

## ‘Refraction’ and Manipulation of Literary Fame: A Study of *Malgudi Days*

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### Abstract

The 1986 television adaptation of *Malgudi Days* (1943), by a prominent Indian English writer R. K. Narayan, can be read as ‘refraction,’ a concept developed by Andre Lefevere. According to him refraction implies “the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads that work (Lefevere, 1982).” The paper aims to elucidate the manifestation of television adaptation as refraction by examining various cultural, linguistic and ideological constraints, as discussed by Lefevere, which influenced its reproduction in the culture of the target language (Hindi), ultimately playing a major role in the history and culture of the target audience. The paper also aims to explore the reasons why and how television adaptation manipulated Narayan’s literary fame in post-colonial India.

**Keywords:** *R.K. Narayan, television adaptation, Indian writing in English, refraction, translation studies, literary fame, post-colonial India.*

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R. K. Narayan, the author of short stories’ collection, *Malgudi Days* is one of those celebrated Indian English writers, who gained eminence, after Rabindranath Tagore, in the English speaking world. He was the first Indian English writer to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award by the Indian government in the year 1960. He was also nominated for Nobel Prize in the year 1996. His work range novels, novellas, short stories, epics retold, travelogues, columns, causeries and memoirs. He ran his own publication house Indian Thought Publication and published his works. He is best known for his works such as *Bachelor of Arts*, *The Guide*, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, *Swami and Friends* and *Malgudi Days* more so because *The Guide* was adapted into a film in the year 1965 and *Malgudi Days* and *Swami and Friends* into TV series in the year 1986.

The source text *Malgudi Days*, first published in the year 1943 by Indian Thought Publication, is a compilation of thirty two short stories based in a fictional town of Malgudi and they have a glimpse of Indianness in their own right. Narayan depicts familiar situations of misery, pain, love, surprise, despair, desire, grief, fear, hate, panic, dejection, anxiety and other such socio-psychological issues faced by innocent countrymen but he also subtly directs different ways to deal with them. His stories represent humanity at large having universal appeal. Every story has its own uniqueness but has an end which touches every human being. He inevitably portrays the

inbuilt Indian values in the characters and the strength of traditions. He portrays indigenous traditional culture and its standards that could stand up to the modern. He probably sees the villages as the spaces that preserve culture, like Gandhi who believed that true India lives in village, but Narayan simultaneously shows the acceptance towards modernity. So he tries to bridge the gap between the submerged past and the socio-cultural innovations inspired by the west. However, there are people who strictly support the former or strictly the latter. The producers of the TV adaptations must have had similar ideas that of Narayan. The Penguin Classics publication republished it in the year 1984; perhaps this can be a possible reason which drew attention towards this text for makers of TV.

The target text, Doordarshan TV adaptation of *Malgudi Days* appeared in the year 1986 by the same name and gathered huge fan following. Each story from *Malgudi Days* took a form of an episode. The TV series had works adapted not only from the *Malgudi Days* but also from *Swami and Friends*, *A Horse and Two Goats*, *Dodu*, *Lawley Road* and *The Vendor of Sweets* making it to be a thirty nine episode series directed by Shankar Nag, an eminent actor-director from Mysore, Karnataka. It was produced by T.S. Narasimhan along with Doordarshan. It had numerous repeat telecasts and it appealed every common man because of its simplicity. It was well received across the nation. There were eleven stories from the collection of *Malgudi Days* which were adapted for Doordarshan television, the rest of the twenty eight episodes of 1986 *Malgudi Days* were from other works of Narayan. The stories were: *The Missing Mail*, *The Gateman's Gift*, *Iswaran*, *Engine Trouble*, *Forty-five a Month*, *Trail of the Green Blazer*, *A Willing Slave*, *Leela's Friend*, *Naga*, *Cat Within* and *The Edge*.

### **Malgudi Days vis-à-vis Constraints of Refraction**

The term 'refraction' was coined by Andre Lefevere, a well known scholar in the field of comparative literary studies and translation studies; in his essay "Translated Literature: Towards an Integrated Theory" published in the year 1981. He views that refractions are "texts that have been processed for a certain audience or adapted to a certain poetics or a certain ideology." He goes on to elaborate the term by stating that refraction is 'the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads that work' (Lefevere). He argues that translations or adaptations per se are no longer reflections of the originals but they are products processed through ideological, poetological and linguistic constraints functioning in literary and social systems. He claims that the process of adaptation of a text for different audience cannot happen in isolation; in fact these adaptations are definitely influenced, tampered and manipulated by such constraints. These constraints govern the reproduction of any source text without which adaptations cannot seem to work. He contends that refractions are obvious and they are dependent on authoritative political systems and historical changes that shape the adapter's ideologies and poetics. He says that translators are 'artisans of compromise'; they are constrained by different factors and are compelled to reconstruct the texts in such ways so that the works are accepted in the target culture. These constraints occur from the elements of a literature and the components of the society surrounding it. He states that refraction 'tries to carry a work of literature over from one system into another, represents a compromise between two systems and is, as such, the perfect indicator of the

