

**SELECTED NOVELS OF R.K. NARAYAN:
A STUDY OF SOCIO-CULTURAL
PERSPECTIVES**

**A Thesis
In Fulfillment of
The Requirements For
The Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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**Supervised By
Dr. (Mrs.) Jatinder Kohli
Department of English
Govt. P.G. College, Kota,
Kota (Rajasthan)**

**Submitted By
Sanjay Kumar**

SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

*I feel great pleasure in certifying that the thesis entitled **Selected Novels of R.K. Narayan: A Study of Socio-Cultural Perspectives** embodies a record of the results of the investigation carried out by **Mr. Sanjay Kumar** under my guidance for the fulfillment of the **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** in the Department of English, Govt. College Kota, Kota (Rajasthan).*

I am satisfied with the analyses of the data, interpretation of results and conclusions drawn. It is an original piece of research work, carried out by the candidate under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge no part of this thesis has previously been submitted in any university or institute for award of any degree, diploma or fellowship.

He has completed the residential requirement by residing (and appearing before me at Government College, Kota) at the headquarters of my workplace i.e. Kota as per the rules of the University of Kota, therefore, residential obligation as per rules has been satisfied by him.

*Date -
Place - Kota*

***Dr. (Mrs.) Jatinder Kohli**
Research Supervisor
Department of English
Govt. P.G. College, Kota,
Kota (Rajasthan)*

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

*I hereby declare that the work embodied in my thesis on **Selected Novels of R.K. Narayan: A Study of Socio-Cultural Perspectives** prepared for Ph.D. degree has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university on any previous occasion and to the best of my knowledge, no work has been reported on the above subject.*

The work presented in this thesis is original and whenever references have been made to the work of others, they have been clearly indicated as such and the source of information is included in the bibliography.

Date -

Place - Kota

*Sanjay Kumar
Research Scholar*

PRE Ph.D. COURSE WORK CERTIFICATE

University of Kota University of Kota University of Kota University of Kota



Prof. S.C. Rajora
Director Research

University of Kota
कोटा विश्वविद्यालय
MBS Road, Kota - 324 005
एम.बी.एस. रोड, कोटा - 324 005
Phone : 0744-2471037

TO WHOM-SO-EVER-IT-MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that Mr./Ms. Sanjay Kumar

S/o/D/o Mr. Sh. Munshi Ram has completed his/her **Ph.D. Course**
Work 2011-12 in **English** following the norms of UGC [UGC (Minimum Standard and
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in Ph.D. programme, w.e.f. **15.02.2011** under the supervision of Dr Jatendra Kolhi

Date : 04/12/2013



DIRECTOR RESEARCH

University of Kota University of Kota University of Kota University of Kota

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“The mediocre teacher tells.

The good teacher explains.

The superior teacher demonstrates.

The great teacher inspires.”

—William Arthur Ward

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Dedicated to
My Wife & Son
Mrs. Gunjan Tiwari
&
Ishan

LIST OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER NO.	TITLE	PAGE NO.
	SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE	I
	CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION	II
	PRE Ph.D. COURSE WORK CERTIFICATE	III
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	IV
1.	INTRODUCTION	1-44
2.	THEMATIC STUDY	45-96
3.	SOCIAL CONCERNS	97-146
4.	CULTURAL ASPECTS	147-187
5.	NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE	188-235
6.	CONCLUSION	236-245
	❖ SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	246-261
	❖ APPENDIX	262-267

CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

Indian English literature originated as a necessary outcome of the introduction of English education in India under colonial rule. In recent years it “has attracted widespread interest, both in India and abroad.”¹ It is now recognized that Indian English literature is not only part of Commonwealth literature, but also occupies a “great significance in the World literature.”² Today, a number of Indian writers in English have contributed substantially to modern English literature. Ram Mohan Roy who heralded the Indian renaissance and Macaulay who recommended English language education in India were probably aware of what was in store for the Indians in terms of literary awareness. Today it “has won for itself international acclaim and distinction.”³

Fiction, being the most powerful form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English literature. It is generally agreed that the novel is the most suitable literary form for the exploration of experiences and ideas in the context of our time, and Indian English fiction occupies its proper place in the field of literature. There are critics and commentators in England and America who appreciate Indian English novels. Prof. M.K. Naik remarks:

...one of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction for though India was probably a fountain head of story-telling, the novel as we know today was an importation from the West.⁴

It was in Bengal that a literary renaissance first manifested itself, but almost immediately afterwards its traces could be seen in Madras, Bombay and other parts of India. The first Indian English novel was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Raj Mohan’s Wife* (1864). It is different from his Bengali novels such as

Durgesh Nandini or *Kopal Kandla*. In fact, it paved the way for *Anand Math* (1884), Indian's first political novel which gave the Indians their national anthem, "Vande Mataram." Then came Manoj Basu's *Jaljangal* in the form of English translation as *The Forest Goddess* by Barindra Nath Bose. The novels published from the eighteen sixties up to the end of the nineteenth century were written by writers belonging to the presidencies of Bengal and Madras. Most of these novels are on social and few on historical issues, and for their models they drew upon eighteenth and nineteenth century British fiction, especially that of Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding and Walter Scott.

The twentieth century began with novelists of more substantial output. Romesh Chandra Dutt translated two of his own Bengali novels into English: *The Lake of Palms: A Study of Indian Domestic Life* (1902) and *The Slave Girl of Agra, an Indian Historical Romance* (1909). The first, a realistic novel, seems to have been written with the aim of social reform with its theme being widow remarriage, while the latter is set in the Mughal period.

Sarath Kumar Ghosh and another Bengali novelist wrote *Verdict of Gods* (1905) and *The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna* (1909). A. Madhavia and T. Ramakrishna Pillai, belonging to Madras presidency were two important contemporaries of these Bengali novelists. Another Indian English novelist of prominence was a Punjabi writer Jogendra Singh. His fictional work includes: *Nur Jahan, The Romance of an Indian Queen* (1909), a historical novel: *Nasrin, An Indian Medley* (1911), a realistic novel depicting the fall of aristocratic life in North India, *Kamala* (1925) and *Kamni* (1931), dealing with social themes. The first three were published in London and the last in Lahore.

Then appeared on the scene novels such as S. T. Ram's *The Cosmopolitan Hindusthani* (1902), L. B. Pal's *A Glimpse of Zanana Life in Bengal* (1904), S. B. Banerjee's *The Adventures of Mrs. Russell* (1909), Balkrishna's *The Love of Kusuma: An Eastern Love Story* (1910), B. K. Sarkar's *Man of Letters* (1911), M. M.

Munshi's *Beauty and Joy* (1914) and T. K. Gopal Pannikar's *Storm and Sunshine* (1916).

The Gandhian whirlwind blew across the country during 1920-1947. Under the dynamic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi established political notions started vanishing from the scene and in turn new ideas and methods appeared, not only in the political field but in almost every walk of Indian life. The inevitable impact of the Gandhian movement on Indian English literature was the sudden flowering of realistic novels during the nineteen thirties. Novelists turned their attention away from the past to concentrate on contemporary issues. In their novels prevailing social and political problems that Indians found themselves in were given prominence. The nation-wide movement of Gandhi not only inspired Indian English novelists but also provided them with some of their prominent themes, such as the struggle for freedom, the East-West encounter, the communal problem and the miserable condition of the untouchables, the landless poor, the downtrodden, the economically exploited and the oppressed.

The impact of the far-reaching change on the Indian social and political scene caused by the Gandhian movement can be perceived in K.S. Venkatramani's *Murugan, The Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, The Patriot: A Novel of New India in the Making* (1932). The former reflects Gandhian economics while the latter reflects his politics. Then came A.S.P. Ayyer, whose novels like *Baladitya* (1930) and *Three Men of Destiny* (1939), although untouched by the twentieth century models and set in ancient Indian history, are Gandhian in spirit. These novelists and their novels paved the way for the great trinity: Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao whose emergence was the most remarkable event in the realm of Indian English fiction. They were the harbingers of the true Indo-English novel. These novelists began writing around the mid 1930s. Bhabani Bhattacharya was also a contemporary of these novelists by birth, but he started writing fiction just after Indian independence.

The writings of these novelists moved the Indian English novels in the right direction. They discovered a whole new world in Indo-English fiction, and the Indian novel owes much to their efforts for gaining solid ground and achieving an identity of its own. They defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate, and brought the Indo-Anglian novel within hailing distance of the latest novels of the West. They established the suppositions, the manner, the concept of character, and the nature of the themes which were to give the Indian novel its particular distinctiveness. They “laid the foundation for the genuine Indo-Anglian novel, each imparting to the Indian experience a dimension of individuality based of their particular approach to content and form.”⁵

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) has been the most prolific of the trio. His contribution to Indian English fiction of social realism is incontrovertibly great. Anand’s novels portray vividly the wretched condition of Indian rural society. He is one who “believes that literature must serve society, solve their problems and guide them”⁶ Through his novels he says that poverty, class, caste system and other widespread evils of society are like a poison that inflicts society and makes it sordid and inhuman.

R.K. Narayan (1906-2001), one of the most copious of Indian novelists in English, is a product of the South Indian Hindu middle class family. He remained aloof from contemporary socio-political issues and explored the South Indian middle class milieu in his fiction. He is a writer with full commitment to Hindu ideas. He created an imaginary small town named Malgudi and depicted middle class life in that town in almost all his works.

Before independence Narayan produced *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938) and *The English Teacher* (1946). His fictional art seems to reach maturity in his novels which appeared after independence: *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Guide* (1958) and *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1962). His other novels include *Waiting for Mahatma* (1955), dealing

with the Gandhian freedom struggle, *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), and *The Painter of Signs* (1976).

In his nineties Narayan added four more novels to his corpus with *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), *Talkative Man* (1983), *The World of Nagraj* (1990) and *Grandmother's Tale* (1992). Narayan succeeded in universalizing his Malgudi, though a local town, as Hardy universalized his *Wessex*. The inhabitants of Malgudi - although they may have their local identity - are essentially human beings having kinship with all humanity. In his novels we meet college boys, teachers, guides, tourists, municipal members, and taxi drivers of Malgudi, but through the provincial themes he forges a universal vision. He “peoples his novels with caricatures rather than characters.”⁷

Raja Rao (1908-2006), whose “advent on the literary scene has been described as the appearance of a new star shining bright”⁸ is the youngest of the great trio. He is not a fecund writer like R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand who have to their credit a dozen novels each and numerous short stories. Even so, he is one of the most significant writers of modern India. After gaining independence India had many challenges to face and many changes came over Indian life.

Complications took place in social, political, economic and cultural spheres but India handled them thoughtfully and adequately and progressed step by step. The fact of being independent and having its own identity spurred Indian English writing. It provided the writer with self confidence, broadened his vision and sharpened his self-examining faculty. As a result of these developments important gains were registered, especially in fiction, poetry and criticism. Fiction, already well established, grew in both variety and stature.

The convention of social realism in Indian English fiction, established by Mulk Raj Anand, went on flourishing during the nineteen fifties and early sixties through Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar and Khushwant Singh. While Sudhin Ghosh, G.V. Desai and Anantanarayanan, though with natural individual

variation, enlivened the trend of the experimental novel, oriented by Raja Rao in his *Kanthapura*. In addition, the fictional works of B. Rajan present the combined effect of realism and fantasy.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's fiction bore social purpose, as he believes that the "novel must have a social purpose"⁹ but he occasionally succeeded in achieving a vivid interpretation of life. In his first novel *So Many Hungers* (1947), Bhattacharya, dealing with the theme of exploitation on the political, economic and social ground, takes the Quit India movement and the Bengal famine of the early nineteen forties as its background. It continued the tradition of social realism stressing, like Anand, the necessity of social purpose in fiction. He is "the only Indo-Anglian writer whose work has been translated into over two dozen foreign languages."¹⁰

Manohar Malgonkar, one of the popular Indo-English novelists of the modern era started his career after independence with the publication of *Distant Drum* (1960). He is an artist of the first order. He excels in literary sensibility and critical maturity; he "subtly makes a landmark as a historical novelist."¹¹ Though a realist, unlike Bhattacharya, Malgaonkar holds the opinion that art has no other purpose to serve than pure entertainment. Even so, his major preoccupation seems to be the role of history in individual and social life in India.

J. Menon Marath whose realism is deeply rooted in his native land Kerala, as Khushwant Singh's in the Punjab. He wrote *Wound of Spring* (1960), *The Sale of an Island* (1968) and *Janu* (1988). Bhalachandra Rajan presents a blend of realism and fantasy, the two conspicuous strains in the Indian English fiction of the nineteen fifties and sixties. Unlike his contemporaries, Rajan's realism is less social than psychological in his first novel *The Dark Dancer* (1959). His second novel *Too Long in the West* (1961) is a comic extravaganza.

The novelist, Sudhindra Nath Ghosh, adopts the ancient native tradition of story-telling to express the Indian ethos in all of his four novels: *And Gazelles*

Leaping (1949), *Cradle of the Clouds* (1951), *The Vermilion Boat* (1953) and *The Fame of the Forest* (1955). G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatters* (1948) was a daring step on the ground of the Indian English experimental novel. In presenting the story of the hero's search for a viable philosophy of living, his quest for understanding the meaning of life, Desani blends Indian and Western narrative forms.

An important feature of this period was the growth of Indian women novelists writing in English. Their appearance added a new dimension to Indian English novel. After India gained freedom they have begun enriching Indian English fiction. The dominant figures were Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai.

Kamala Markandaya, one of the most outstanding and eminent Indo-Anglian novelists, shows a broad range and rich variety of setting, characters, and theme. Ruth Praver Jhabvala takes an amused look at arranged marriages in India with her Jane Austenian tongue-in-cheek style and presents an ironic survey of the East-West confrontation. Her early novels *To Whom She Will* (1955) and *The Nature of Passion* (1956) are exquisite comedies of urban middle-class life in the nineteen fifties and sixties.

Nayantara Sahgal, whose forte is politics, is the leading practitioner of the political novel in India. She writes simple prosaic tales about politicians and bureaucrats. In addition to the obvious political theme, Sahgal shows her preoccupation with the modern Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self-realization. After the 1960s Indian English fiction, like its Western counterpart, shifted its focus from the public to the private sphere. The mass destruction caused by nuclear weapons in World War-II brought unrest and anxiety all over the world. The situation gave rise to psychological disorders and loss of moral values, and profoundly disturbed man's mental peace and harmony. World literature, responding to the new era, started to deal with the different modern gloomy faces of society.

Indian novelists could not remain aloof from these currents and henceforth they were not exclusively concerned with the exploration and interpretation of a social milieu, but dealt with new subjects of human existence and man's quest for self in all its complicated situations. This shift of focus in Indian English fiction becomes clearer particularly with Anita Desai and Arun Joshi who explore the agonized existence of modern man in their writing which "changed the face of Indian English novel."¹²

Anita Desai, one of the literary luminaries of contemporary Indian fiction writing in English, is the most prominent among the Indian English novelists who have tried to portray the tragedy of human souls trapped in the circumstances of life. She "is more interested in the interior landscape of the mind than in political and social realities."¹³ In her novels, Indian English fiction has acquired a depth which it seldom had before. She is more interested in the evaluation of the interior landscape of the human mind than in depicting the practical and social realities of life.

By the end of the nineteen sixties and the early seventies some fresh faces appeared on the Indian English fictional scene, the most prominent of them were Chaman Nahal and Arun Joshi. Arun Joshi (1939-1993), Like Anita Desai, has recorded modern man's traumas and agonies in his novels with rare competence and gravity. Indira Bhatt and Suja Alexander remarks in his book, "It is with the novels of Arun Joshi and Anita Desai that a new era in the Indo-English fiction began and also witnessed a change in the treatment of themes."¹⁴

His emphasis is on the individual psyche of the protagonist throughout his five novels. His technique of introspection intensified by self-mockery opens a new dimension in the art of Indian English fiction. It is because of his novel approach, his psychological understanding of the inner conflict of human beings and his philosophical existential vision, that one is drawn into his writing. Joshi recognizes a reality beyond the mere phenomenal world, a reality which only an artist

could imagine and capture by giving a consistent form to the shapeless face of human existence.

Among Joshi's contemporaries, Chaman Nahal is an acclaimed novelist. His most outstanding work before the eighties was *Azadi* (1975), one of the most prominent novels on the theme of Partition. After 1980 began the period of so-called "new" fiction. In this period a breed of new novelists emerged. It includes Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Upmanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Deshpande, Shashi Tharoor, Shobha De, Amitav Ghose, Amit Choudhary, and Arundhati Roy.

Shashi Deshpande is the novelist with the most sustained achievement, having published eight novels. She seems to grapple with the identity crisis of the contemporary women in her works. Her chief novels include *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *If I Die Today* (1982), *A Matter of Times* (1996) and *Small Remedies* (2000).

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) heralded a new era in the history of Indian English Fiction. His other foremost novels include *Shame* (1983) and *Satanic Verses* (1988). Amitav Ghosh, one of the most popular names in recent Indian English fiction writing, started with *The Circle of Reason* (1986) followed by *In An Antique Land* (1992), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) and *The Glass Palace* (2000). Shashi Tharoor's first novel *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) is one of the finest examples of post-modern fiction in recent Indian English Literature.

Vikram Seth published a novel in verse, *The Golden Gate*, in 1986. In 1993 appeared his *A Suitable Boy*, which won him great fame as a first-rate novelist. It was followed by *An Equal Music* (1999).

Amit Choudhary has published four novels, namely *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991), *Afternoon Raag* (1993), *Freedom Song* (1998) and *A New World* (2000). Shobha De's important contribution includes *Socialite Evenings* (1989),

Starry Nights (1991), *Sisters (1992)*, *Strange Obsession (1992)*, *Sultry Days (1994)*, *Snapshots (1995)* and *Second Thoughts (1996)*. De's novels would seem to belong less to serious literature than to pulp writing.

