1. Introduction:

Background of the Study:

Research is a ceaseless activity of human being. It is necessary to explore new things around us in a particular field. Being a student of literature, researcher has to investigate new trend in the area of literature. Setting is one of the pivotal aspects in a fiction. As a result of this, it is important to look deeper into it from various angles. The researcher has decided to study novels of R. K. Narayan and to search out in what way Malgudi locale plays a role not only as a geographical territory but also ‘a living character’ in R. K. Narayan’s fiction. Receipant of the Sahitya Academy Award, R. K. Narayan is an internationally reputed novelist who has created an imaginary locale Malgudi for most of his novels. Consequently, he is known as Malgudi novelist.

Problem of Study:

It is when almost retires thinking that Narayan has been– totally dealt with- for such is the widest range of his criticism –the Lawrentian revelation of criticism of ‘the spirit of place’ (Anthony Beal,1955:296) prompts one and to take yet another and still another steady look at his Malgudi novels. In fact the reading of this entire corpus of Narayan comes as the most rewarding experience. It is here that the Malgudi local offers newer perspective. Read thus, the spirit of place in Narayan’s fiction does have all the connotations spelt out by D.H.Lawrence. Lawrence, however seems to be the beginning of new awareness of the spirit of place, reflected in Narayan’s novels. In fact where Lawrence ends, as it were, the present research begins.

The study of the critical material available on Narayan, and especially the article ‘the spirit of place’ (David Lodge, 1972: 122-127), D. H. Lawrence enables the researcher to think over the study of place ‘Malgudi’ in Narayan’s fiction. Compared with other aspects of the Narayan’s novel (plot, theme, language, characters, style and philosophy), ‘place’as an aspect is integral and centrifugal (Naik, 2004:57-83) of his fictional world. R.K.Narayan’s novels reveal that they have all the potentialities for such a study. In his novels the researcher finds a multidimensional expression of the spirit of place. The reality is that the place constitutes the real essence of novels. In his perceptive study, Rise of the Novel, Professor Ian watt has pointed out that one of the important characteristics of the novel seems that it gives its personages, “a local habitations and name” Glorifying Yoknapatawpha, Faulkner, has shown his excellent
mastery of place in fiction, so seems to be this with Narayan whose fictional setting is Malgudi: a town in South India. *Swami and Friends* the initiation of R. K. Narayan, introduces the world of Malgudi to his readers and the world of Malgudi one may witness grows in size and maturity with his successive novels.

**Statement of Problem**

> Every continent has its own great spirit of place. Every people is polarized in some particular locality, which is home, the homeland. Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different starts: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality. (Beal, 1955:55)

**Conceptual Explanation of Problem**

It is essential to study the novels of R. K. Narayan critically, emphasizing locale. Researcher has taken into consideration the views of the eminent scholars and critics in relation to works of R. K. Narayan. Therefore, it is essential to focus on Malgudi as a living spirit. The plot construction of Narayan’s novels is steered by the particular milieu and background of a South Indian community, which is firmly established in a cultural tradition. The return to the normal, means traditional pattern of life reaffirms his comic vision. This lays stress on the cyclical pattern of Narayan’s plot construction. The growth and maturity of characters is paralleled in growth of Malgudi from a small agricultural town to a big industrial city. Malgudi in all Narayan’s novels does exist and shape his characters. Beneath the veneer of rebellion, in all the novels runs the theme of illusion versus reality. Myth as the most important influence makes the rebels to withdraw from the deviation and accept sane normalcy in life.

**Different realizations of ‘setting’**

At the very outset the term setting, with its popular and familiar denotation, is understood as a geographic territory functioning primarily as a background or as a locale of the fictional world set against a certain period of time. It may be any place under the sun or on the moon and cast against any point of time either in the remote past, or the actual present or in the far off future. Setting has also been employed as a fixed or permanent locale depicted in novel after novel as in the case of Thomas Hardy, William Faulkner, Arnold Bennett et al. But it is only when setting, going far beyond its common meaning,
is realized as a living presence symbolizing and subtly voicing the quintessential character of the people, that it becomes what Lawrence calls the spirit of place.