dominant constraints in both systems' (Lefevere). The source text is interpreted and is refracted through the prism of the adapter who is under systemic constraints. They are the literary and social systems, both together, give rise to the constraints which, according to Lefevere, are: patronage, poetics and natural language.

**Patronage** according to Lefevere is something that has the power over a literary system by the people or organizations outside it. He argues that refractions are not created in vacuum but are generated in the service of power. So patronage can be any kind of force that has the power to influence, encourage, destroy, manipulate or tamper a work of literature. According to him patrons can either be persons or groups. Hence patrons are either influential and powerful individuals; or they can be groups of people from royal courts, political parties, religious organizations, social classes, and publishers; or even the media houses per se. He explains that patronage outside the literary system is usually 'more interested in the ideology of literature than in its poetics' (Lefevere), whereas people within the literary system, such as critics, writers, academicians and translators are more concerned about the poetics. However, some inside the literary system themselves are representatives of patronage so it becomes tough to clearly demarcate a line between the two. Patronage comprises of three components: ideology, economy and status. Patronage, differentiated, can be defined when all the three components are prominently independent of each other, and patronage, undifferentiated, can be determined when all the three components are "all dispensed by one and the same patron" (Lefevere, 1992). During the latter, patrons primary focus is the attempt to preserve the stability of the social system as a whole.

The television adaptation of *Malgudi Days* for Doordarshan broadcast can be viewed as a good example of the constraints that play a role in refraction. Patronage is about the choice of the subject and presentation of its form governed by the patrons. Patronage in the older days was thought to be a form of pension or regular emoluments by the royal courts or kings for survival of creative art forms but in broader sense nowadays patronage would be something that financially supports the production and publicity of an art work. The patrons here for the recreation of *Malgudi Days* on TV screen would have been Doordarshan and T.S. Narasimhan. It was from the year 1983 that Doordarshan invited producer-directors to start a massive project of initiating TV series for Indian audience which constituted people from elite to the ordinary as the government by then had already installed TV sets in every corner of the country. The patrons for *Malgudi Days* were Doordarshan, the only broadcaster under Prasar Bharti, a national broadcasting authority under the Broadcasting Ministry of the government of India, indirectly the Congress party. And Padmarag TV International, indirectly the producer T. S Narasimhan, that contributed financially for the production of the TV series. These patrons according to Lefevere have controlling powers for the shaping of the recreated work for different target culture. Here the patronage remains differentiated as the Padmarag TV International was a Karnataka based production house and Doordarshan channel under Prasar Bharati was operated through Delhi with the censorship of Broadcasting Ministry under Congress party. So the patrons, one from the southern part of India and another Doordarshan from the central northern part of India, came together for the process of refraction of *Malgudi Days*. In our relevance the Broadcasting

Ministry had established Prasar Bharti that lay behind the whole process of broadcasting of the content nationwide. And Padmarag TV International, T. S. Narasimhan was a director turned producer who bought the rights from Narayan for the purpose of adapting his works. So for Shankar Nag, the director of this TV series had to meet requirements set by these two organizations as patronage had the power to encourage Shankar Nag to recreate such a work.

The three components within patronage are ideology, economy and status.

- **Ideology:** ‘literature should not be allowed to get too far out of step with the other systems in a given society.’ Lefevere claims ideology; set of beliefs and ideals of patrons; to be one of the components for patronage. Like Althusser’s idea of ideology to be a hegemonic control, Lefevere contends that, it is a way of manipulating interests relevant to the power structures in social and historical context. Ideology is the key idea in Lefevere’s theory, which refers to the act of adapters willingly accepting and shaping their ideology imposed upon by patrons, this also testifies the theory of Stuart Hall that ideology penetrates as a result of the relation between power and dominance with its relevant practices. The patrons within a social system have their own ideology. If adapter’s ideology is not in conflict with patrons’, then it becomes a parameter for acceptability. Now such works created, keeping in view the ideology of the patron, are easier to be published and accepted in the target culture. The adapter also complies with the favourable sentiments, faiths and beliefs of the patrons. Hence ideology of the adapter and the patron plays a crucial role in the process of refracting an original text for target culture.