Another writer of immense worth is Arundhati Roy. She has won the Booker Prize for her maiden novel, *The God of Small Things (1997)*. It is a tale of shock and horror with theme of death and decay. In it Roy reveals immorality in public life, too, which is rocked by party politics and selfish motives.

Jhumpa Lahri's debut short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*, after facing rejection for years was finally released in 1999, and subsequently won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the O. Henry Award. She has written three other books since then- *The Namesake*, *Unaccustomed Earth* and *The Lowland* which was shortlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize. Her writing is distinguished for her plain, yet, deep, language and Indian immigrant characters.

V. S. Naipaul is also a prominent writer and is a Noble laureate. He has written contrasting soul-stirring novels like *India: A Wounded Civilization* and *A house For Mr. Biswas*. He is the first ever Indian origin to triumph the Booker Prize for his book *In a Free State*. He has received Nobel Prize in 2001 for his literature that made him popular among the literature lovers. Other works that bought him recognition are *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, *An Area of Darkness* and *A Bend in the River*. Naipaul has raised controversies with his sarcastic comments on countries like Caribbean and India and Muslims fundamentalism on non- Arab countries.

Kiran Desai is a writer who has experimented with varied forms of narrative techniques in fiction. Her talent in the use of irony and humor make her novels worth reading. Kiran Desai, daughter of Anita Desai, had won the Booker Prize for her second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* in 2006. It deals with a number of themes from eventful rustic life to pangs insurgency. She is an outstanding woman author of India.

The White Tiger is the first novel of Arvind Adiga which made him popular in India and abroad. He won Booker prize for literature in 2008 for *The White Tiger* which surprised the readers by its narrative strategy and realistic presentation of the world of corruption prevalent in all realms of Indian life. Adiga's other novels worth reading and he is a celebrated author who has something to say to the world.

Vikram Seth is one of the celebrated writers in English whose literary eminence has been established by his second book, *A Suitable Boy* which deals with harsh realities of post independent India in its all manifestations. His novels present a very wide canvas than his contemporaries. His work's transcends the national boundaries and stands for world citizenship as like the writer himself.

Chetan Bhagat is a famous author of a number of record breaking best sellers. It is said that all of his novels are best sellers which no other Indian writer can claim till now. The most interesting fact about his writings is that they portray truth than fiction. *Revolution 2020* is the most acclaimed novel as it depicts the sad plight of Indian society which is struggling due to nepotism and corruption.

Ramchandra Guha is also a prominent Indian writer who has written on different topics such as social, political, historical and environmental also on the history of cricket. Besides this, he is a well – known columnist who writes for *The Telegraph*, *The Hindu* and *The Hindustan Times* and is also an Indian historian.

Indisputably, the Indian English novel has gained a unique viability, vibrancy and vitality, attracting a remarkably wide readership and universal acclaim, to which the new novelists have made a positive contribution. The Indo-English fiction has so many novelists but very few are sympathetic critics. Meenakshi Mukherji expresses her sympathy to conclude her with a comment:

Indo-English fiction, which has served for so long as a file or document of sociology of anthropology or educational theory must

now be regarded as literature and evaluated as such. That is the service it requires from critics, and this study is modest essay in this direction.¹⁵

Thus it can be concluded that the journey of Indian English novel has passed through tough times and it required a tremendous expertise and enterprise on the part of the authors to establish Indian English novel as a genre of repute. It started with the glory and the grandeur of the great and turned to the liberty and resistance of the common. Initially they imitated the voices of their masters but later turned to their brothers' and neighbours' voices and finally to their own inner voices. Through the novels written in the different phases we get the changing picture of the Indian political, social, economical & psychological world.

Now after a close study of history of Indian English literature, the study will focus on a brief biographical sketch of R.K. Narayan, and a close study of his literary works. R.K. Narayan is one of the most important figures in the field of Indo-Anglian fiction. As is the custom in the South 'R' in his name stands for the name of his village to which his family belonged- Rashipuram. 'K' stands for the name of his father Krishna Swami Iyer. The full form of 'Narayan' is Narayanswami. He was born in 1906 at South Indian village named Rasipuram. His father's name was Krishna Swami. His mother tongue was Tamil, he had settled down in Mysore, where the regional language is Kannada, and he wrote in English.

Narayan was not a brilliant student as such. He failed both in the High School and Intermediate examinations. He somehow managed to pass his B.A. when he was twenty four years old from Maharaja College, Mysore in 1930. As his father was a humble retired school teacher, and had a large family to support, he expected his son's contribution to the family income soon after his graduation.

His further education being discontinued; Narayan had to become a newspaper reporter to support his family. His business was to gather Mysore city

news and send it to a newspaper called, *The Justice* published in Madras. Its aim was to promote the cause of the non-Brahmins who suffered from the domination of the minority Brahmin class in public life, government service and education. First, Narayan worked for some time as a clerk in the Mysore Secretariat, and then as a teacher in a village school only for a day. But both these professions did not suit him, his ambition, even as early as his school days, had always been to become a writer. So finally he decided to devote all his time to writing. But he had to face lot of criticism from inside as well as outside. The most fateful event of his life took place in 1935 when he accompanied his elder sister Janki from Coimbatore. There he met Rajam who later on became his wife.

The circumstances in which he met his future wife can best be compared with Chandran's meeting with Malathi. The meeting soon blazed into a passionate love. Emboldened by his true love, the shy and sensitive Narayan went straight to Nageshwara Iyre and his wife and asked for their daughter's hand. Nothing but the problem of horoscope matching comes in the way. But in spite of all these fluctuations and obstacles Narayan's marriage came off, celebrated with all the pomp, show, festivity, exchange of gifts and the overcrowding, that his parents desired and expected.

Narayan's marriage with Rajam was supremely a happy marriage. Though Rajam, his wife did not know English, she took keen interest in the work of her husband. But the novelist's happiness was short lived. His beloved wife suffered Typhoid in 1939, only five years after their marriage, and the cruel hands of destiny took her away to the heavenly abode. It was the most shattering incident in Narayan's life which instilled a profound belief in astrology into his mind evident in his novels and short-stories. But before her death, Rajam gave birth to a child, Hema which was a prototype copy of Leela in *The English Teacher*. The shattering death of Rajam was rewarding as well because he emerged as a fuller and wiser novelist from the dark and gloomy valley of the tragedy.

Despite stark criticism and opposition Narayan got stuck to his decision of becoming a writer. The account of how he began to write a novel is very funny. Narayan had started writing under the influence of events occurring around him. His main concern was the small segments of the Indian middle-class society and its mores and traditions as embodied in his ever growing town Malgudi. C.D. Narasimhaiah says:

He has scarcely stirred out of Malgudi nor has his characters; and if by ill-luck they did stray out of the Municipal limits of Malgudi they invariably came back, sadder and wiser-such is the spirit of place, Malgudi the microcosm of traditional Indian society.¹⁶

Narayan choose journalism as his career. He wrote for newspapers and magazines as well as developed creative writings of the finest possible order. He had travelled to the United States and other foreign countries. It was only in the fifties that he crossed the Indian shores for America. But he derived neither inspiration nor training from abroad. Unpretentious about his genius he wrote like an Indian. He was not one of the artists who had not cared to write for sensation or for cheap popularity, nor had he written to interpret India to the West. His prime concern had been to view Indian life artistically and to deal with it like a pure artist.

Narayan has altogether twelve novels and about one hundred fifty short-stories to his credit. His novels include *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945), *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *Waiting For Mahatma* (1955), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *The Painter of Signs* (1977) & *A Tiger for Malgudi Days* (1983).

The collection of short-stories are *Malgudi Days* (1944), *Dodu and other Stories* (1943), *Cyclone and other stories* (1944), *An Astrologer's Day* (1947),

Lawley Road (1956), *God, Demons and Others* (1956), *A Horse and Two Goats* (1970) & *Old and New* (1981). He has written some autobiographical pieces also *My Dateless Diary* (1960) & *My Days* (1943). His some other creative writings in the print are *Next Sunday* (1956), *The Ramayan* (1972), *Relucant Guru* (1974), *Mysore* (1938), *The Emerald Route* (1977) & *Mahabharata* (1978).

R.K. Narayan's novel *The Guide* received the 'Sahitya Akademi Award' for the year 1960. The novel had been filmed. He was awarded 'Padma Bhusan' in 1964. The University of Leeds conferred on him the Honour of D.Litt. in 1967 and Delhi University followed it in 1973. He earned high acclaim in India and abroad. He was a visiting lecturer at Michigan State University in 1958; and lectured at many reputed institutions of America such as the University of California, Kansas University, Yale University and Yassar College. Though his novels were first published in England yet he is best known Indian novelist in America.

Narayan is the first Indian writer to have been included in *The Writers and Their Work* a series of monographs published by the British Council. He is the only Indian so far to have achieved this distinction. He visited U.S.A. in 1956, on an invitation from the Rockefeller Foundation. Many of his stories and sketches have been broadcast by the B.B.C, a rare distinction. Tele serial were also made on many of his novels and short stories. His works have been published both in England and the U.S.A. and in both these countries he has enjoyed wide popularity.

His novels may be classified into early novels, domestic novels, novels dealing with Mammon - worshippers, and political novels. In all he has written about 12 novels and about 150 short stories. Among his early novels fall the novels written on school and college life: these are *Swami and Friends*, *Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher*. Among his domestic novels are included, *The Dark Room* and *The Vendor of Sweets*. His best known novels dealing with money-worshipping people of the world are *The Financial Expert*, *Mr. Sampath*, *The Guide*, and *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. His only political novel is *Waiting for the Mahatma*.

Now we shall study some of his selected novels in brief which are to be included in this thesis. *Swami and his Friends* (1935) present a socio-economic condition of pre-independence era, along with the different stages of school age which makes the life of its central-figure, Swaminathan. It is the typical style of Narayan that he chooses first a central figure and then prepares other events accordingly. In the words of Professor K.R.S. Iyengar:

**The whole of one's boyhood is recalled here...
It is as though every day actuality has taken
Narayan's pen and written out the universal
epic of all our boyhood yesterdays that are now
no more.¹⁷**

The main concern in his novels, therefore, remains a graphic presentation of the various evolutions which his central a character undergoes. In the novel we see how the hero, Swami, lives in English ruled atmosphere of Malgudi. He is sent for education in the Albert Mission School where teachers are apt to convert their boys into Christian and are all the time insulting Hindu Gods. Narayan is sharply aware of the developments that have been taking place in Indian milieu as important consequences of independence.

There is a lively presentation of people's tendency in the novel. The English rulers were trying all their best to remain in the country. But their incessant endeavour to bring social and cultural change in India aroused the ire of Indian populace. People rose against them and started Khilafat Movement (1920), Civil-Disobedience Movement and ultimately Quit India Movement (1942) to drive them out of country. Mahatma Gandhi led the movement and men and women, like Sriram and Bharti who came under his spell, joined it. Violent agitators, like Jagdish and Veeraswami, who believed in smuggling arms into the country, and on a given day, shooting all the Englishmen, also came on scene of the national movement for independence.

The school boys, like Swami and his friends, also joined the movement; they walked out of their classes, broke window-panes, took out processions and raised slogans against the British Government. They participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement and burnt their clothes made up in the foreign mills. Narayan is interested in the oddities, eccentricities and angularities of the Indian middle class men. Swami is critical of his teacher's appearance that his eyes were too near each other, that there was more hair on his chin that one saw from the bench and that he was very bad looking. The whole novel is full of comic absurdities of little school boys.

Narayan also gently laughs at the world in which Swami lives. The paradoxes of pre-independence India, the alternating aloof and passionate nature of the people, the confusions that encompass the mind of a child in such a volatile environment: all those things are brought out beautifully. He takes a dig at the educational system too as envisioned by the British Masters in the novel. The use of cane, the degrading and humiliating nature of the 'Stand-up-on-the desk' punishment, the heavy work load are all shown up by Narayan for what they are: a cruel way of education which mass-produces unimaginative clerks and subordinate staff to serve in the British administrative machine.

In the final analysis, *Swami and Friends* is more than the story of a child. It shows us the stark reality that how the Christian teachers in pre-independence era were interested more in converting their students into Christians than educating them properly. It is the story of a generation of Indians who are born and brought up in the shadow of the British Colonial Raj and who inherit the confusions of the cultural and social conflict. R.K. Badal also asserts in his book that it is also a study of typical school boy's mentality as, "*The Bachelor of Arts* is a simple story charmingly told of the ordinary everyday incidents in the placid life of a Hindu House hold in South India."¹⁸

It is another novel dealing with college life. If *Swami and Friends* presents the school days of Swaminathan, *The Bachelor of Arts* tries to capture the feelings of

Chandran, a young man of twenty one, and *The English Teacher* similarly portrays the life, and elaborates the propensities of a teacher. The novel shows us the norms, manners and conventions of a South Indian middle class family. The real theme of the novel is reaction to the family relationship that of son and parents. William Walsh rightly remarks:

The family is the immediate context in which his sensibility operates and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which family relationship are treated that of son and brother in *The Bachelor of Arts*.¹⁹

The hero, Chandran, is a progressive college student. After passing his B.A. falls in love with Malthi and ignoring the traditional norms of society, wants to set an example by marrying this girl whatever her caste or sect might be. But he cannot marry because of opposition from his mother. He soon gets frustrated with the world. He goes to the extent of, renouncing it and becomes a *Sannyasi*. After a brief spell of *sannyas*, he again enters domestic life, marries a girl chosen by his parent. After his marriage age with Sushila, Chandran joins as a newspaper correspondent, and then he becomes the chief agent of *The Daily Messenger*. Thus he becomes prosperous, and he explains to the people that people marry because of the satisfaction of their sexual appetite and the management of home; otherwise there is no sanctity in the institution of marriage.

“Fatalism that marks the common Indian attitude to life”²⁰ is also highlighted amply in the novel. In *The Bachelor of Arts* the novelist shows Indian society’s orthodox belief in astrology. It also shows that how free choice of emotional relation is made limited by fate and astrology and the choice of life-partnership is determined by the mercy of astrologers. Graham Greene gets a new glimpse into life through his novel and writes:

It was Mr. Narayan with his Swami and Friends who first India in the sense of the Indian population and the Indian way of life, alive to me, and in *The Bachelor of Arts* he continues to fill in his picture of Malgudi, a small town in Mysore. Narayan has created wonderfully memorable characters in *The Bachelor of Arts*.²¹

Narayan introduces us to the stark socio-political reality in the novel that the elections are losing its dramatic values in our country. The elections of college students union, which has lost its true sanctity, are held under illegal influences. The students' union secretary Natesan could win the election only because every vote was purchased with Coffee and Tiffin. The restaurant bill comes to seventy in the election month. His father writes him angrily asking that rupees lay scattered in our village streets. It is amusing and interesting that such practice was not uncommon even in 1937, the year the novel was published. M.K. Naik comments:

The novel, therefore, next to the *Swami and Friends*, is once again on the exposure of faults and foibles of oddities of behavior and responses ...it operates in a world carefully insulated from the harsh realities and the somber imperatives of life.²²

The Dark Room is a sociological study of an Indian household which demonstrates the typical Indian attitude of life where the husband is lord and master and it is a sin for a wife to disobey him. P.S. Sundram in his novel comments:

It is a sort of thing that takes place in every society where the old double strands are valid and the women are economically so helpless

that they just have to lump what they do not like.²³

The life of an Indian housewife is vividly presented in the novel. Narayan narrates the story as a detached observer and focus the attention of readers on the feelings and emotions of both husband and wife. It is difficult to trace where Narayan's sympathy lie in the novel. This is a pathetic novel which evokes the sense of tragedy and sympathy, not less successfully than the Rama Mehat's *Inside the Haveli*, which is comparatively a better domestic novel and fascinating peep behind the walls of a Rajasthani noble man's house where a housewife struggles against orthodoxy and tradition but finally yields to the ways of family.

The Dark Room is a lament on the disharmony of domestic life. The hero Ramani, a man of middle class family, belongs to the old conservative set of husband and regards marriage an institution in which the wife has to have implicit obedience and bear children ungrudgingly. He is short-tempered man. He behaves cynically and irrationally with his wife and children. His wife Savitri is a dutiful women but he never loves her for her goodness. Ramani represents a typical Indian husband who bosses over their wife for the money they earn and spent over their children and household affairs.

Savitri represents a typical Indian housewife who is a replica of stoicism. She tolerates the violent teasing of Ramani and does not say even a word against him. She goes to a dark room in his house where she moans and sulks. "Perhaps only a Hindu wife", says Mahtama Gandhi:

Would tolerate these hardships, and that is why I have regarded woman as an incarnation of tolerance. A servant wrong suspected may throw up his job, a son in the same case may leave his father's roof, and friend may put an end to the friendship. A wife, if suspects her

husband, will keep quit, but if her husband suspects her, she is ruined.²⁴

Savitri finds her husband infatuated with Santa Bai, his new office assistant. She leaves her home out of frustration and desperation only to realize the bitter truth a traditional Hindu wife of her class is totally helpless. She ultimately gives up her pride and returns to her home, broken and defeated, to her still unrepentant husband.

The plight of traditional of Hind wife is evidently the central theme of this novel, written in the mode of the pathetic, the tragic, the ironical, and the propagandistic. Like thousands of other Indian housewives, Savitri is an also helpless creature in the hands of her husband. When she presents her son from going to school, who says he is ill, she is completely worsted and humiliated with rejoinders like:

Mind you own business, do you hear... Go and do any work you like in the kitchen but leave the training of a grown up pay to me. It is none of a woman's business.²⁵

Even the minor characters are individualized. The flirt (Pereira), the accountant Kanta Lyenga who was against employing a woman in the office and the other are full of vitality. Shanta Bai, the temptress, Ramani the despotic man, who falls head over heels in love with Shanta Bai are all realistic. The most artistic part of the novel is the end. The author does not bring in cheap conversion of hearts, so common in Indian stories. Instead, he sticks to realism. Savitri returns home and looks after her children. Ramani carries on with Shanta Bai as before and life adjusts itself. Ganga, the talkative forward wife of a teacher and Janamma, the wife of the public prosecutor are also well-described.