It is in the Lawrentian sense that setting has been employed in a number of ways by several accomplished novelists revealing remarkably the inextricable relation of setting with the rest of the elements of the novel. To begin with, setting as the spirit of place may be realized reflecting the customs and attitudes of the community as found in many regional novels like Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* and Malamud’s *The Fixer*. It is in such novels, again, that setting represents the psychological, religious, moral, social and emotional milieu in which characters exist.

Further, if setting as ‘place’ is known only superficially, say through books and heresay, as in the case of many historical novels of Scott, it also depicts the geographic territory which actually exists. Hardy’s Wessex, Bennett’s Five Towns and Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha may come to our mind. Again, and more importantly, setting as a spirit of place is realized symbolically as microcosm representing certain nation or people. It is a little world as in William Golding’s *Lord of the flies* in which the author confines his characters and his actions to a limited place reflecting the characters’ motivation and focusing on the essential nature of human beings. It has also been realized as an active antagonist and protagonist influencing the course of the events and the destiny of the characters. In *War and Peace*, for instance, the geography of Russia appears to be a protagonist defeating and destroying Napoleon’s army. In the *Return of the Native* the Egdon Heath overshadows and frustrates the hopes and aspirations of the characters. Suffice it to say that ‘setting’ has several realizations ranging from the obvious and the simple to the symbolic and the complex. It is in the later sense that it virtually seems to control the action, theme and time of the novel.

**The Case of Malgudi**

Malgudi, the permanent locale of Narayan’s entire corpus of novels has never ceased fascinating the common reader and the Narayan critic alike. It represents a unique case of dual existence; first, setting as a geographic territory, an ‘unknown and airy nothing’ conceived and shaped by the novelist’s imagination and turning into a local habitation called Malgudi. Says Narayan:

I remember waking up with the name Malgudi on Vijayadashimi...

Malgudi was an earth shaking discovery for me, because I had no mind for facts and things like that, which would be unnecessary in
writing about Malgudi or any other real place...I sat down and
wrote the first sentence about my town: ‘The train had just
arrived at Malgudi Station’. (Mehta, 1974: 124).

Against this kind there also runs a parallel realization of Malgudi as a real place to be located on the map of South India. There are Narayan Scholars enthusiastically and logically trying to put up theories to establish the identity of Malgudi. M. K. Naik, for instance, has not only put up one such theory, but has in fact conceived of a Malgudi map dotted with the names of every street every place and every monument in Narayan’s imaginary town (Naik, 1983: 152).

Trusting the tale and not the teller, as we turn to the depiction of Malgudi in Narayan’s whole corpus of novels, our first encounter, so it seems, is with a typical colonial Indian town. Narayan, one realizes, has no eye (or patience) for the details of the geography which has been dealt with rather sketchily. But the first appearance of Malgudi as a small and typical Edwardian town grows significantly from novel to novel one may have one such glimpse of the growing Malgudi scape in Narayns’ The Painter of Signs (1976)

This is a jungle where other beasts are constantly on the prowl to
Attack and bite off a mouthful, if one is not careful. As of this
were New York And blocked the Traffic on Broadway. He would
not recognize it, but Malgudi was changing in 1972.

But it is only when we take setting as the spirit of place, as Lawrence meant it, that Malgudi assumes real significance. The spirit of place is realized subtly; realized like the skin of your body or like the atmosphere which you most certainly feel and are aware of but which cannot be seen.

R. K. Narayan’s works:

While studying R. K. Narayan’s work (critical approach and view of critics about his novels) as a whole, researcher has to take the genesis of the imaginary locale Malgudi into account. If Thomas Hardy has a well deserved kinship with the Wessex novels, and Arnold Bennet with his Five Towns, Narayan too earned for himself the most meaningful and endearing name, the Malgudi maestro, the creator of
Malgudi; Malgudi is the chosen region which forms the background to a ceaseless flow of all the novels of Narayan. The researcher has to focus on the growth and development of locale, Malgudi.