During 1986 or during those times the government in power was the Congress Party which had strong ideological views parallel to that of M.K. Gandhi and the author of *Malgudi Days*, R.K. Narayan was a Gandhian. With the transfer of power from the colonial rulers it was always the congress party which ruled the nation with their elite leaders having strong ideological stands guided by the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. They retained the name India but ran the government with ideals of socialism and secularism inspired by Gandhi. National consciousness also began as one of the earliest proponents. During the first two decades of independence, the Indian government with Congress ruling party established various institutions like IIMs, IITs, Sahitya Akademi and others. The idea was to move into the idea of absorbing the past cultural inheritance and achieve unity in diversity with modern ideals of socialism, populism, progressivism and secularism. The party believed in cultural values and universal brotherhood. The thought of national consciousness and nation building also remained prevalent during the decades of 70s and 80s, a period which was thought to be period of quest for identity. Like Althusser says that ideology is a practice that can be manifested through actions, the Indian government then was focused on creating India’s identity in all aspects through their actions, including the efforts for national literature, indirectly through publicizing and glorifying the native authors. After the socio-political and economical upheavals, there emerged works of literature that talked about the idea of India’s past (myth, heritage, traditions and beliefs) and the acceptance of modernity. So the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting through Prasar Bharti tried to spread its ideology in some or the other ways. The probable aim of this initiative would have been the idea to educate Indians about the idea of India its cultural heritage and traditional

values along with a sense of advancements in the world and needless to say to glorify R.K Narayan. And this was quite evident in the close examination of the works which were adapted during that time and also in the eleven adapted stories of *Malgudi Days* for TV.

On the other hand T.S. Narasimhan was from south India and was more into children's literature. Two of his produced films *Edda Makkalu* and *Naavidde Eccharike*, got best children film awards by the Karnataka state government. He was closely associated with children's film movement. He also tried hard to bring his dream project of Children Film Complex to Karnataka but he could not realize it. So his inclination towards children's literature and his love for his native place can be evidently seen in the adapted TV series. All the eleven adapted stories have children characters of significant importance in subtle ways. Even the selection of the stories can be viewed in this light as not all thirty stories from the collection the *Malgudi Days* were selected but only eleven out of those were selected along with *Swami and Friends*, *The Vendor of Sweets*, *Horse and the Two Goats* and *Lawley Road and Other Stories* which had important and significant children characters.

From the collection of *Malgudi Days* the selected stories would have been the combined ideological requirements of Doordarshan and Padmarag TV International indirectly of the Congress party and T.S. Narasimhan respectively. The adaptation may have been defined to serve their purposes.

- **Economy:** 'the patron assures the writer's livelihood.' This component not only forces the adapter to accept the ideology of the patron but also assures his livelihood by the patron. As the patron has economical concern for the person involved in refraction, he is compelled to have the ideology that of the patron. This financial assistance by the patrons has the power to control the text and also to shape the text according to the patron's needs.

Doordarshan then was a non-profitable organization but it approached various directors and producers for initiating TV series. Dynamics of the finances incurred during that time for the production of *Malgudi Days* could not be really known but it was certainly Doordarshan which made an offer to Shankar Nag for directing the TV adaptation of *Malgudi Days*. Doordarshan was primarily working for providing infotainment services. The economic component here can be seen converging with the status component as Doordarshan was the only way to reach the national audience. Of course Shankar Nag was too much into films but it was for the first time that he got a chance for TV and he accepted the offer. The probable reason why Doordarshan offered Shankar Nag the directorship could be his awareness of author's culture and the setting of Malgudi which is typically south Indian. Padmarag TV International Shankar Nag otherwise was into Kannada Theatre Activities, Commercial Marathi and Kannada films as actor and had also directed a few good number of movies. And it was for the first time when Shankar Nag was given an opportunity for TV. He accepted the offer as he felt it was viable for him to achieve a status of prestige nationally.



- Status:** ‘the writer achieves a certain position in the society’. He contends that once the adapter accepts the patronage, he is integrated into larger support groups and their life styles. The patrons not only delegate authority but also make the adapter acquire a status of reputation. A respectable status is conferred upon the adapter by compromising with the patronages. When the adapter conforms to the patrons’ expectations it the status of prestige or that the adapter achieves. And the same happened with Shankar Nag. He became a celebrated TV film maker and got a status of prestige. He came into a national public sphere as he also acted in the TV series. He got recognition of a notable and critically acclaimed director. It is noteworthy that when the TV series was revived in 2006 by another director, the new director had to face harsh criticisms because of the comparison to the standards set by Shankar Nag. So they are not just economic rewards in the patronage but it is significant in establishing the adapter’s status. Doordarshan proved to be one of the greatest platforms for Nag to prove his potential as a TV Director. However, Shankar Nag was a quite a popular name in commercial Marathi and Kannada film industry.