The character of Margayya has been very well portrayed. He is a lovable rogue for his humour and confidence about his capabilities. His practical sense was

quite developed and he attracted people for being a man of average emotions. He had set his heart on money as Dr. Pal had on sex, and his character is symbolic of the blemishes of commercial civilization. The irony of Maragayya's life was that he was mediocre and his area of operation was Malgudi, too small for the play of his imagination and, experience. His love for his son and concern over his daughter-in-law's fate when neglected by her husband present the human side of the financial expert, and, to the balanced reviewer his character will always remain delightful.

The story has been narrated in a consummate manner written in the Shakespearean double plot technique - one, main plot consisting of Ramani and Savitri, and another sub plot consisting Mari and Panni. In the final analysis, we can say that it is neither an *Indian Doll's House* a copy of *Patient Crissil*, it is simply a sociological study of an Indian attitude of family life and the traditional glory attached to this happy concept of living.

The English Teacher is exclusively a love story but interestingly different from the love stories one reads, dealing with school and college life of India. By a love story traditionally we mean the love before marriage which consequently ends, or may not, into the marriage. Here we have the love story which starts when Krishnan is already a married man, Sushila already a mother. The Krishnan, a lecturer in English in the Albert Mission college of Malgudi, wants a drastic change in the society he lives.

Krishnan the hero of the novel is opposed to the British system of education, though he himself was the product of the education, which makes up morns, cultural morns and his mugged up notes repeated from year to year was "...a fraud practiced (on young man and women) for a consideration of hundred rupees."²⁶ He was opposed to the perpetuating system of education that crippled his imagination and hence believed in social freedom and independence of mind. He had studied English literature and admired the wonderful writers, but he could not do so only at the cost

of his creativity. His soul revolted against the British education and hence he gave up his job and preferred to work as primary school teacher.

Krishnan, the English Teacher, was a product of a system of education which dims for a sitting and he received minute instructions about the things of his house, which convinced him that, they could only come from his wife's spirit. The English Teacher put up his daughter Leela at a school run by a devoted master. The master's unhappy life and his devotion to the school form a minor subplot of the novel. In the end Krishna resigns his job and joins the primitive school so that he can talk directly to his departed wife, who, he believes, was a spirit.

The English Teacher is a song of love in marriage. It is a psychic, mystic and spiritual study of some part of Indianness. It is a remarkable piece of art, full of unexpected things and the turning of each page brings a surprise. The atmosphere and texture of happiness and above all, its elusiveness have seldom been so perfectly transformed. It is an interesting, delicious idyll. It is a wonderfully painted miniature of India, wherein we can meet characters as vivid as Jane Austen's and move through landscapes as delicate as Corot's.

Narayan brings out the qualities of an ideal housewife in *The English Teacher*. Sushila is a symbol of devoted Hindu wife who gives foremost importance to her family and her domestic duty. She is a cash keeper. She appears Krishnan to be so a ruthless accountant that a hundred rupees seemed to do the worth of two hundred and all through the month she was able to give money whenever Krishnan requires:

She seemed to understand perfectly where every rupee was going or should go, and managed them with a determined hand. She kept the cash in a little lacquer box, locked it up in her almirah and kept in a minute account of it in the last pages of a diary.²⁷

The various aspects of matrimonial relations are depicted in the novels of R.K. Narayan. The matrimonial relation of Krishnan and Susila is supremely happy. A minor strife takes place in between them when Sushila sells an old watch. They did not talk each other for a while but soon their pride fumbled and prejudiced dissolved.

The novel which starts as an interesting novel of domestic fidelity gets bogged in spiritual things and philosophic discussions which many a time tax the patience of the readers. As a work of art this novel could have been much better with less spiritualism. The characters are well worked out. Even the school master inspires dignity, fills the readers with a sort of reverence. But in spite of artistic style, subtle humor and irony, the novel suffers from a lack of interest.

The English Teacher is a Narayan's fine peep into "a little middle class home and the comic irony of the petty problems of the daily business of living."²⁸ Narayan, simultaneously, once again ironically satirizes the existing educational system which has failed to serve its true purpose.

The Guide is the most popular novel of R.K Narayan. It was published in 1958, and won the Sahitya Academy Award for 1960. It has also been filmed and the film has always drawn packed- houses. *The Guide* is a unique achievement of Narayan's world of fiction so far. It is a beautifully organized and profoundly mature work of literary art. R.S. Singh regards this novel:

***The Guide* (1953) is an appreciated for the technical novelty in depicting the ironies of modern Indian life as well as social tradition in which the comic and the sad are not sharply marked off one from the other.²⁹**

It recounts the adventures of a railway guide; popularly known as 'Railway Raju', as a tourist guide he is widely popular. It is this profession which brings him in contact with Marco and his beautiful wife, Rosie. While the husband is busy with his

archaeological studies, Raju seduces his wife and has a good time with her. Ultimately Marco comes to know of her affair with Raju and goes away to Madras leaving Rosie behind. Rosie comes and stays with Raju in his one room house. His mother tolerates her for some time, but when things become unbearable, she calls her brother and goes away with him, leaving Raju to look after Rosie and the house.

Rosie is a born dancer, she practices regularly and soon Raju finds an opening for her. In her very first appearance, she is a grand success. Soon she is very much in demand and their earnings increase enormously. Raju lives lavishly, entertains a large number of friends with whom he drinks and gambles. All goes well till Raju forges Rosie's signatures to obtain valuable jewellery lying with her husband. The act lands him in jail. Rosie leaves Malgudi and goes away to Madras, her hometown. She goes on with her dancing and does well without the help and management of Raju, of which he was so proud. On release from jail, Raju takes shelter in a deserted temple on the banks of the river Sarayu, a few miles away from Malgudi, and close to the village called Mangla. The simple villagers take him to be a Mahatma, begin to worship him, and bring him a lot of eatables as presents. Raju is quite comfortable and performs the role of a saint to perfection.

However, soon there is a severe famine drought, and the villagers expect Raju to perform some miracle to bring them rain. So he has to undertake a fast. The fast attracts much attention and people come to have *darshan* of the Mahatma from far and wide. On the twelfth day he has become too weak yet, he goes to the river and reaches the basin where he daily prays for rains. Then too weak and exhausted, he slumps down with these words, "Vellan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs. (p. 68). Thus the novel ends of ambiguity. The characters are more complex and are drawn with care and artistic spirit. Rosie, the dancing girl with her idealistic conceptions of a dancer, is well contrasted with Raju's mother, who has traditional ideas of her own. R.S. Singh in his book regards this novel:

Technically, *The Guide* is an advance on the earlier novels: the present and the past are cunningly jumbled to produce an impression of suspense and anticipation.³⁰

This novel shot Narayan into great prominence to the extent that he became a by-word to the world of novel readers and the general public.

The Man Eater of Malgudi has a definite sustained mythical structure. There is the opposition between the good and the evil, the *sura* (God) and *asura* (Demons) which is a recurrent motive in Hindu mythology. M.K. Naik comments that the novel is:

...an impressive fictional statement dealing with ethical issues such as the fate of evil and the question of human relationship, and the precepts and practice of the entire business of living.³¹

The situations and problems of the society of Malgudi are neatly drawn and characters well observed. William Walsh regards:

Narayan has perfect pitch in his sense of human relationships. This is exactly what people say and do; this is precisely how they behave.³²

The mythological base of the novel, i.e. *Bhashmasura* myth, corresponds the theme of Milton's *Paradise Lost* where too good ultimately wins over the evil. This novel is the story not of a tiger but of a cruel and ruthless taxidermist named Vasu. He is a heartless creature and has no regard for gratitude or obligations. He is physically very powerful. He gets his training under a wrestler. He can break stones with his hands. But when the *Pahalwan* comes he gives him such a blow that he becomes

unconscious. Vasu has no remorse for this, and walks out leaving him in this condition. He learns the art of taxidermy in Junagarh and now his hobby is to kill animals and stuff and sell them to the people. The good renter Natraj and his close friends, poet and a journalist find their congenial days disturbed when Vasu, the taxidermist walks in with his stuffed hyenas and pythons and his dancing beloved. Vasu is in search of a very big animal and as such threatens the life of an elephant of the temple that Natraj has befriended.

In this novel also Malgudi is the scene. Vasu comes to Malgudi because of the attraction of the Memphi forest, and he wishes to live with the wild animals. He is a money-minded person. He does not give money to Natraj for whom he is seen collecting funds. He does not even pay the rent due to him. He does believe in morality. He does not believe in the institution of marriage and brings women to his house. He has an authoritative tone, but would relax it softly to beg favour from others. On the whole he is a callous, feeling less, brutish and roguish man. In contrast to him Natraj is a good soul. The novel is remarkably successful from the point of view of characterization. In the words of Professor K.R.S. Iyengar:

The Man-Eater of Malgudi jumbles the ingredients of comedy to excellent purpose and provides ample entertainment, but the undercurrent of serious intention cannot also be missed.³³

On the whole *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* is a hilarious, charming, and artistically successful novel. The novelist has blended realism and romanticism, humour and irony in the novel. The most remarkable thing about this novel is Vasu's character. I challenge any man to contradict me is the philosophy of Mr. Vasu, M.A., Taxidermist, the hero of this novel. He is a large man about six feet tall, and he has a bull neck and hammer fist, a tanned face, large powerful eyes under thick eyebrows, a large forehead and a shock of unkempt hair distinguished him from average

humanity. Like Narayan's other rogue-heroes he too is a bully for Homo sapiens. Professor William Walsh regards this novel as Narayan's greatest work:

Undoubtedly, this novel is a perfect piece of workmanship but has a few defects which strike at ones. For example, the situations are slightly exaggerated for the sake of humour. The waste paper sale takes half-a-day. Even in the leisurely Indian life half-a-day is an exaggeration, Similarly, Vasu's behavior, and the manner in which it is tolerated by others are not convincing.³⁴

Similarly, the death of Vasu is also far from convincing. Despite a few minor unconvincing details *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* can be called a 'Well-turned out Novel'.

The Vendor of Sweets is R.K. Narayan's later novel. It is a sociological study of the sixties. It highlights the ironies of the life of leaders of free India who swear by the name of Mahatma Gandhi, but actually live a degraded life. R. S. Singh comments, "...Interested in personal gains, they twist the preaching's of Gandhi and the Geeta to suit their corrupt practices."³⁵ The hero of this novel Jagan looks a typical travesty of Mahatma Gandhi, clad in Khadi-cloths and with the *Geeta* in his hands, sells sweets in Malgudi. His son Mali is also mediocre and degenerated. He represents that the class of young Indian men who, fascinated by American affluence and culture, make airy plans for the improvement of their own prospects and sometimes criticize their own country.

The novel has his usual freshness, vigor and delight. It deals with a new theme unlike that of his previous novels. In it clash of affections is nicely depicted. As sixty, Jagan is a prosperous widower, a sweet vendor who contrives handsome profits with high minded Gandhian principles. The apple of his eye is his son Mali, for whom he

feels a deep but absurdly embarrassed affection, which appears to go unrequited. Mali attempts to manufacture novels and short stories on machines according to certain procedure and fails. He lives an immoral life with grace, the American-Korean girl. A tension prevails in between the father and son because both view-points are hard to meet. Through the novel, Narayan wants to show us the existing attitude towards Gandhism, renunciation, business correspondence and possibility or impossibility of the union of the two cultures, i.e. East and West.

When Mali coolly announces that he is abandoning studies to go to America to become a writer, Jagan's fatherly feelings are thrown into still greater confusion. And when, a year or two later, Mali returns with a half-American and half - Korean girl. Jagan, an orthodox fogey, is aghast, though he claims, "We don't believe in caste these days... Gandhi fought for its abolition."³⁶ But how can he satisfy his society and relatives? And how so deep-rooted caste system can be abolished in India? Jagan is condemned by her sister. M.K. Naik remarks:

...we are ashamed to refer to you as a brother. Even when you joined Gandhi and lost all senses of caste, dining and rubbing shoulders with untouchables, going to jail, and getting up to all kinds of shameful things, we didn't mind anything. But now is it a fact that you have a beef-eating Christian girl for a daughter-in-law? I can hardly call you a brother in the presence of my in-laws. No one can blame Mali, with a father like you, etc...³⁷

Even if the relatives can be appeased, the problem is not over. The vast society, for which Jagan's son's marriage is strange and anti-traditional, is hard to be satisfied. For Jagan, to satisfy everyone in the society is a hard nut to crack.

As William Walsh comments, “Narayan’s aim here is to examine the validity of Gandhism and the Hindu ideal of life in post-independence India.”²³ There is a remarkable fall in the character of the young and old Jagan. Narayan perhaps wants to show the degeneration of the young and true Gandhian, like many others of the post-independence Indian society, into the hypocrite of the later years. His renunciation is his escape from his personal anxieties or, as William Walsh points out “Jagan’s renunciation of the world, then, is of a piece with the Indian tradition.”³⁸ But he (William Walsh) admits that he is also pushed into it by his personal circumstances. “Renunciation of objects,” says Mahatma Gandhi, “without the renunciation of desires, is short lived, however hard you may be.”³⁹ Therefore, this is the reason that the renunciation of Jagan is fizzled out.

The East and the West encounter are remarkably visible in the novel. The Westernized modern India is set against the traditional India. Narayan is aware of the fact that a good number of young men who go to America return with Westernized thinking having a motif to ignore their native traditions and customs. This is presented through the character of Mali and the crisis of values in the Hindu joint-family life can be very well identified with the clash between the two generations father and son.

Thus to conclude the novel shows us the changes that took place in the post-1947 society of India. It also highlights that how the Gandhian philosophy is exploited by the people for their personal ends. We see how old (traditional) and new (westernized) generations encounters due to their cultural differences. The novel is, thus, a fine sociological study of the post-independence period of Indian society.

The novel, *The Painter of Signs* written after something like ten years silence, is both slim and packed. According to William Walsh:

It is much longer than a ‘nouvelle’ and yet by the end of it a character has been evolved, a predicament analysed, a world constructed, a

point of view defined. *The painter of Signs* is well named. Narayan is a painter of signs in that the accurate portrait is also emblematic and humanly significant, the actual Malgudi becoming a metaphor of much larger application.⁴⁰

The novel has been serialized in the July-September 1976 issues of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. Narayan is the novelist of the common men and such a common man droll, foolish, absurd but sincere and good is Raman, the young painter of signboards in Malgudi and the hero of this novel. His customers are shopkeepers, lawyers, bangle-sellers and others who always haggled with him about his work or his payment.

Raman is proud of his work he has his own philosophy of painting and colour combination. Once he gets an order for a signboard from the family of planning officer. His work is appreciated by Daisy who is in charge of the family planning mission of Malgudi and Raman finds himself touring the nearby villages in company of Daisy who is a born tyrant and orders everybody around her, including Raman. Raman's contact with Daisy transforms him into a different sort of person. His life takes an altogether new turn. He becomes so Daisy-obsessed "Till yesterday I was a free man with my mind unfettered. Today I am unable to think of any other subject" (p. 58). He begins to have erotic dreams associated with Daisy. Analyzing his thoughts about her, Raman thinks (*The Painter of Signs*):

The clothes on her simply do not exist for you, you are preoccupied with what you can accidentally glimpse at, hoping for a chance to see her clothes blown off; while she sits away at her desk, you fancy her on your lap; while she is conversing, you are sealing her lips with

**your kiss. That is the tragedy to womanhood
utility articles whether in bed or out.⁴¹**

Daisy is a modern and sophisticated woman whose past, like Ganga, is shrouded in a mystery. She didn't believe in 'love' and for her it is simply a romanticism created by the literacy man. Narayan ironically highlights that every modern girl of our society are running in the same boat. The girls of our society, like Daisy, are now apt to have equal status and complete freedom in their matrimonial life. The days of their dependence are gone. Bentham's utilitarianism has influenced every walk of the modern life and daisy, like other modern girls of the society, is not an exception. The love knows as the union of two souls has lost its true meaning and is now evaluated in the sense of utility.

Raman, the hero of this novel is attracted towards Daisy and ultimately falls desperately in love with her. He dogs behind her simply to have an opportunity of her accompany. Once they go to a mountain village and Daisy lectures to the rustics about family planning. But she meets her match in the village priest, the priest of the temple where barren women go to pray for children. He does not permit Daisy and even Raman to paint a birth control slogan on the wall of the shrine. Going back from the village becomes a trial. The bus to Malgudi fails to make its appearance and Raman and Daisy have to hire a bullock cart.

The ride in the cart gives Raman the proximity he is praying for. He has so many ideas about expressing his love for Daisy. But Daisy has foreseen all this and she avoids him. At last they catch a bus and reach Malgudi where Daisy leaves him without a word. He mopes and broods for over a week but at last he decides to take up the normal threads of life. Time passes by and one day Daisy comes back to home. Raman decides to marry Daisy against his aunt's wish. He also realizes how totally his aunt has dedicated herself to his well being. But the emotional pull draws home to Daisy. She has made it very clear, in her usual unemotional and businesslike manner, that she is not at all interested in housekeeping or household chores; she does not want children and her work would always have precedence over her wifely duties.

Raman has no alternative but to accept her conditions. She is not even interested in a kitchen. To her it is a waste of time.

As decided earlier when Raman goes to bring her home, he finds a change in her. She declares that it is impossible for her to go to his house and it is the end of their affair. "Married life is not for me. It frightens me I am not cut out for the life you imagine. I can't live except alone"(p. 98). Thus she cannot afford to have a personal life; she is dedicated to her work. She even leaves Magudi and wants him to forget her. Raman takes out his bicycle and starts his neglected job as a painter of signs again.

Daisy is a peculiarly modern young woman for whom the cult of independent individuality is the supreme value of life. Working for family planning is simply the best means to hand to help her shape her life according to this value. For Raman's old aunt the possibility of a marriage between her nephew and this girl, without a family, out of caste, with a name like Daisy is an insupportable horror. All that one can say for Raman is that this experience has helped him to achieve some measure of way independence. No longer a child to be tended by his aunt, no more a lover and certainly not a husband, he does of least attain, a degree of stability touched by disillusion.

Thus, *The painter of Signs* is a fine study of a typical sophisticated girl whose tendency is to bid farewell to the tradition and existing norms of society. The novel shows us the mentality of modern girls and also of the girls of the days to come. It highlights also Hindu's religious attitude and the problem of population increase and its drawbacks.

Though much work has been done and is continuously being done on R.K. Narayan, still the present study will try to prove that with Narayan, socio-cultural direction acquires a new aspect. His stories begin with realistic settings and everyday happenings in the lives of a cross section of Indian society, with characters of all classes. The research will be an attempt to show Narayan's ability to highlight the social context and provide a feel of the characters through the simple narration.

The study will be an attempt to show that how Narayan successfully reveals the true image of India in his novels by his re-creation of the Indian landscape and by his realistic portrayal of the Indian life and characters. His stories deal with a wide variety of people, school, children, young old etc. The present study, thus, proves the meaningfulness and purposefulness of social customs and intuitions and strengthens tradition and endows it with a great value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better more supernatural reality of ancient events. The work will be a fresh attempt to comprehend socio-cultural extent in Narayan's novels and also to assess his achievement as a social artist.

The work would depict the problems with certain socially accepted practices and reveals the absurdities and incongruities of life in modern Indian society. The study would explore the intricacies of Narayan's contemporary society of his time and his social novels transcend this ideological boundary and present the real picture of society encompassing the broader humanity.

It will be shown how through his characters Narayan enlightens the contemporary Indian life and how he portrays man objectively in relation to society. His vision is truly comprehensive. He presents the Indian society & culture as it is. His characters are engaged in different occupations from tourist guide to astrology. Narayan, thus, presents a panoramic view of the Indian life. The study will prove that how Narayan's works acquire a new extent in socio-cultural range.

The research aims to determine the social conditions which become the writer's subject. The study would be a record of Narayan's special contribution in the depiction of socio-cultural life in India. His depiction of the middle class is an authentic expression of his deep insight into the social psyche. His stories are beautifully crafted and his works are timeless and ageless. Thus, the research will analyze the nature of socio-cultural trends reflected in Narayan's novels.

Some research works also throw light on R.K. Narayan and his works in detail. David Lodge describes in detail myth and allegory in, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977) Narayan's protagonists, he dominantly feels are comparable to humours, but in Narayan, this approach elevates his comedies into myth.

The Literary Endeavour (1982) edited by Dr. L. Adinarayan highlights the significance of the regional literature through transcription. The journal comprises twelve articles focusing on myth, irony, love, non-violence, time and language, God consciousness and narrative strategy in Narayan's novels.

In *R.K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation* (1983), William Walsh emphasizes locale, Malgudi. He underlines influence of Malgudi milieu on plot, theme, and characters. One of the leading Indian authorities on Indian English Literature, M. K. Naik in his book *The Ironic Vision: A Study of the Fiction of R. K. Narayan* (1986) focused on close examination of the regional element in Narayan's fiction and its substantial relationship with his ironic vision.

Jayant K. Biswal worked on *A Critical Study of the Novels of R. K. Narayan: The Malgudi Comedy* (1987). He explored the immense possibilities of the comic in the common place of Malgudi. He emphasized that comedy is not only confined to physical details, it also incorporates the philosophic awareness of life which integrates man into his society and reconciles him with his gods. Apart from these works reviewed many researches and the information has been analyzed for importance of study.

K.R.S. Iyengar, is an authority in Indian English Literature in his book *Indian Writing in English* (1989) focuses on traditional characters in Narayan's novels. Commenting on the character of Savitri in *The Dark Room* he says that Narayan manages to preserve in the pages of the novel - like the mummified curiosities of ancient Egypt- *dark room* as a sanctuary and a retreat for the eternal feminine badge is sufferance.

A Study in Classic American Literature (1990) is a valuable book by D. H. Lawrence on the port of literature. The articles in the book move on word the critical debate and point their latest orientations. The article *The Spirit of Place* by D. H. Lawrence enables the readers to think over the study of the place *Malgudi*, in Narayan's fiction.

The articles, in *R. K. Narayan's India, Myth and Reality (1993)* are devoted to R.K. Narayan. The efforts have been made to present to the readers full views of Narayan's fiction. Sharan Nagendranath's book *A Critical Study of Novels of R.K. Narayan (1993)* is quite helpful to the readers to study and understand R.K. Narayan's novels in detail from *The Swami and Friends* to *The Talkative Man* which have been evaluated by Sharan. The studies made so far are mostly thematic. But the present study seeks to provide a union of technique and theme; form and meaning. In a true sense, technique and theme are not separated in a work of art. As a result of this, the usefulness and validity of this study is obvious.

Tone Sundt Urstad in his work *Symbolism in R.K. Narayan's "Naga" (1994)* focuses his attention on how Narayan uses symbols in his writings.

Professor Veena V. Mohod of Amravati University undertook research on *Social Realism in R.K. Narayan's Novels (1997)*, and proves that with Narayan, social realism acquires a new dimension. His realism is an expression of his essential humanism. She views Narayan's success as a social realist artist is epitomized in his creation of *Malgudi* where man realizes the wholeness of existence, his place in the infinite.

C. N. Srinath's book *An Anthology of Recent Criticism (2000)* is a collection of delightful essays on R.K. Narayan and it brings together critical responses to the writings of eminent Indian English writers. The book prominently concentrates on Narayan's barely sufficient resource and restraint art, his entangled irony and an irregular humor. The essays also attempting well to project women as

tools of social change, its indigenization of language for cross cultural significations, and the appeal of its familiar rhythm for Western critic.

The Book Indian Fiction in English (2000) edited by Pramod Kumar Singh comprises twenty three scholarly papers on different issues of Indian fiction in English. The papers make an intensive study of the work of novelist who has helped in shaping Indian English fiction. The research papers reflect scholar's critical vitality. Shashi Deshpande suggests that the concept of new woman will have justified only by bringing about a radical change in public attitude towards man-woman relationships.

Women in R.K. Narayan or Rose Daisy & English Honours (2001) in Prabandhmala by Dr. Sanjukta Das is a study of female characters in Narayan's works.

R. A. Singh's *Critical Essays on R. K. Narayan's novels* (2002) discuss at length Narayan's rich literary achievements. It is rare for one top collect views only on a particular writer, and such work is surely singular in the Indian context. More so, subject of the essays is not a single novel but a complete work of the novelist. Efforts have been made to present to the readers full views of Narayan's fictional world. It is interesting that the Indian Novel in English developed differently from its Western counterpart. It is different in conception of plots, characters, social, religious and political ideas. There is also difference in prose style and myth. R.K. Narayan uses his own style which is remarkable. The myth is tactfully handled by the novelist in almost all the novels. The classical myth, however, is a source of symbols in the work.

The book *Ironic Comedy of R.K. Narayan* (2002) by Bal Ram Mishra, is an exhaustive study of Narayan's major fictions. The book is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is related to a critique of the fundamental irony. The plot and its ironical curvature are focused on in the chapter second. The third chapter is devoted to irony in portraiture, or characterization workmanship. In the

fifth chapter Mishra concentrates on comparison between the two locales Malgudi and *Wessex* of Thomas Hardy. Here, exploitation of regionalism and its contribution to a sense of irony is enlightened. The last chapter suggests that evaluation is a needed task which readers and research scholars may undertake for fresh dividends.

Narayan's autobiography *My Days* (2006) narrates an uneventful story of writer's life; which presents remarkable illustration of the writer in the making and his entry in the field of literature.

Wit and Humour in Indian English literature (2008) is edited by Ramesh K. Srivastava. His introductory essay explicates the purpose of comic elements which is mainly to provoke or evoke laughter. Narayan is known for comic elements in his novels. His humour from different angles has been discussed by Hariprasanna and Ramesh K. Srivastava. Srivastava concerns only to *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, amalgamation of mythic and comic modes. Due to the use of myth as a structural parallel, the painter Nataraj and the taxidermist Vasu symbolize *Shiva* and *Bhasmasura*.

Swati Srivastava's article on *Wit and Humour* highlights the novelist's skill of creating humour in a work of art. The papers on Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides A Tiger*, Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*, and Anant Murthy's *Samskara*, Nissim Ezekiel's poetry, and two papers on Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* highlight the comic vein even when the works deal with hunger, poverty and caste-discrimination.

New Insights into the Novels of R.K. Narayan (2008) by M.K. Bhatnagar is a lucid discussion on some of the aspects of Narayan's works. Susan Nirmala. S. in her research work *Indianness in R.K. Narayan's Novel The Man-Eater of Malgudi and Language Use and Society in R.K. Narayan's The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (2009) is an attempt to show Narayan's use of style and the contemporary society.

Frying Pan and Other Stories (2009) is a collection of twenty seven short stories which executes a communication with a Malgudi. The author strongly says that the way Narayan captures events and coins them as motifs, the way he wraps his characters and texture them into different mould make the reading of the book an enduring memory. The front and back cover design aptly illustrates the typical South Indian milieu which forms the settings for most of the stories in the book.

The book by Kanak Lata Tiwari, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy and R. K. Narayan* (2010) deals comprehensively with the elements of locale, custom, people, languages which constitute a regional novel. As a critic, she has critically unfolded the thick texture of the regional novels. To her, even though they belong to two culturally different countries, the novelist Hardy and Narayan share, to large extent common narrative techniques, in treating the regional elements in their novels. Each in his own way depicts the region, its history, its geography, its institutions, customs, dialects, superstitions, myths and fables etc. They give descriptions of the landscape describing rivers, mountains, forests, and market places. Hardy has depicted his native place Dorchester as Wessex and Narayan has used the setting of South India towns like Mysore, Coimbatore, etc, to visualize town of Malgudi.

An eminent scholar, Dr. R.N. Panda in his book *R.K. Narayan: A Critical Study* (2010) brings out all essential reading materials. He narrates the story at the superficial level where the locale is dominating. Humanism is basically a philosophical outlook centered on human beings. The article *A Novelist of All Humanity* by Alexander Mc Call Smith shows Narayan as a humanist who draws the best possible picture of contemporary Indian middle class families. The book makes fair attempt to show that his heroes are nondescript citizens who find within themselves the moral strength to develop into model Hindu.

Family in Indian English Fiction (2010) by Dr. Gautam Sharma analyses that family is the universal social grouping found in every society. It is functional as well

as economic unit which performs for the healthy existence of its members. Being a member of joint family; the author has been observing traditional Indian family system in Rajasthan. The book is a result of his own experience. Changing aspect of family in Indian English novels has long been neglected. It is true that most of the novels are directly or indirectly based on depiction of family. Many writers have concentrated their work on the changing aspect of woman and change in the relationship, e. g. mother-daughter, and husband- wife etc.

The book *The Child in R.K. Narayan's Fiction* (2011) by Uday C. Gor is a good attempt of understanding the child in R.K. Narayan's novels. It focuses upon Narayan's art of characterization in general and on the characters of children in particular. The characters reveal a definite journey of the self from innocence to experience and then to wisdom. Gor has examined the psychological insight of the novelist in the portrayal of school going children. The relationship of children among themselves, with parents, elders, teachers and world of grownups is studied by him in minute detail.

Ironic Humour as Art and Popular Medium in R.K. Narayan's Short Stories (2014) is a research paper by C. Malathi also tries to explain how humour and irony substantiates the story as an enjoyable one, along with his love for humanity, which is abundant. As a whole, R.K. Narayan stands culturally graceful and his ironic humour is the vicissitude of life.

Thus, Narayan's novels require further scrutiny and this work would make an attempt to study them from the stand point of society and culture. Hence the utility and validity of present research work is obvious.

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CHAPTER - 2

THEMATIC STUDY

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The themes Narayan chooses in his novels will seem to be of perennial interest especially to a sensitive mind interested in human beings. The basic themes that Narayan mainly focuses in his novels are: the study of feminist sensibility, myth and reality, family and various family relationships, the renunciation, and the conflict between tradition and modernity etc. Narayan's method is to treat his themes, not in abstract or didactic terms but in terms of individuals in flesh and blood and their experience. The themes of Narayan are all inter-related and interdependent. But for purposes of study and analysis one may have to isolate them.

The present chapter will deal with the thematic study in R.K. Narayan's works and to show how the essence of Narayan's fiction is to present the traditional Indian value & the social consciousness in its totality. The dominant discourse on women in early Indian society has confined women within the household as daughter, wife, and mother and in other roles. Women constitute practically undifferentiated group, with a fixed set of norms and duties they are supposed to adhere to. In a caste-ridden, tradition bound society like the Indian society with women as adjunct, it is they alone which seem to have been casualties of the upheavals in society. As adjunct, women neither are active agents in societal process nor do they represent various profiles.

The matrix out of which Narayan constructs Indian female identity largely stems from the glorious ancient cultural past. However, he is definitely conscious of the presence of the colonial past that helps him to reformulate women's identity. Narayan is well aware of the agony of the marginalized group, which is manifested in his work, *My Days*, "I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of woman as oppressed to man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early treatment of

the 'Women's Lib.' movement. Man assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning that she herself began to lose all notions of her independence, her individuality, stature and strength. A wife is an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances" (p. 119).

Not only in his thought but also in his personal life he has great respect for women. His wife died only after three years of their marriage leaving a girl child behind to be looked after. He never remarried and spent his entire life in the memory of his wife and bringing up a girl child. But in his literary work his moral outlook is so subtly stated that it needs a searching for meaning to bring out the status of women. This chapter is an attempt to examine whether his sympathies for the marginalized would enable one to call him a feminist or whether there is too much of the traditional patriarchal mindset in him.

Narayan gives expression to Indian life with its entire vicissitudes. Sometimes humorous, sometimes ironic, but he always writes within the four walls of his culture. His novels are considered to have brought forth the changing images of women in the Indian scene in all their fascinating varieties. He seems to be a champion of women's cause. A close preview of female characters reveal the real intentions and motives of R.K. Narayan in portraying his female characters.

His early novels are centered on male protagonists and their female counterparts work as adjuncts that embody the traditional Indian psyche with all its accompanying hopes and anxieties, born out of a deep-rooted belief in fatalism. This is certainly true in the context of his early novels like *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The Dark Room*, *The English Teacher*, *Mr. Sampath* and *The Financial Expert*.

In these novels R.K. Narayan's orthodox intellectual and social background confines him to characterize women to certain established discourse roles — grandmothers, mothers and wives, and discourse positions - marginal, passive and dependent. His woman remains more a symbol of relationships than a creature of

flesh and blood. Very often many of his female characters have no names. They are addressed like, Swami's mother, Swami's Granny, Chandran's mother, Krishna's mother, Srinivasa's wife, Sampath's wife and Margayya's wife. They are also called by their pet names given to them by their husbands that objectify them. Ramani calls his wife Savitri *a pet* and Shanta Bai *fresh rose*. Krishna calls his wife *jasmine*.

These female characters of Narayan in his early novels are all examples of denial of individual identity to women. They all exist in traditional Indian domestic settings. They are simple, suffering, selfless and sincere women. In Gilbert and Gubar's words they are more like 'Angel in the House'. Gilbert and Gubar argue that:

To be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead. A life that has not story, like the life of Goethe's Makarie, is really a life of death, a death in life.¹

Therefore, these female characters are, if not dead, not alive either. They are typical devoted housewives, who are very particular about performing domestic duties that are repetitive, boring, tiring and above all unpaid, and bring no recognition, neither social nor personal. They do household work such as: serving, sweeping, cleaning, nurturing the children, preparing food and housekeeping. They are expected to know the needs of their husbands and get the things done beforehand. They do it with great pleasure without any complaint. For them housekeeping is the ultimate objective in life. May it be Savitri, Swami's mother, Krishna's mother and his wife Susila, Chandran's mother, Sampath's wife, Srinivasa's wife, Margayya's wife or Balu's wife?

Liberal feminists believe as, "The family is the foundation of a country. And within the family, woman as mother was the foundation."² For a mother bringing up the children and cooking the food is the foundation of her existence. In *Swami and Friends* Swami's mother performs all the household duties with honesty and remains all the time in the kitchen so much so that Swami misses her in the kitchen and feels

uncomfortable without her attention when she is in bed for two days to have another child. Swami says, “My mother was all the time in the kitchen. I couldn’t get it (‘it’ referred to lime pickles.)” (p. 14).

When Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* returns home after eight months and does not find a single speck of dirt on his table asks his mother surprisingly the reason behind it. His mother replies innocently, “What better business did I have?” (p. 117) Ramani scolds Savitri in *The Dark Room*, “no lack of expenses, money for this and money for that. If the cook can’t cook properly, do the work yourself. What have you to do better than that?” (p. 2)

Krishna talks about his mother in *The English Teacher*, “House-keeping was a grand affair for her. The essence of her existence consisted in the thrills and pangs and the satisfaction that she derived in running a well-ordered household. She was unsparing and violent where she met slovenliness” (p. 29). He also tells about Susila, “My wife had picked up many sensible points in cooking and household economy, and her own parents were tremendously impressed with her attainments when she next visited them” (p. 29). Susila is dexterous housewife and knows every skills of keeping house. Krishna lightly mocks at her, “She went in and brought out a little more and pushed it on to my plate and I ate with relish just because she was so desperately eager to get me to appreciate her handiwork” (p. 37).