The three components altogether create a win-win kind of a situation for the people within and outside the literary system. The works that diverge from the authority of patronage would experience difficulty in getting published through channels or might be reduced to low status works. Therefore the adapters would have to fulfill the requirements of patronage to get their works accepted in the target culture. These ideological, economical and status components within patronage are interrelated. They converge and diverge but still have a hand to hand relation. They may nullify the other component/s proving its own dominance, but cannot prove its absence.

**Poetics:** There are two components for this constraint; according to Lefevere are the inventory component and the functional component. Lefevere claims that, the inventory component includes range of genres, symbols, leitmotifs, prototypical situations and characters and the functional component is the relation of literature to the social system in which it exists. The inventory component has more conservative influence on literary system whereas the functional component tends to exert more innovative influences or propaganda. He states that poetics tends to be determined by ideology. So it gives way to two directions: one, inventory component as a reading, rendering and anticipation to literary works based on their ideology, in a given time by different people within the society in a given period, and two: functional component, as a defined by the people based on their ideology, within the society a given period, about how and what literary works should be.

Poetics and Ideology operate in tandem. The constraint of poetics has close connection with the selection of the author, his theme, his form of writings, his category and his character portrayals. The literary devices are considered for refractions and they become constraints because it is only when the original author, his writing, his ideology that are influential to the patrons, are adapted. R.K. Narayan, a Gandhian himself had the ideology which had parallels to that of Congress, the ruling party. The patron here Doordarshan is outside the literary system so it has a focus on the secularist and socialist ideology of the text and his author. Whereas T.S. Narasimhan was a

director turned producer, can be claimed, patron within the literary system who already knows about filmmaking and audience. It can be claimed that his poetological constraints would have been the stories which were children centric and the ways in which the town of Malgudi portrayed by R.K. Narayan. Also the director would have found it to be easier to adapt a story for an episode.

The functional component about how the target culture accepts the reproduced text considers the constraints for a TV production. The director here would have been quite aware of the popular tastes and the ways in which the works would have been accepted in a better way. Music for the TV adaptation was introduced. Also many illustrations, describing the text, by R.K. Laxman were incorporated to demonstrate symbols and metaphors. The functional component has its own important role to play so that the target culture accepts it as a piece of work for entertainment. The target culture was already into watching films because film as a popular medium was already established and well received. By 1986, film was a forty years old medium for Indian audience and by then it had flourished fullfledgedly according to the taste of target audience for visual medium.

These two inventory and functional components became poetological constraints for the shaping of the new text for TV and this can be observed in the examination of the source text. We can find humour, comic reliefs, music, stills, children; expression of emotions, innocence led to betrayal and of course visuals designed by R.K. Laxman unlike the original text.

**Natural Language:** Lefevere claims that, it is the language 'in which a work of literature is written, both the formal side of that language and its pragmatic side, the way in which language reflects culture.' As different languages reflect cultures, the adapters make a conscious effort to naturalize language of the target culture. The natural language of the target culture is much more influential in shaping the refraction. The foreign writer would only be accepted if the original work is adapted into a language not necessarily of the original but the natural acceptable language of the target culture. This is the constraint that may bring a great variance in the literary work as different languages have their own unique cultural differences. So apart from patronage and poetics, natural language of the target culture is one of the most important constraints that cannot be neglected to analyze refraction as it is biased to the dominant target culture.

The original *Malgudi Days* was written in English language and was published in the year 1943 but the adaptation for, the only TV channel Doordarshan, was done in the year 1986. The constraint of natural language worked to its highest order when the literary piece in English was transformed into Hindi for the target audience. The pan- Indian audiences for whom the TV series was made were conversant in Hindi. Hardly a few percent of the population then would have known English. This led the adapters to recreate *Malgudi Days* on screen in Hindi language which was generally spoken and understood by most of the Indians then. It can also be claimed that it resolved the northern southern India regionalism conflict with the language of north, Hindi and the setting of south, Karnataka.