In *The Financial Expert*, Margayya’s wife and daughter-in-law also do their household duties with great responsibility. The fabulous thing about these women is that they themselves know that they do not have better work to do than doing this drudgery. They accept it with a sort of contentment and never try to inquire about their lot. Wollstonecraft rightly remarks:

I wish to persuade women to endeavor to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrase, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are

almost synonymous with the epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are always objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt.³

Narayan's women are all alike having exactly the same job to do. They serve food to their husbands' in the same manner. A faint aroma comes from everyone's saris and disheveled look is the common look of all of them. Their husbands eat first and they are the last to eat in the family. Even when they are hungry, they wait. No matter if their husbands come at midnight or the next day. They cannot even think of having meal before their husbands do.

Ramani says to Savitri in *The Dark Room*, "What a dutiful wife! Would rather starve than precede her husband? You are really like some of the women in our ancient books" (p. 14). Krishna's father writes a letter to his son complaining in the novel *The English Teacher*, "still keeping late hours for food-the last to eat in the house" (p. 19). Krishna's wife Susila serves him food and eats after him.

In *The Financial Expert* Margayya's wife waits for Margayya till midnight and when Margayya tells her to eat before him she replies, "How could I without knowing what have happened? In future, if you are going to be late" (p. 37). These women put their husbands on high esteem. It could be because, they are emotionally attached to their husbands; it could be because they love their husbands too much; it could be because of social fear; it could be because of some religious implications - whatever be the reasons the women of Malgudi show the essential feminine nature of traditional Indian women.

Narayan has fears that Westernization of Indian culture would bring curse on the society and suggests that women should refrain from aping the Western culture. Ramani decides that he will not be worried about Savitri because she dares to cross the four walls of the house and so must be punished, "She had walked out of her own will; she would have to face the consequences, of course; old enough to know what

she was doing. Firmness was everything in life; that was the secret of success with women. If they found a man squeamish they would drive him about with a whip. He was certain she would return and apologized when her madness passed. This was only a different version of sulking in the dark room” (p. 142).

The priest of the temple says to Mari, a locksmith, in the novel *The Dark Room*, “If she won’t let you rest, thrash her; that is the way to keep woman sane” (p. 167). In this context, Dorothy Allison justly opines:

Some people begin to believe that the security of their families and communities depends on the oppression of others that for some to have good lives there must be some whose lives are truncated and brutal. It is the belief that dominates the culture.⁴

When Susila instructs her maid to serve food to her husband and goes away off instead of serving food herself, Krishna thinks, “She doesn’t even care to wait and see me served. She doesn’t care. If she cared, would she sell my clock? I must teach her a lesson” (p. 49).

In *The Bachelor of Arts* we encounter Chandran’s mother screaming and yelling, “They can’t be all right, and if they have kept the girl unmarried till sixteen. She must have attained puberty ages ago. They can’t be all right. We have a face to keep in this town” (pp. 69-70). She calls Malathi a ‘hefty, middle aged girl’ and does not see any defect in her twenty-three year old son. Krishna’s sister in-law does not like doing domestic work for this she is hated by her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law comments, “I really don’t mind doing it for everyone, but there are those who neither know nor learnt when taught I feel like kicking them when I came across that type” (p. 29). The sociologist, Veena Das, describes such women as female patriarchs, old women who often speak on behalf of men. She writes:

In fact, if women didn't internalize the voices of men and speak like patriarchs themselves, the social order could not be maintained. Coercion and force can never ensure the authority of the rule as an internal voice.⁵

When Savitri sulks in the dark corner of the room at her husband's rude behavior, Janamma, her friend, makes her understand the situation, "You should either let your words out or feel that everything your husband does is right. As for me, I have never opposed my husband or argued with him at any time in my life. I might have occasionally suggested an alternative, but nothing more. What he does is right. It is wife's duty to feel so... men are impetuous. One moment they will be all temper and the next all kindness. Men have to bear many worries and burdens, and you must overlook it if they are sometimes unreasonable" (pp. 59-60).

She tells her many traditional and mythological stories about devoted wives in order to remind her that her behavior is not for an ideal woman. She recounts instances of the patience of wives, "...her own grandmother who slaved cheerfully for her husband who had three concubines at home; her aunt who was beaten everyday by her husband and had never uttered a word of protest for fifty years; another friend of her mother's who was prepared to jump into the well if her husband so directed her; and so on, till Savitri gradually began to feel very foolish at the thought of her own resentment, which now seemed very insignificant" (p. 60). Nobody dare tell anything to Ramani because he is all powerful economically, physically and emotionally.

The subjugation of women is rooted in the socio-economic structure of the society, which is further made sacrosanct by religious ordinances. Women carry these ideologies smoothly to other generations. Ghulam Murshid remarks:

It is well said ...of all the subjects that women might learn, housework is the most

important...whatever knowledge she may acquire, she cannot claim any reputation unless she is proficient in housework.⁶

Therefore, it is none other than women who mould and curb the behavior and character structure of other women, and teach them to submit to the established authority.

The women of Malgudi are not financially independent. Unpaid work by them in the home brings no money. Therefore, they have to ask money from their husbands. They wait for their husbands' approval for anything that has financial implication. Husbands give them money as if they give alms to beggars. Swami's mother does not have money to give to the tailor who has been asking money for four days. Her husband gives her money but with a comment, "I don't know how I am going to manage things for the rest of the month, he said, peering into the purse. He locked the bureau, and adjusted his turban before the mirror" (p. 23).

During crisis women of Malgudi either cry or sulk in the dark room. If they do not cry and sulk they prate and shout to get over the crisis. Margayya says, "Women can't hold their tongue" (p. 53). They do not know any other way to enjoy life, release their anger and anxieties. They hardly know how to please themselves. Ramani observes that his wife, "never made an effort to conquer her moods; that was why, he felt, women must be educated; it made all the difference... If Savitri had little more education, she might have been even better" (pp. 88-89).

Meenakshi becomes sad when she discovers that her husband has brought a book instead of a sari. The book is on the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. She refuses to read it and when Margayya insists upon it, she listens to it both horrified and fascinated. When Balu flees away from the house Meenakshi becomes hysterical while Margayya thinks that he is now a rich man and it is the time for celebration. He loathes Meenakshi for spoiling the atmosphere of the house by crying and sulking in the dark room.

Krishna's mother-in-law is superstitious and believes that, "the Evil Eye had befallen on her daughter and that at the new house a malignant spirit had attacked her" (p. 83). Susila blindly follows what her husband says of the affairs outside home. For this trait of Susila, Krishna muses, "she took sides with me in all my discussions and partisanships, and hated everyone I hated and respected everyone I respected. She told me a great deal about my neighbours, their hopes and fears, and promises and qualities" (p. 37). She uses her intelligence in discovering the cheating done by the shopkeeper. "She was very proud of her list. It was precise. Every quantity was conceived with the correct idea as to how long it should last. There were over two dozen different articles to be indented and she listed them with foresight and calculation. She was immensely proud of this ability" (p. 40).

Srinivasa's wife is shy and inarticulate in the presence of a stranger. She follows every tradition blindly without giving a thought to it. When Srinivasa comes to know that she has not eaten anything for two days during travel, he cries, "What foolish nonsense is this? ... He stood looking at her for a moment as if she were an embodiment of knotty problems. He knew what it was, "rigorous upbringings fear of pollution of touch by another caste, orthodox idiocies- all the rigorous compartmenting of human beings" (p. 35). She reads novels and journals but she always tells her husband to write something to interest women in his publication.

Socially, after her marriage, woman has no independent social or economic status of her own. Her social status is directly determined by and is dependent on her husband's status, though it is subject to and is strongly qualified by her husband's wish to give her that status. He can, if he wishes, deny her that status though she is his lawfully wedded wife. Srinivasa leaves his wife in the village and neglects his son and wife keeping himself busy with his job. After a long time when he sees his wife and son in rags he realizes how he has neglected them.

Ramani scolds Savitri for wearing rags at home. He says, "Why can't they put on some decent clothes and look presentable at home instead of starting their make-up just when you are in hurry to be off? Stacks of costly saris all folded and kept inside, to be worn only when going out. Only silly-looking rags to gladden our sight at home. Our business stops with paying the bill. It is only the outsider who has the privilege of seeing a pretty dress" (p. 26).

Krishna always tells his wife to wrap herself in beautiful saris. Margayya looks at his wife and thinks, “How plebian she looked, with her faded jacket, her patched, discoloured sari and her anemic eyes. How can anyone treat me respectfully when my wife is so indifferent-looking?” (p. 20)

In those days women are under social fear from the cradle to the funeral pyre. Narayans asserts, “Fear from the cradle to the funeral pyre, and even beyond that, fear of torture in the other world. Afraid of a husband’s displeasures, and of the discomforts that might be caused to him, morning to night and all night too. How many have I slept on the bed on one side, growing numb by the unchanged position, afraid lest any slight movement should disturb his sleep and cause him discomfort?” (p. 116)

In Narayan’s early novels women are expected to behave and lead life in a very restricted manner. A woman should be gentle, soft-spoken, shy, tolerant, submissive, compassionate and pure even to those who may doubt her motives and be harsh and unjust to her. A woman is expected to be perfect in all aspects rather than a simple human being with virtues and vices or precisely, she should be an *Angel* or *Devi*. Women fear to transgress the limit of the decency level. They suffer and tolerate every heap of insult with patience and fortitude for the fear of getting socially isolated; they do not expect help from - their partners in bringing up the children or managing the household for the fear that if they do so, they will be branded as selfish or bad mother.

Chandran blames Malathi for not responding to his love and curses her, “little sign did her show of caring for a fellow; she couldn’t say that she had no chance. She had plenty of opportunities to show that she noticed him. Where there was a will there was a way. She had only been playing with him, the devil. Women are like that, they enjoyed torturing people” (p. 112). He loves Malathi and tries to marry her but never asks her directly. Her father rejects the proposal on the ground of mismatching of horoscope. She is ignorant and completely at the receiving end. For all her innocence, ignorance and powerlessness she is charged of being a devil. Therefore, justly it is said by Rajendra Lal Mitra remarks:

...in Hindu marriage there is no selection, no self-choice, and no consent on the part of the bride.

**She is an article of gift, she is given away even as a
cow or any other chattel.⁷**

Savitri dare not ask her husband about his love affair and prefers to suffer in silence. She even conceals her husband's affair for she fears that this would bring disgrace to her family. Ramani continues his shameful act without any fear because he knows well that his wife will never confide it to anyone. Margayya's daughter-in-law, Brinda, does not dare to tell her husband's vices to her father-in-law. She hides it till Margayya comes to know about this from others. Srinivasa's wife tells him, "When you have a house, why should you go out for coffee? What will people say if they find master of the house going out for coffee" (p. 37).

She also does not raise her voice for the fear of the neighbour who will think of her as a bad-tempered woman. While her husband Srinivasa thinks just contrary to what she thinks, "...he felt, with an extravagant seriousness, that the whole civilization has come to an abrupt stalemate because its men had no better basis of living than public opinion. He raced against their upbringing... A child's life was reduced to a mere approved behaviour in the midst of father, mother, grandmothers and uncles; and later in life parents-in-law, husband, and so on and on endlessly till one had no opportunity to think of one's own view on any matter" (p. 37).

Every woman is scared of something or the other. This scary temperament weakens them from taking any bold decision and forces them to sacrifice even their own selves. Even when calamity falls on them they seek help from others rather than doing anything positive to get the things solved. They only pray and make several promises to God. When Swami disappears his mother cries and prays to God. When Chandran's mother comes to know that flower-thief is a *Sanyasi* she allows him to go because she dare not punish a *Sanyasi*, "Ah, leave him alone, let him go. She was seized with fear now. The curse of the holy man might fall on the family. 'You can go sir,' she said respectfully" (p. 43).

Narayan in his novels seems to convey that a woman has to live within the boundaries of patriarchal framework, that there is no escape for her. If she tries to break the social norms she would herself disintegrate and that is the only stark reality of life. In *The Dark Room* Shanta Bai, a divorcee at the age of eighteen is a master of her own will. She is a graduate and can say no when she feels so. She is a woman

who thinks that being a housewife and bearing all the atrocities inflicted by husband is sheer foolishness. She dismisses films like *The Ramayana* as sheer mythological nonsense.

She flirts with Ramani to promote her own personal interests. She combines her feminine independence with a shrewd opportunism that characteristically belongs to the new civilization. She believes in having a life of adventure and looks down upon the traditional housewives. She herself admits, “Oh, I love unconventional things ... otherwise I shouldn’t be here, but nursing children and cooking for husband” (p. 79). But she forgets that she lives in a society which has stored epithets for her - slut, slattern, concubine, hooker, harlot, keep, prostitute, whore etc.

In order to lead a free life she loses respect from the society, which every single human being craves for. She pretends that she is least bothered about the social norms but she could not make herself entirely free from the shackles of social tradition. She sometimes becomes restless and seeks permanent peace that is lost in the course of becoming an emancipated woman. She asks Ramani to move from one place to another hysterically at midnight but she does not get peace. She admits to Ramani that she is rather mad tonight as she says, “I can’t sleep tonight” (p. 91). Juliet Mitchell posits:

Hysteria is the woman's simultaneous acceptance and refusal of the organization of sexuality under patriarchal capitalism. It is simultaneously what a woman can do both to be feminine and to refuse femininity, within patriarchal discourse.⁸

In *The Bachelor of Arts* Chandran’s idea about marriage, “people married because their sexual appetite had to be satisfied and there must be somebody to manage the house. There was nothing deeper than that in any man and woman relationship” (p. 123). This statement is somewhat true in the early representation of Narayan’s female and male characters. Most of the marriages are not based on mutual trust and companionship. The wives cannot discuss their problems freely and confidently. A wife throughout her life shows obedience and submission while husband shows dominance and supremacy. There is no intimacy between Swami’s mother and father. Chandran’s parents indulge in bickering and seem to be always

apprehensive about their sons' future. For Savitri marriage has become a source from where she can fulfill hers as well as her children's needs.

The only exception in this relation is Krishna and Susila. Though they are placed in the patriarchal set-up of the society, the bond between the two is subtle and strong. They love and share their happiness and grief. Krishna sets an example. When his wife falls ill he serves his wife and child and manages household with great pleasure, "...but I liked it immensely. It kept me so close to my wife that it produced an immense satisfaction in my mind. Throughout I acted as a nurse. This sickness seemed to bind us together more strongly than ever" (p. 81). Krishna contacts his wife after her death spiritually and talks to his wife Susila for hours and feels happy and contented. He feels happy more than any other couple whose wife is alive. He says, "The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved. It was a moment of rare, immutable joy - a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death" (p. 184).

Narayan's women are too unrealistic in their assessment of the world and their place in it. In almost all of his early novels, there is always a role for the grandmother and the mother. But grandmothers and mothers, in spite of being senior members of the family have no power in taking decisions in the family affairs. Grandmother's role is confined only to telling stories to their grandchildren. Swami's Granny is old and experienced but the most ignorant person in the house. She has devoted an entire chapter on her ignorance titled Granny shows her ignorance. She is never obeyed by either Swami or her son. Instead of giving orders to her son, she says to him, "you are not in the habit of explaining things to me...you all are big men" (p. 130). Similarly, Swami's mother has no power to stop her son from going out to play in the sun. She tells her husband to stop him.

Ramani tells Savitri, "go and do any work you like in the kitchen, but leave the training of a grown up boy to me. It is none of woman's business" (p. 1). Meenakshi has also no authority over her child, Balu. Margayya blames her, "she has completely spoilt him, beyond remedy; I must take him out of her hands and put him to school. That is the only way; otherwise he will be a terrible scoundrel" (p. 53). Women feel proud of their status as mothers but children are beyond their control. Mothers are assigned to bring up children and train them but all the power is in the hands of fathers.

Through Savitri, we learn about the anguish of wifedom in 1930s, when women began to ask for something better than what conservative Hindu marriage could offer them. Savitri, an upper middle-class woman is different from other housewives though she possesses characteristics of traditional Indian wife. Unlike most of the female characters of Narayan, Savitri is a sensitive character who has female friends in whom she can confide. One of them is Gangu and the other friend is Janamma.

Narayan gives description of Gangu in this way, “She prepared for her film career by attending two Tamil pictures a week and picking up several screen songs, in addition to wearing flimsy crepe saris and wearing her hair and flowers in an eccentric manner. She talked irresponsibly and enjoyed being unpopular in elderly society in South Extension. She left home when she pleased and went where she liked, moved about without an escort, stared back at people, and talked loudly. Her husband never interfered with her but let her go her own way, and believed himself to be a champion of women’s freedom; he believed he was serving the women’s cause by constantly talking about votes and divorce. Gangu was tolerated in the extension, she was interesting; with all her talk, she was very religious, visiting the temple regularly, and she was not immoral” (p. 19).

Narayan emphasizes Gangu’s religious nature and morality and thus she secures her position to be a friend of a good woman like Savitri. Janamma is a rich woman who walks on the lines of an ideal Indian woman. Savitri has great regard for her and consults her whenever crisis befalls on her. Savitri is on good terms with both of them and enjoys their company. There is another woman Ponny, who helps Savitri out in her bad days. Ponny, a lower class woman, leads a free life. She gives advice to Savitri, “keep the men under the rod, and they will be all right” (p. 136).

Savitri has a growing awareness of her own powerlessness. She longs for the life of liberty; she likes to be respected and exercise some power within or outside the four walls of the house; she is the woman who is quite realistic in her approach to life, she does not live in imagination. No doubt she is humiliated more than any other character, but she is the one who realizes things as they really are. She has become immure to her husband’s running commentary but always longs for freedom and power, “how impotent she was, she thought; she had not the slightest power to do anything at home, and that after fifteen years of married life” (p. 7).

She speaks philosophically before leaving her husband, "...things? I don't possess anything in this world. What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything else that she has is her father's, her husband's, or her son's" (p. 113). She wants to take the children with her but her husband refuses to give them to her. Out of sheer anger she walks out of the house like Ibsen's Nora in the play *The Doll's House*. In Ibsen's drama we do not know what had happened later but here in *The Dark Room* Savitri has to face the repercussions for deserting her house, husband and children. She realizes under the open blue sky that there is one definite thing in her life that is fear.

Sulking in the dark room gives Savitri a dark vision but when she is exposed to the whole world she faces realities of life and becomes clear and more practical in her approach. She earns rice for her work in the temple and feels proud of herself, "This is my own rice, my very own; and I am not obliged to anyone for this. This is nobody's charity to me" (p. 184). But soon she realizes that she is going to live on other's charity wherever she goes. Therefore, she returns home and decides to live on the mercy of one man rather than many. She accepts this stark truth although a part of her body is dead. That is the reason why she does not call Mari to her house and reflects, "Why should I call him here? What have I" (p. 210)? A. N. Kaul argues:

The point here, however, is not that, unlike Ibsen's female characters, Narayan doesn't bang the door but has it banged on her and that in the end, her dream of feminine independence and dignity over, she returns submissively to the house never again to stray in thought and deed.⁹

However, in the open blue sky Savitri comes to know the purpose of her life and her future course of action. Her love for Ramani is lost somewhere in her three days of excursion where she meets life. Ramani tries hard not to be a loser but he actually is one. Although, apparently Savitri looks foolish and humiliated coming back to Ramani's house, but Savitri is now transformed to a practical and clear-headed woman who knows her position and her destination well.

Ramani leaves her to face the miseries of life but this becomes a blessing in disguise for her. She stops worrying unnecessarily for her husband and starts working

for her daughters Sumati and Kamala's future because now she wants her daughters to be independent and free. Savitri realizes, "If I had gone to a college and studied, I might have become a teacher or something. It was very foolish of me not to have gone on with my education. Sumati and Kamala must study up to the B.A. and not depend for their salvation on marriage. What is the difference between a prostitute and a married woman? The prostitute changes her men, but a married woman doesn't; that's all, but both earn their food and shelter in the same manner. Yes, Kamala and Sumati must take their University course and become independent" (p. 120).

She locates herself in the struggle for social transformation. Every act she performs is embedded in an incredibly intricate network of pressures, constraints and necessary compromises. Despite all these obstacles and impediments blocking her way to happiness, she still manages to have her say about her inner desire not for herself but for her daughters' self-fulfillment, self-nourishment, self-enhancement and self-empowerment.

In 1947 after fifty years of agitation and political pressure on the part of social reformers, Madras Devdasi's Act was passed and devdasis were forced to give up their profession and an unusual way of life. They were stranded, having no source of income. Narayan presents the predicament of devadasis in the novel *The Guide* by making his female character Rosie, a devadasi. Rosie is a product of the reformers' campaign to eradicate temple dancing in South India.

The Painter of Signs was published in 1976 at the time when women's movement had stirred up the whole world and U. N. had decided to celebrate the year 1975 as an International Women's Year. Women had started protesting for their social, political and economic rights besides all other demands. In India family-planning program was introduced. Men and women were recruited for this job. The novel *The Painter of Signs* was inspired by this very movement.

Much of our history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: male/female, dominate/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior, moral/immoral, black/white. We are living in a bifurcated world and the bifurcating nature of our species forces us to see everything in terms of binary oppositions. In that way, woman is considered not a human being as a whole who could have human weaknesses and strengths but, “woman has traditionally been seen as either saint or devil...Virgin Mary or Eve.”¹⁰

In those times she is respected as mother and suspected as seducer. But with the advent of women’s movement norms have changed. Narayan again asserts that female characters of grey shades who are neither black nor out and out white are portrayed. Nonetheless, there remains a considerable lag between changes in attitudes and in behaviour and structural lag in developing and adopting such kind of literary discourses. Narayan, even after being an advocate of female freedom and individuality, could not successfully come out of this binary opposition.

The Guide and *The Painter of Signs* by Narayan, which set new waves by introducing many trends are in fact, very traditional and orthodox as far as the role division of the sexes is concerned. These novels are emphatic affirmation of the patriarchal set up, which reduces women to either stereotypically angelic or stereotypically demonic. Rosie from *The Guide* and Daisy from *The Painter of Signs* are portrayed as immoral or dangerous seductresses who lead to the downfall of the male protagonists because they refuse to be selfless; they act on their own initiatives and reject the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for them. They are the source of transgressive female power, which is clearly evident even at the time of their introduction.

The moment Rosie descends from the train she demands to see cobra-dance. She becomes ecstatic to see cobra-dance and begins dancing like cobra which signifies danger, threat and bad omen for Malgudians, “She watched it swaying with the rapist attention. She stretched out her arm slightly and swayed it in imitation of

the movement; she swayed her whole body to the rhythm-for just a second” (p. 68). Raju, her boy friend, also acknowledges her bad effect on him, “my troubles would not have started but for Rosie” (p. 9).

In *The Painter of Signs* Raman, the protagonist also thinks of Daisy, the heroine, “she looks terrible... She seemed to grin and looked like a demons! Soorpanaka's approach should have had the same effect on Rama” (p. 43). Narayan compares these female characters with demons and witches because according to Gauthier, “If the figure of witch appears wicked, it is because she poses a real danger to phallogocentric society.”¹¹

Narayan has made these female characters too emancipated to be ideal Indian women. Their English names Rosie and Daisy suggest the lack of traditionalism. Raju wonders why she calls herself Rosie. She does not come from a foreign land. She is just an Indian. Rosie changes her name to ‘Nalini’ considering, “It’s not a sober and sensible name” (p. 176). Daisy about whom Raman observes, “what a name for someone who looked so very Indian, and traditional and gentle” (p. 31). These two female characters also do not have surnames. Hence, these women cannot be absorbed in their husbands’ or parents’ identity.

In those times not only name, but their professions are also very unorthodox. Rosie is a dancer. People thought that only from lower strata of the society prefer this occupation. Rosie, a fatherless girl, tries to transform temple dance into an art form for public stages and considers her dance as a national treasure. Still this transformation of dance does not bring proper respect for her because in Indian society dancing is basically a profession of *devdasis* who are considered as public women, temple prostitutes and dedicated women.

Daisy is a family planning officer. In executing her job she has to lecture men and women on birth control. She explains to the villagers the process of birth and its control, “Daisy explained physiology, anatomy and sexual intercourse, with charts or, if a blackboard was available, with sketches in chalk. She never felt shy or hesitant

but sounded casual” (p. 59). Narayan shows that if a woman steps out to be a career woman she has to be bold enough to execute her job.

Rosie and Daisy have much in common. They are outsiders coming to Malgudi. They do not have glorified past. Rosie has low birth. She is a daughter of a *devadasi*. She is an M.A. She knows only her mother’s name. She does not know her father’s name. She herself admits, “I belong to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers; my mother, grandmother, and, before her, her mother. Even as a young girl I danced in our village temple. You know how our caste is viewed? ‘...we are viewed as public women,’ she said plainly, and I was thrilled to hear the words. We are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilized” (p. 84).

Daisy runs away from home at the age of twelve because she wants to build her career. She renounces her parents and family life for the sake of independence. She is an orphan in spite of having parents. Narayan wants to convey that only women of low birth can do what these heroines do and they cannot be fitted into the framework of this ideal world.

Both Rosie and Daisy challenge the belief that women are inherently better adapted to traditional female sex roles. Their adaptability to the public role is astonishing. Daisy travels tirelessly. She sleeps on a little piece of carpet; she eats whatever food is available - without taboos of any kind. She bathes in a public well, washes and dries her clothes anywhere, stays in a lonely hut and is an extremely understanding woman. She has a perfect timetable and routine. She gives proper guidance to the villagers to follow birth control norms.

Raman acknowledges her passion for work, “What a lot of policing she was doing! Raman thought. She must really be mad! She will fight and shun people who bring up large families. Some madness must have got into her head quite early in life and stayed on there” (p. 67). She is like a yogi whose eyes are fixed on the centre of his nose, seeing nothing else in life.

Similarly, Rosie dances tirelessly. She does household work happily with Raju's mother without complaining. She is least bothered about the past and looks forward hopefully to the future. Even when she is taunted and embarrassed by others, she never stops her dance practice. She is a woman who adapts herself in any situation and in any place; whether it is her mother's house, husband's, boyfriends or her own.

She manages everything in the absence of Raju and for that reason Raju feels jealous of her self-reliance. With the help of characters like Rosie and Daisy Narayan tries to explain that a woman has to be tough and committed to the chosen ideologies to be an independent woman - not only committed but she has to be passionate and obsessed. He depicts their passion towards work as a sort of madness. He gives an impression that these two women are somewhat mad in pursuing their professions.

These two heroines practice self-interest and self-gratification that are supposed to be prime virtues of men. Being educated, both of them know how to please themselves. Rosie marries Marco because he for Rosie is an instrument of getting all her needs fulfilled. She herself says, "The question was, whether it would be good to marry so much above our wealth and class. But all the women in our family were impressed, excited that a man like him was coming to marry one of our class, and it was decided that if it was necessary to give up our traditional art, it was worth the sacrifice. He had a big house, a motor car, he was man of high social standing; he had a house outside Madras, he was living in it all alone, no family at all; he lived with his books and papers" (p. 85).

Marco perhaps, "married out of a desire to have someone care for his practical life, but unfortunately his choice was wrong - this girl herself was a dreamer if ever there was one" (p. 113). In order to seek forgiveness from Marco for her adultery, Rosie breaks the relationship with Raju abruptly without explaining things to him. She follows Marco but Marco, adamant in his decision, deserts her.

Rosie, who deserts Raju carelessly, returns to him. At Raju's house, she is insulted and abused by Raju's mother and uncle but she does not retort and tolerates everything patiently. With the help of Raju she becomes a professional dancer and gradually rises to fame. One day she tells Raju, "even if I have seven rebirths, I won't be able to repay my debt to you" (p. 184). But she fails to tolerate even extravagance and commercialization of her dance by Raju.

When Raju is apprehended for forgery, she firmly speaks to Raju, "If I have to pawn my last possession, I'll do it to save you from jail. But once it's over, leave me once and for all; that's all I ask. Forget me. Leave me to live or die, as I choose; that's all" (pp. 221-222). She asks forgiveness from Marco and abandons Raju mercilessly. She shows her intense desire to spend the rest of her life with her husband Marco. Rosie fails both as a respectable wife and as a glamorous beloved because she is there all for herself.

Daisy is modern in her outlook and temperament. She herself admits, "although I was thirteen I had my own notions of what was good for me...I would like to work rather than be a wife" (p. 131). Daisy, a family planning officer, knows not only how to achieve her goal but also to keep people in place. She is authoritative, determined, decisive, cold, callous and commanding; she is every inch an embodiment of male qualities. Daisy is clear in her goal as well as mission. She herself says, "I like to serve the people in what seems to me the best way, that's all. And in this area allotted to me now, if I can help arrest the population growth by even five percent within this year, I'll be satisfied" (p. 58). She asks Raman to accompany her and to paint the walls on the tour of villages. "She had offered him the privilege of accompanying her and he had accepted it that was all. She treated him as a sort of a trailer" (p. 63). Her ambition is to arrest the population growth and she pursues this aim with religious intensity.

She develops physical relationship with Raman and plans to marry him. Raman madly falls in love with her and also wants to lead his life with Daisy. "I can't

live without her” (p. 77). For him, “life without Daisy’s company seemed impossible” (p. 110). He often expresses his love to her, “I like you, I feel lost without you” (p. 125). But for Daisy, I love you, I like you, are words which can hardly be real. You have learnt them from novels and Hollywood films perhaps. When a man says ‘I love you’ and the woman repeats ‘I love you’- it sounds mechanical and unconvincing. Perhaps credible in Western society, but sound silly in ours. People really in love would be struck dumb, I imagine” (pp. 125-126).

She puts two conditions before Raman: first, that they should have no children and second, if by mischance one is born he will give the child away and keep herself free to pursue her social work. She also tells him, “If you want to marry me, you must leave me to my own plans even when I am a wife. On any day you question why and how, I will leave you” (p. 159). Raman makes all the compromises. Despite that Daisy deserts him ruthlessly.

Raman says, “That is the tragedy of womanhood — utility articles whether in bed or out” (p. 46). Ironically, here the roles of the sexes are reversed and Raman and Raju become the utility articles for Daisy and Rosie respectively. Although it is Raman and Raju who are fascinated by these female characters and they themselves initiate these relationships, yet it is they, who are trapped. Throughout the novel they express their love and run after their but their letters’ attitude towards them is purely mechanical. Their love is only for their profession and they are ambivalently and ambiguously physically attracted towards their paramours. They develop physical relationship with their boyfriends because for them sex is “all powerful instinct which demands fulfillment against the claims of morals, belief and social restrictions”¹² says, Jeffrey Weeks.

They never show any kind of guilt or repentance and forgive themselves at the very first hand. Raman tries hard to save himself from her but succumbs to magnetic power of Daisy. Although he knows well that Daisy, “is a sire, planning to eat me up, I suppose. I must be careful” (p. 47). He takes a very good care of her like a

traditional Indian housewife. He says, “What a fool I am not to have noticed her mood! He said to himself. Smiling mood and non-smiling one, talking mood and silent one, caressing and non-caressing. How on earth am I to judge when to do what, when to say what, and how to do the right thing at all times” (p. 171)?

When Raman dare ask her where she is going, she snaps the relationship with him. Raman pleads, “I’ll no way interfere with you, live as you live, in the open or in a hut, walk barefoot in the forest paths, seek nothing, demand nothing, I will not mind any hardship if I can be with you. Please” (p. 178). But Daisy adamant in her decision speaks coldly to Raman, “I want to forget my moments of weakening, and you must forget me. That’s all...” (p. 179). Then she speaks rather earnestly, “Oh, forgive me for misleading you” (p. 180).

Finally she speaks like a typical Indian man, “don’t again talk of the past or think of it. I am wiping it out from my mind” (p. 181). She breaks the relationship and leaves Malgudi. Raman could only say like a traditional Indian woman, “I’ll love no one except you. Understand, you are my wife. Come back to me. I’ll keep the home always ready for you” (p. 182).

From Raju’s tongue superlatives drop glibly for Rosie and he reduces himself to a man whose purpose of life is to amuse his girlfriend Rosie. He reflects, “The only reality in my life and consciousness was Rosie” (p. 118). While Rosie, after developing extramarital relationship with Raju, starts paying extra attention to Marco’s need. Raju feels that, “she was trying a new technique on him, after the inauguration of our own intimacy. She arranged his room. She spoke to Joseph about his food” (p. 114). She starts saying, “After all he is my husband. I have to respect him. I cannot leave him there.... After all he has been so good to me, given me comfort and freedom” (pp. 119-120). C. D. Narsimhaiah remarks in this context:

**Especially in the way he takes care to preserve
Rosie from inner taint Narayan seems to be**

**affirming what has been hailed in the Indian
tradition as the feminine principle in life.¹³**

However, it does not seem that Rosie's inner self is not tainted. She deserts Raju and wants to be with her husband Marco. But when Marco refuses to accept a wife who has committed adultery, she returns to Raju. After that, she neither for once remembers Marco, nor does she mention his positive aspects. She always shows the dark side of Marco until she sees Marco's photograph in a leading magazine *Illustrated Weekly*. The photo of Marco in the book drives her crazy. She suddenly forgets her husband's apathy and cold behaviour towards her. She again starts saying, "After all, after all he is my husband" (p. 201). "I do, I deserved nothing less. Any other husband would have throttled me then and there" (p. 201).

She starts all these acts just to have Marco back in her life because the respect she can get from Marco can never be given by Raju and one must not forget that she marries Marco only for social prestige. Now she has name and fame, she wants someone equal to her own status and Marco, no doubt, if not superior, is her peer. She sees that there is a possibility of reunion and if she reunites with Marco she will get the same status she has always craved for. She is again ready to sacrifice her dance for him. Therefore, she leaves Raju easily and tells him to forget her. For Raju it is a big blow, "I couldn't understand her. I had an appalling thought that for months and months I had eaten slept and lived with her, without in the least understanding her mind. What were her moods? Was she sane or insane? Was she a liar, did she bring all these charges against her husband at our first meeting just to seduce me? Would she be leveling various charges against me now that she seemed to be tiring of me - even to the extent of saying that I was a moron and imbecile? I felt bewildered and unhappy. I didn't understand her sudden affection for her husband" (p. 202).

A woman has to change and use the man as per her convenience if she wants to be emancipated and only freak women are supposed to do this that are voracious, all devouring and consuming. Rosie and Daisy follow this principle and become the

perfect example of freak women. The patriarchal myth that female biology automatically makes a woman feminine and that motherhood is her natural instinct, desire and ambition, which gives her the qualities of nurturing, caring giving and sacrificing is subverted by Rosie and Daisy. Motherhood is neither a compulsory duty for them nor a cherished ambition. Before marriage Daisy puts condition before Raman that they should not be having children or if, there is one by mistake; she will give the child away. Daisy goes against the ancient values, denies the importance of children and motherhood in women's life and even goes against *Shashtras*. She views children as symbols of defeat for her cause of family planning. Similarly, Rosie has no kids and never desires for them. These heroines are far cry from conventional feminine types.

Nevertheless, Narayan tries to make the character of Rosie and Daisy acceptable and to win some kind of sympathy by making them appear as victims depicting Raju, Marco and Raman in normal patriarchal set-up. Marco, a traditional Indian husband, keeps himself busy in his cave-research and hardly cares for his wife Rosie and accuses Rosie of having morbid interests and says, "If a man has to have peace of mind it is best that he forget the fair sex" (p. 71). He himself commits adultery but when he comes to know about his wife's relationships he stops talking to her, stops eating the food she touches and finally says, "...this is my last word to you. Don't talk to me. You can go where you please or do what you please" (p. 151).