Thus natural language of thought and collective imagination of visual medium for the Indian audience then was Hindi, which was established by its precursor, Hindi Film. Natural language of the target audience is of utmost importance as it a parameter for acceptability of the newly generated work. For instance if we think of *Malgudi Days* in English or any other language then it becomes tough to accept that fact that it gathered such fan following across India, or not majority would have been able to render it. So the success for a work to be accepted within a region specific audience is dependent on the natural language of the target audience. This idea can be clearly testified in the television adaptation of *Malgudi Days*.

### **Refraction and R.K. Narayan's Literary Fame**

Adaptations, in Lefevere's words 'refractions' have been happening as the result of changing perceptions and needs of the receptors. In the regard of literary fame, Lefevere categorically claims that, if the work of literature is not refracted, it may lose its existence and might disappear from the society. In fact they are the refractions of literary works which are involved in the process for survival of the original works and these get a new life. Lefevere argues that refractions not only are instrumental in survival of a literary work but are also extremely influential in establishing a writer's prestige. The original work gains its solidarity with its refraction. Refraction in subtle ways draws attention towards the original author and his ways of writing and in the longer run publicizes him. But because of the constraints, refractions may have to manipulate the literature and also his author's ideology and poetics. It is possible that refractions may end up being controversial works as they can create different values and practices. So the literary fame here can either be positive or destructive. It can either make or break an identity of the author by the ways in which the work has been refracted. It has the power either to glorify or to vilify a writer. Spoofs, parodies, satires are quintessential specimens of the latter whereas serious well-adapted works represent the former.

It was not just Shankar Nag who received a status of prominence after the adaptation of *Malgudi Days* but it was also R. K. Narayan who for the first time came in the public sphere which mostly constituted of the people who knew Hindi Language. It is in the episode 7 when R.K. Narayan himself comes on the screen to introduce the town of Malgudi. Before this R.K. Narayan's fame was only limited to English Indian readers but with this adaptation his name came to the mouths of every other Indian who watched TV. He became a major literary figure and needless to say many started translating his works into their regional languages. It is noteworthy to share that the coverage to the Hindi Translation of *Malgudi Days* reads *Malgudi Ki Kahaniya, Jin par Television ka serial bhi ban chuka hai*, which means Stories of Malgudi, on which TV serial has also been made. It also significant to note that Narayan got nominated for Nobel Prize in literature in the year 1996 which was subsequent to the TV adaptation. However it was not just *Malgudi Days* for which Narayan was highly received but it certainly added to his literary appeal.

### **Conclusion**

A close examination of historical and political context of the literary devices employed, suggest that the production of *Malgudi Days* for TV involved conception of nationalism sentiment and



Indian culture vis-à-vis modernization processes. Needless to say that political events and historical periods demanded an acceptance of the motives based on ideology, poetics and language. And this can be claimed through the contextual evidences of 1986 *Malgudi Days* adaptation.

It is quite evident that adaptation of *Malgudi Days* had considered all the constraints presided by the people involved in its production proving it to be a refraction. *Malgudi Days* for TV represented the post-colonial decolonizing ideology that attempted to uproot colonial façade and brought Indian cultural legacy. It aptly catered to the need to decolonize the Indian mind and establish the glory of Indian culture, language, values, myths, literature and writers. The Doordarshan channel through such adaptation ultimately led to create a national stage for Indian literature and its textuality. And the literary adaptations dominated the creative arts of filmmaking for TV which could reach every corner of India defying the effects of colonialism. Not only it was instrumental in spreading the government's idea of decolonizing but also regarded the children oriented ideology of its producer T.S. Narasimhan. Driven by the ideological constraints, equivalence was manipulated by the adapter as R.K. Narayan is never thought to be a children's writer but *Malgudi Days* is every so often remembered because of its children characters specially Swami and Leela. *Malgudi Days* was created for TV with due respect to the ideology, poetics and language of the target audience. Moreover it was one the TV shows that created a culture of TV viewership with an aim to achieve national identity and promoting modernization. It appropriately achieved these goals as it portrayed common identity leading to unitary nationalism on the imaginary plane of Television.

*Malgudi Days* adaptation was also significant in establishing R.K. Narayan's literary fame as it reached to the large section of Indian population who could not read and understand English. It had the power to influence the target society and encourage the national literature. It ultimately helped in preservation of the work *Malgudi Days* and now it is thought to be a part of Indian classics. Moreover, it played a valuable role in bringing the Indian audience in front of TV sets creating some kind of unity through shared emotions within the groups of society. The analysis of such constraints for refraction of a text for a different medium vis-à-vis socio-historical context can reflect a certain ideology and poetics in a given society in a specific period of history ultimately provides with insights of the relations between adaptations and history.

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