But when he sees his wife Rosie becomes a famous dancer, he comes back to her whom once he had despised. His indifference towards Rosie gives reason to Raju to love and sympathize with her. But Raju himself begins to exploit Rosie and commercializes her art. Raju believes, "I had a monopoly of her and nobody had anything to do with her... I resented anyone's wanting to make a direct approach to her. She was my property" (p. 189). Further, "I liked to keep her in a citadel" (p. 193). Raju becomes a spendthrift and wastes all Rosie's hard-earned money.

Raman tries to seduce Daisy but fails and feels no guilt or shame like Ramani, Marco and Mr. Sampath. He says, “He had done nothing to feel guilty about - the normal drive of a force which kept the whole world spinning. Nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to be apologetic about. If he had not tried to make use of an opportunity in the normal manner, he would have been considered a worthless sort in some circles” (p. 98). He tries to master over Daisy but fails.

Finally Rosie & Daisy stand all alone in life. It seems that they pursue their own ends single-mindedly and end up being quite content with their lives but unhappily married or single they are left all alone in this whole universe. They challenge or disrupt many established socio-cultural norms like personal identity, sexual mores, family arrangement, childbearing customs, educational patterns, religious ideology, political and economic structures for full participation in public life and for independence.

Raju’s mother and Raman’s aunt are the traditional models for Indian women. Raju’s mother is a simple, suffering and sincere woman while his father possesses traits of a typical Indian man, “he was a man of uncertain temper and one could not guess how he would react to interruptions, and so my mother coached me to go up, watch his mood, and gently remind him of food and home” (p.19). Raju’s mother waits for her husband till late hours and bears all the atrocities of her husband in the name of being a *pativrata* wife. She does not like Rosie and calls her a snake-woman. She often tells anecdotes about husbands to Rosie like *Janamma* in *The Dark Room*, “good husbands, mad husbands, reasonable husbands, unreasonable ones, savage ones, slightly dangerous ones, moody ones, and so on and so forth; but it was always the wife, by her doggedness, perseverance, and patience, that brought him round. She quoted numerous mythological stories of Savitri, Seetha, and all the well-known heroines” (p. 155).

Raman’s aunt is a widow and barren. Her character is also depicted within the Indian traditional patriarchal set up. She brings Raman up. She works all day long

and goes to the temple in the evening to tell stories from Hindu mythology. Raman feels, “a stab of sympathy for her. Morning till night, planning something for his delectation - for years, unwavering attention to his needs” (p. 27). Raman never acknowledges his Aunt’s contribution, “Aunt had no better occupation but gathering fodder for him night and day and keeping them in proper condition” (p. 164).

Narayan does not change at all. He never progresses significantly over the years. Right from the beginning he, in his own way, is guarded about his claims for the independence of women and men. For Narayan, it is a fact that women do appear to be victims of an oppressive system and men are victims of man’s image of man: hard cold, rational and analytical. His major concern is to warn men to mend their ways towards women because women can be a threat to their mastery as it is evident in the novels *The Guide* and *The Painter of Signs* and therefore, he at no point encourages women to challenge all social or cultural norms and practices as the solution to male hegemony. He is fearful about the change of subjectivity and always craves to work towards a level of communication in male-female relationship that is built upon mutual respect, trust and individual self-worth.

The best novels are the nearest to reality. Among the Indian English writers R.K. Narayan falls into that category which appeals to all sections of society. A schoolboy, a graduate, a professional, an educated housewife or a superannuated person - all feel at home with Narayan’s fiction. The reason for this general appeal is no doubt his ability to create characters which one can identify with spontaneously. Swami, Krishna and Chandran and Ramani or Suseela and Savitri or the unassuming Sastri and the innumerable minor characters are easily recognizable, because they are based on real life models.

However, there are some characters of Narayan, which are of a peculiar mould. For example, Margayya, the ambitious financier in *The Financial Expert*, Raju the ostentatious guide in *The Guide* or Vasu, the rogue taxidermist in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* are extraordinary, yet convincing. One reason that may be attributed

to this extraordinariness is the element of the esoteric which is prominently visible in these novels.

The relevant use of tales from the Hindu mythology, the teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the austere religious practices and beliefs ordained to attain one's aims, add strength to the fictional art of R.K. Narayan. Furthermore, this device helps the reader with a better understanding of that particular character and a deeper insight into human nature.

It is in this context that Narayan's skilful use of myth makes reality more easily comprehensible. As Ian Milligan rightly says:

Novelists like Narayan continually add to the richness of our human experience: they bring before us new topics, new characters, and new attitudes.¹⁴

*The Financial Expert*¹⁵ narrates the story of Margayya, a financier. As his name indicates he shows the way to the illiterate poor peasants to draw loans from the bank and from each other. He conducts his business in front of the central cooperative Bank, under the shade of a banyan tree with his tin box, a gray, discoloured, knobby affair, in which he carried his entire equipment consisting of an ink bottle, a pen, a blotter, a small red covered register and the most important of always loan application forms.

Despite warnings from the bank's secretary not to indulge in illegal possession of the – application forms, Margayya continues with his financing. To him, “money alone is important in this world. Everything else will come to us naturally if we have money in our purse” (p. 21). In his view, “if money was absent men came near being beasts’ (p. 27). Margayya explains again, “People did anything for money. Money was man's greatest need like air or food. People went to horrifying length for its sake, like collecting rent on a dead body... It left him admiring the

power and dynamism of money, its capacity to make people do strange needs” (p. 28).

Obsessed with the thought of money, Margayya falls victim to its overbearing influence. His immediate concern was to attain material benefits such as unlimited affluence, foreign studies for Balu, his only son, his possible marriage with a judge’s daughter, and the realization of the next generation of aristocrats in his family, filled his mind night and day. His only salvation lay in acquiring the riches he coveted. The best way to fulfill his desire, he presumed, would be to consult the temple priest.

Margayya sought the priest out and waited patiently for an opportunity to confide in him. The atmosphere in the temple on that late evening swayed his mind towards the mysterious and awesome superiority of gods and goddesses of his culture. As Milligan says:

People are thoroughly influenced by the society in which they have grown up. The complicated net work made out of the consequences of individual decisions becomes a map of the moral attitudes of a society.¹⁶

The priest tells Margayya the significance of Puja (ritual worship conducted to appease the Hindu Pantheon of Gods or Goddesses) to obtain one’s aim and objectives. Margayya, as he sat in the sanctorum reflects on the image of “Hanuman, the God of power, and the son of wind. According to tradition this God had pressed one foot on the very spot where the shrine now stood, sprang across space and ocean and landed in Lanka..., there to destroy *Ravana*, a king with ten heads and twenty hands, who was oppressing mankind and had abducted Rama’s wife *Seetha*” (p. 33). When the puja is over the priest gives him the tumbler of milk.

But when Margayya refuses to drink, the priest admonishes him thus, “Milk is one of the forms of Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of Wealth. When you reject it or

treat it indifferently, it means you reject her. She is a Goddess, who always stays on the tip of her toes all the time, ever ready to turn and run away. There are ways of wooing and keeping her. When she graces a house with her presence, the master becomes – distinguished, famous and very wealthy.” Margayya’s reaction is typical. He “reverently touched the tumbler and very respectfully drank milk, taking care not to spill even a drop” (p. 35). The reason why Narayan makes use of mythology, in his own words is:

Even the legends and myths, as contained in the Purana’s... are mere illustrations of the moral and spiritual truth enunciated in the Vedas... each forms a part and parcel of a total life and is indispensable for the attainment of a four-square understanding of existence... The characters in the epics are prototypes and moulds in which humanity is cast, and remain valid for all time.¹⁷

The priest also relates the story of Kubera, from Mahabharata who had to go through an arduous penance in order to atone the spilling of a drop of milk on the floor of his palace. Unable to hold back any longer, Margayya requests the priest, “I want to acquire wealth. Can you show me a way? I will do anything you suggest” (p. 36). Margayya’s attitude is a fine example of the human tendency of becoming desperate for realizing ambitions, often overlooking the adverse effects of pursuing them to the extreme. The priest comes up with a solution to Margayya’s problem. He suggests, “...You should propitiate Goddess Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth. When she throws a glance and if it falls on someone, he becomes rich, he becomes prosperous, he is treated by the world as an eminent man, and his words are treated as something of importance. All this you seem to want” (p. 50).

When the vainglorious Margayya forgets his surroundings and takes a deep pinch of snuff, the priest eggs him on thus, “A devotee of Goddess Lakshmi need

care for nothing, not even the fact that he is in a temple where certain decorum is to be observed... It is only the protégé of Goddess Saraswathi (deity of knowledge and enlightenment) who has to mind such things... Some persons have the good fortune to be claimed by both... evidently you are one of those for whom both are fighting for at the moment” (p. 50).

Margayya could hardly detect the sarcasm in the priest’s tone, for; he is overwhelmed by the dreams of surrounding himself with wealth. Presently, he gets his horoscope examined by the priest and is advised to propitiate Saturn (who, he was told, is powerful enough to make or take one’s fortunes) with honey in the temple of the planetary deities. Then he is given a short verse to recite and a set of instructions to follow before he starts the rituals. When he voiced the last minute doubts about the success of the ceremony, the priest replies ambiguously, “Results are not in our hands... The *Shastra’s* lay down such and such rituals for such and such ends. Between the man who performs them and one who doesn’t, the chances are greater for the former” (p. 57).

Two days later, Margayya began his rites in a room he spring – cleaned. Following the instructions of the priest, he inscribed a Sanskrit syllable on a piece of deer – skin (Which he could get after suffering agony) which he tied around his neck during the chanting of the mantra. He went all the way to the pond where the red lotus was available, burnt it and mixed the charred contents in ghee obtained from the milk of a gray coloured cow and dotted his forehead between the brows with it for a higher degree of concentration. For the next forty days, he was lost to the world, “He had to repeat it a thousand times a day, sitting before the image of the Goddess... Each took eight hours of repetition to complete the thousand, and then he reverently put the black paste on his forehead, lit camphor... his Jaws ached, his tongue has become dry... he emerged ... venerable... sapped in every way but with his face glowing with triumph” (p. 70).

Although there was a lull in Margayya's fortune making, he, however, was able to achieve his goal by becoming a partner in the publishing business run by the enterprising Mr. Lal. But being dissatisfied with the shady deal of publishing pornography, Margayya turns to finance once again. Look at the way he prospered as a financier, "People borrowed from him only under stress... Margayya was the one man who lent easily. He made the least fuss about the formalities but he charged interest in so many subtle ways and compounded it so deftly that the moment a man signed his bonds, he was more or less finished" (p. 183).

The irony of the narrative is that while Margayya amassed wealth, he lost his mental and physical health. His son Balu turns out to be a loafer. His one time friend, philosopher and guide Dr. Pal plays traitor in his later life by ruining his business as a means to avenge his injured pride. Once again Margayya stands penniless. One wonders at the way things turn out for Margayya despite the elaborate and painstaking Lakshmi Puja.

One can only conclude that Narayan tries to reconstruct the oft observed pattern in reality that material assets are of no use if the basic integrity and sympathy are lost, if one's attitude in gaining riches is selfish and singular. Rajaji's concluding remarks of his Ramayana aptly describe Margayya's predicament. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks:

Any work done in good spirit is good work. It is not work that is tiring or degrading but the wrong attitude one brings to life.¹⁸

This suggests eternal truth that the will and destiny of an individual are inextricable. It is the individual who is ultimately responsible for his fate, as in the case of Margayya.

*The Man-Eater of Malgudi*¹⁹ has Vasu as its central character. A taxidermist by profession appears out of the blue at Nataraj's press, ordering visiting cards intending

to begin his career in Malgudi. He learnt the art of stuffing animals from a master named Suleiman, but before that he learnt wrestling and killed the guru with a deadly chop, in a moment of uncontrollable fury. While Nataraj debated his wisdom of doing business with a man who looked and sounded like a giant, Vasu takes over his attic as living cum, working quarters for himself. No mention of rent or permission to conduct taxidermy in it is made, “It was like having a middle aged man eater in your office and home and with the same uncertainties, possibilities and potentialities” (p. 27).

Right from the beginning Vasu struck Natraj as a man of abnormal features. He had a “tanned face, large powerful eyes under thick eyebrows, a large forehead with a shock of unkempt hair like a black halo” (p. 13). After failing to appease a forestry official to get a license to kill animals, Vasu began poaching in the Mempi forest, besides shooting innocent creatures such as cats, dogs and eagles. On being questioned about propriety in killing an eagle, held sacred by the Hindus because it is Lord Vishnu’s vehicle, Vasu replies flippantly as, “I want to try and make Vishnu use his feet now and then” (p. 64).

He seems especially fond of killing tigers. Natraj is rather stunned when for the first time he saw an eighteen – inch head of a tiger in the back seat of his jeep. The mild mannered Natraj was brought up in a household where to kill a fly is regarded as a sin. Vasu, the selfish godless giant appears his precise foil. He proved a perfect enemy when he filed a false case against Natraj on the grounds that the latter rented part of the house illegally and that he ill – maintained it.

But Natraj never could be a successful enemy and desired to settle the matter out of court by peaceful means. He was ready to look at the stuffed hyena and the python from educational point of view. But Sastri, the right hand man of Nataraj had a different view. He says, “He shows all the definitions of a rakshasa with his enormous – strength, genius and no regard for man or God” (p. 96). Sastri continues that like a demon, Vasu is invincible and beyond law.

Sastri provides a number of examples to support his observation. He quotes from the *Puranas* such as the *Ramayana* in which the ten headed demon King *Ravana*, with unusual Yogic powers and boon for never ending life, nevertheless met with an end at the hands of *Rama*. Then there is *Manisha* an *Asura* with a boon of immortality and invincibility and an ability to create a demon in his own image with every drop of blood he shed was at last annihilated by the goddess *Durga* who sucked the blood from his body. And finally Sastri recounts the fable of *Bhasmasura* who made humanity suffer with his rare boon of scorching everything he touched was at last tricked by Mohini (an incarnation of God Vishnu) to place his palms on his own head and was reduced to ashes. In real life too “Every man can think that he is great and live forever, but no one can guess from which quarter his doom will come” (p. 97).

R.K. Narayan used the tales from *Puranas* extensively because as K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes, “...they have been the ground plank of Indian culture.”²⁰ When the poet’s friend Natraj completes his poem on Radha Kalyan, they decide to celebrate the event in a big way. The astrologer fixes a day that coincides with the spring festival. Natraj gets busy with printing cards and banners and making arrangements to bring the volume out on the evening of the sad day. All of a sudden Nataraj gets a surprise visit by Rangī, the infamous temple dancer who of late has become the mistress of Vasu. Much to his stunned disbelief and shock she informs him in secret that Vasu has been planning to shoot Kumar, the temple elephant on the night of the festival when a procession of gods and goddesses is to be taken out into the streets of the town.

When Nataraj corners him about his nefarious plans Vasu replies nonchalantly thus, “Has it occurred to you how much more an elephant is worth dead? ...I can ten thousand out of the parts of this elephant” (p. 172). Having lost hope of rescuing the elephant Nataraj surrenders to Vishnu who rescued Gajendra the elephant king from the clutches of a killer crocodile. He cries out involuntarily “O Vishnu! ... Save our

elephant and save all the innocent men and women...” (p. 183). Unable to with hold Nataraj enters Vasu’s living quarters and takes the gun away.

But Vasu remains still. It is only on the day after the function that they learnt of Vasu’s accidental death. On inquiry it came to light that he hit himself on a vital part of his head in order to kill a worrying mosquito and met, with his own end. Vasu did say, “Night or day, I run a mile when a mosquito is mentioned” (p. 26). And Sastri is ironically right when he observes, “He had to conserve all that might for his own destruction. Every demon carries within, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self destruction and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment. Otherwise what is to happen to humanity?” (p. 242)

Narayan’s application of mythological story of *Bhasmasura* to Vasu is to underline the distinction between good and evil. He observes:

The strong man of evil continues to be reckless until he is destroyed by the tempo of his own misdeeds. Evil has in it, buried subtly, the infallible seeds of its own destruction. And however frightening a demon might seem, his doom is implied in his own propensities...²¹

*The Guide*²² was not only his most mature book but also won world wide renown by being filmed. It won the prestigious Sahitya Akademy award for the year 1960. It is the *Karma* theory that is enunciated in the life of Raju the protagonist. In Hinduism it is a foregone conclusion that an individual lives and dies in accordance with his *Karma* and *Vasanas* (impression the personality has gathered from its own thoughts and actions of the past or previous lives). Desires and thoughts which spring forth from one’s *Vasanas* make it appear inevitable as observer in The New Yorker:

As a Hindu Narayan believes in reincarnation – a universe of infinite rebirths. ...he surveys his

**teeming scene from the perspective of this most
ancient of practiced religions...**²³

The career graph of Raju is rather complicated. He begins his adult life as a guide to tourists. A man who is a compulsive showman, Raju believes in appearances. He meets Marco, an archeologist, to whom as, “Dead and decaying things... fire ...imagination rather than things that lived and moved and swung their limbs” (p. 72).

Rosie, his wife is starved of dancing because her husband forbids it. A strained relationship is further breached because Raju helps Rosie by being a sympathetic audience when she performs in the privacy of the hotel room while Marco is away researching the caves in the Mempi forest. One thing leads to another and Rosie confides in Raju and it follows that they become lovers.

Marco finds out the liaison between the guide and his wife (in the name only), deserts her in cold – heartedly without giving her a chance to explain. Castigated by family and friends for what appears to be immoral behaviour, Raju the guide now becomes a manager for Rosie’s commercial dance performances all over the country and comes into incredible affluence. Along with money come the attendant evils such as drink and gambling. Also Raju is madly possessive of Rosie. (“She was my property... I like to keep her in a citadel” p. 84.) He is constantly in the grip of fear that he may lose her.

It is this flaw in his character that finally causes his downfall. He hides the Illustrated weekly in which Marco’s article on Mempi caves appears for fear that Rosie may reestablish her links with her husband. It is this fear, which prompts him, forges her signature on the document sent by Marco for the release of her Jewellry. Raju is finally caught by the net of his own sins and arrested by his former friend of prosperous times, the superintendent of police in the middle of a dance performance by Rosie. When she learns of his arrest, she comments, “I felt all along you were not doing right things. This is *Karma*” (p. 193).

The fact that ironies of life never cease is realized in Raju's case when after serving time in prison, he inadvertently becomes a saint for the people of Mangala when he took refuge in an ancient temple on the outskirts. Velan becomes his protege and Raju out of necessity mixes motives and desires and once again the conman in him takes over. He speaks to the villagers on various issues of topical importance.

He not only gives them discourses on the *Ramayana* and the characters therein, but also advises them on matters of cleanliness and godliness. He even prescribes medicines and settles disputes and quarrels involving property. He encourages the village school master to reopen the school in the premises of the temple. All the time Raju is aware of his put on air of grandeur. He plays the role of the *Swami* to the best possible extent. But once again is shockingly overtaken by the inexplicable eventualities. Things take a dramatic turn when Velan's semi crack brother mistakenly reports that the *Swami* will not eat till rains come instead of till they stop fighting over a matter of selling and buying. Events that followed were beyond Raju's thinking or control.

He never once imagines that there arrives a time when the fake *Sannyasi* in him has to transform into a genuine one, people expect him, as the holy one with spiritual power, to bring rain to the draught stricken land of theirs by his penance as it used to happen in ancient India. For some time, Raju tries to evade this role. But fate is something inexorable and relentless. It is in times like this that one realizes it is divinity that shapes our ends.

The first – four days of his enforced fast was sheer agony for Raju. The sight of food torments him. He polishes off the vessel containing the previous day's leftover food. He curses his first meeting with Velan who is responsible for the whole thing now. "He felts sick of the whole thing" (p. 210). He knows that the fact of his being a *Sannyasi* is a myth just as the old crocodile in the pond is. But then the people of this land survive on myths. It enhances their belief and religious faith. The transformation in Raju is gradual, natural, if also wonderful. First it is Velan, asleep at his feet tired and perseverant, who stirred his conscience thus, "Why not give the poor devil a chance, Raju said to himself instead of hankering after food which one could not get anyway" (p. 213).

The resolution to chase away the thoughts of food gives him a peculiar strength. It further forges his thoughts towards genuine fast, “If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly? For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing something in which he was not personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him a new strength to go through the ordeal” (p. 213).

Thus for the sake of people and their religious belief, he is firm in making fast. On the twelfth day of the ‘Swami’s’ fast, he hears rain in the hills and sags down. In a masterful stroke Narayan leaves the readers in a state of wonder as to what happens to Raju. But what matters is that he stops thinking about himself that he is free from attachment of any kind. He does become the ‘Guide’, but, of a superior mould in the final analysis. Radhakrishnan says:

...when the mirror of understanding is cleansed of the dust of desire, the life of pure consciousness is reflected on it. When all seems lost, light from heavens breaks, enriching our human life more than words can tell.²⁴

One cannot fail to appreciate the rainbow magnificence of life in R.K. Narayan’s novels. It is the miracle of faith forged by the use of myth that is enacted in these novels. Despite the use of myth, it is the credible universe changed with moral imagination that comes to us in the above unforgettable novels of the *Grand Old Man of Malgudi*.

Renunciation is one of the recurrent themes found in the novels of R.K. Narayan. The author’s preoccupation with the theme seems so strong that it seems to willy nilly find place even in some of his other novels than *The Bachelor of Arts*. *The Guide* is one example where we find the renunciation theme remarkably handled by Narayan.

When *The Bachelor of Arts* opens we find Chandran, the protagonist preparing himself to take the final year B.A. exams. We subsequently see him get his Bachelor’s degree. Structurally the novel is neatly divided into four parts dealing with

the following four important phases of Chandran's life spread roughly over four years. Chandran getting the Bachelor's degree, his encounter with love, his renunciation, and his marriage with Suseela.

In the second part of the novel, on one of his river ramblings, Chandran sees Malathi and is instantaneously drawn to her. He feels that he is deeply in love with her. He tries his level best to marry her but cannot marry as her father thinks that their horoscopes do not match. It is ironic, that Chandran has never spoken to the girl nor has he ever presented himself before the girl. Malathi seems to be blissfully unaware of his existence let alone his love for her. It is a complete one sided infatuation on Chandran's part.

In the third part of the four part novel, Chandran renounces the world by becoming a *Sannyasi*. For all the renown Narayan has won for his realistic portrayal of life, the way Chandran's renunciation is presented in *The Bachelor of Arts* seems quite contrived and implausible. Dejected in love, Chandran leaves Malgudi for Madras. He is to go his uncle's house but does not go there. Instead goes to a hotel, stays therefore a day and moves even from there without any particular destination in mind.

Chandran's decision to become a *Sannyasi* seems rather abrupt and impulsive. Even though he gives up his *Sannyasiship* after eight months, his abrupt transformation as a *Sannyasi* for eight months seems rather unrealistic and incredible. On giving a slip to Kailas, Chandran gets into a tram to go somewhere not knowing where exactly to go. He has not shown at any point until then any proclivity or propensity to become a *Sannyasi*. The reader do not in the least expect him to take that decision when he spots a barber sitting on the steps of a temple and gets his head tonsured; with the same barber's help he procures the clothes of a *Sannyasi*. He crossed the road, and got into a tram, and settled down comfortably in a seat. The conductor came and said, "Ticket, Please. Where does this go? Mylapore. One ticket, Mylapore. How much?" (p. 102)

For the next half an hour his problems as to where to go were set at rest. When the train halted at the terminus he got down and walked till he saw the magnificent grey spire to *Kapaleswarar* temple against the morning sky. He entered the temple, went round the holy corridor, and prostrated before every image and sanctuary that he saw. He saw a barber sitting on the steps of the temple tank waiting for customers. Chandran went to him and asked, “Will you shave me?” “Yes, master” The barber was rather surprised... (p. 104).

Narayan tries to justify Chandran’s transformation as a *Sannyasi* by describing his renunciation as something different, “He was different from the usual *Sannyasi*, others may renounce with a spiritual motive or purpose... But Chandran’s renunciation was not of that kind. It was an alternative to suicide. Suicide he would have committed but for its social stigma. Perhaps he lacked the barest physical courage that was necessary for it. He was a *Sannyasi* because it pleased him to mortify his flesh. His renunciation was a revenge on society, circumstances, and perhaps, too, on destiny” (p. 108).

Narayan’s defense that Chandran’s renunciation was an alternative to suicide is not very convincing. If committing suicide is ruled out by Chandran for its social stigma, so should be renunciation; for becoming a *Sannyasi* has as much stigma about it, if not more, as committing suicide.

It is mentioned in the novel that Chandran spends eight months as a *Sannyasi* but, Narayan deals with this eight month period of Chandran’s life rather curiously. Chapter twelve of the novel, which runs into about eight pages alone, deals with Chandran’s renunciation. Possibly Narayan’s intention was to show that eight months was a brief spell in Chandran’s life. But the entire time frame of the novel includes roughly only four years of Chandran’s life – since he enters his final year B.A. till the time he is married – within a span of four years, eight months is not too short a period to be covered just in a single chapter especially when that period is unique and has special significance.

Narayan possibly could not use more space for this eight month period in Chandran's life because he was not at home elaborating on Chandran's renunciation which was not all that plausible. Therefore he wanted to slur over it and be done with it as quickly as possible. The same Narayan, in his *The Guide* handle's, Raju, the protagonist's renunciation with remarkable ease dexterity. That *The Bachelor of Arts* published in 1937 is only Narayan's second novel largely explains his inexperience and awkwardness in handling Chandran's renunciation. *The Guide*, on the other hand, was published in 1958; twenty – one years after *The Bachelor* and twenty – three years after Narayan began his writing career. This substantial period of experience in writing seems to have helped Narayan in handling the renunciation theme in *The Guide* with extraordinary mastery.

Raju's life as *Sannyasi* in *The Guide* does not seem to outlast that of Chandran in terms of time. But his transformation into a *Sannyasi*, though a counterfeit one, is so convincing that he fits the role of a *Sannyasi* like a glove. The portrayal of Raju's Character from the beginning is such that the readers don't find his *Sannyasi's* role contrived or implausible. He has always shown the tendency to be different from the rest by falling in love with the wife of another man and by keeping her in his home defying both his mother and the society. While Chandran voluntarily embraces *Sannyasiship*, Raju, inevitably, is forced to play the role.

Just prior to assuming the role of *Sannyasi*, Raju has served a two year sentence in prison and his stay there has made him tough enough to face any kind of life including that of a *Sannyasi*. So when we find Raju staying all alone in the secluded temple located by the river near a village, we do not wonder how Raju manages to survive in an atmosphere of that kind. But when Chandran becomes a *Sannyasi* on his own volition, we are intrigued as to how he copes with the utter contrast between the safe, snug atmosphere of home which seems to be the only one he has known in his life prior to becoming a *Sannyasi* and the unprotected harsh life of a *Sannyasi* which is a total- antithesis.

But Narayan does not dwell on this in detail except for mentioning that Chandran initially feels a craving for coffee but gradually he overcomes even that. How Chandran as a *Sannyasi* copes with his basic need for food and sleep is dealt with by Narayan very cursorily in a matter of fact tone. "When he felt hungry he tapped at the nearest house and begged for food, or he begged in the bazaar street for

a coconut or plantain... Anybody invited him to sleep under a roof he did it, if not; he slept in the open, or in a public rest-house where - were gathered scores like him” (p. 107).

Knowing Chandran for what he is, the readers find it difficult to believe that he is capable of begging for food without any compunctions or qualms. It is equally baffling that Chandran who has always enjoyed an exclusive bedroom for himself at home is able to sleep without any problem in the open along with other *Sannyasis*.

It is rather amazing that Chandran shows no signs of missing anything in the world or expresses no sense of regret, guilt or shame for eight months. But one fine night after eight months we see him subjecting his soul to a vivisection, “He sought an answer to the question why he had come to this degradation... He had deserted his parents, who had spent on him all their love, care and savings. He told himself that he had surely done this to spite his parents, who probably had died of anxiety by now. This was all his return for their love and for all that they had done for him” (p. 111). That Chandran subjects himself to self introspection as late as eight months after wandering as a *Sannyasi* leaves the readers wondering how and why he withholds this introspection for eight long months.

One normally decides to become a *Sannyasi* on reaching self-realization. But ironically enough, Chandran here gives up his *Sannyasiship* the moment self – realization dawns on him. Chandran walking out of his *Sannyasiship* is as dramatic and abrupt as is his entry into it. It symbolically begins with the shaving off of his head and beard and ends with a shave.

Given the personality that emerges of Chandran until he decides to become a *Sannyasi*, one finds it rather incredible that Chandran takes such a drastic step. Even if he takes that decision on impulse, he is not likely to have sustained as a *Sannyasi* for eight long months with the kind of abandon and ease as is shown in the novel.

Thematically it seems that the novel would not have lost much even without the third part which deals exclusively with the renunciation theme. This part does not seem well interwoven into the text of die novel; instead it looks imposed. There are no hints in the first – two parts that the novel will move in the direction of what happens, in the third part. Nor are there any allusions to it in the fourth part. Thus the third part of the novel seems rather imposed than interwoven.

For all its contriteness, the renunciation theme in *The Bachelor of Arts* is presented with Narayan's characteristic brilliant irony. One important function the renunciation episode plays in the novel is to lead the protagonist towards self-realization. Chandran emerges with a better understanding of himself after going through the renunciation phase and the third part of the novel becomes thematically significant to that extent.

The clash between tradition and modernity is an important aspect of R.K. Narayan's novel *The Vendor of Sweets*. In the novel, Jagan, the protagonist and his son, Mali, represent two opposite ends, "tradition and modernity"²⁵ respectively. The conflict between them acquires larger proportion, signifying dichotomies at various socio-cultural levels such as "the division of East and West, of young and old, of child and parent etc."²⁶

In the novel, the elements of tradition are based on the Hindu view of life and the Gandhian ethics, the two most powerful influences discernible in the character of Jagan. Throughout the novel, he refers to *The Gita*, *The Puranas* and other Hindu scriptures as his ideals to guide him. Besides being a descendant of an orthodox Hindu family tradition, which considerably shapes his bearing and mind, there is also a marked influence of Gandhian ethics on his day to day activities.

As a student, he had participated in the freedom movement under the influence of Gandhi and he considers himself representing the generation which still upholds the legacy of the Gandhian era, the great phase in our national history. He has lived a very restricted life following:

...the Gandhian way of life to the minute details eating natural salts, wearing khadi, spinning charkha, reading *Geeta* and writing a book on nature therapy, and he wishes even others to do the same.²⁷

Jagan's son, Mali, is a dropout from college. Having lost his mother in childhood, he is brought up under the restricted freedom of a principal father and develops rebellious tendencies. Later, lifting money of his father secretly, he goes to Michigan (America) to do a course in story writing. His stay in America transforms the entire orientation of his personality. In his attitude and outlook, he shifts from one

extreme to another – a conversion of all Indian traits into an American mode of life various stages of his complete deviation from his tradition have been made explicit through his letters, in which he passes shocking information to his traditionalist father to have “taken to eating beef”²⁸ or having plan to solve India’s food problem by allowing the cow slaughter on mass scale.

His physical relation, without marriage from the girl friend, whom he has brought from America professionals, his avid obsession to make quick money even at the cost of human values, his total disregard for his cultural roots and an equal affinity to American mercantile attitude; all these make him represent the Western or modern values of life.

However, “modernity, which is often linked with technological advancement,”²⁹ is best represented in the novel through the industry of story writing machine, which Mali wants to set up in Malgudi. This machine, as a symbol, evokes two major modernist values – mechanization of an area of activity which requires remaining human and a frenzied effort for material prosperity. Jagan refuses to promote the project, quite against the expectation of his son, for ethical and ideological reasons. This ensures the clash between Jagan and his son, representing traditional and modern values respectively.

The arrival of machine based on the principle of ‘electronic’ or ‘electric’ was a queer thing in Malgudi, so when Natraj informs Jagan that Mali “...wants to manufacture story writing machines”³⁰, he is just baffled. Mali displays his eagerness in waiting for the parcel of machine to arrive. In his zeal to start the project at the earliest, he finds the country just inadequate to keep pace with his fast moving American tempo. To his assertion for having... “never seen a more wasteful country than this.”³¹ Jagan retorts, “We find it quite adequate for our purpose” (p. 82). He demonstrates various operative systems of this machine to Jagan, quite oblivious of the reaction caused in the latter:

**You see these four knobs? One is for characters,
one for plot situations, one for climax, and the**

fourth is built on the basis that a story is made up of character, situations, emotion and climax, and by the right combination...³²

Mali further explains, “You can work on it like a type writer. You make up your mind about the number of characters. It works on a transistor and ordinary valves absolutely fool proof. Ultimately, we are going to add a little fixture, by which any existing story could be split up into components and analyzed; the next model will incorporate it” (pp. 82-83). So this machine aims to produce creative writing like an industrial product, to be sold like consumer goods. Even the critical and evaluative process is to be mechanized as if to add qualitative refinement in the product.

Jagan, who is a sort of writer himself considers Mali’s effort as perversion of art and creative activity. He considers creative writing as an aesthetic experience. In his opinion, books must be treated respectfully, being a form of “...the Goddess Saraswathi.”³³ He feels no one can be a writer unless one receives inspiration from the God. Thus he asserts, “I know Kalidasa was a village idiot ...until the goddess Saraswathi made a scratch on his tongue and then he burst into that song *Syamaladandakam* and wrote *Sakuntala* and so on” (p. 38). So the difference in the cultural value is obvious enough. For Mali creative writing is as much a mechanical effort as manufacturing a toothpaste or paper, where as for Jagan, it is as aesthetic experience.

Even before leaving for America, Mali had expressed his desire to become a writer, but Jagan lacks conviction in his writing abilities. He curiously asks whether “Mali is really helping mankind with his writing.”³⁴ He has also misgivings about his son’s experience of life and his equipment to become a writer. So he “...wanted to know which language his son’s muses accepted, whether Tamil or English.”³⁵ Thus in the opinion of Jagan, languages, the experience of life, the ideal to help humanity, are some of the basic conditions of creative writing. This traditional idealistic approach is sharply antagonistic to what Mali visualizes writing stories by mixing various

components like the preparation of a drug. For Mali, writing has relevance only in the terms of materialistic gains.

Jagan is also furious at the idea of going to America to learn the technique of story writing. It was outrageous and hurt his national pride. Jagan very sarcastically asks, “Did Valmiki go to America or Germany in order to learn to write his *Ramayana*?”(p. 58) Instead, he suggests Mali to go to village granny. Mali and Grace make combined effort to involve Jagan in their project to manufacture story writing machine. Jagan is quite puzzled to see the apparatus of the machine. He closely reads the headings, “Characters: good, bad, and neutral. Emotions: love, hate, revenge, devotion, pity, complexities, characters, incidents, accidents, climax: placement and disposal and conclusion” (p. 83).

Quite upset by his concrete mechanical presence of an aesthetic process, which appears to him like an object of other planet, many contrasting notions hover in his mind. In a persuading tone he explains to Grace, “...do you know that our ancestors never even wrote the epics? They composed the epics and recited them, and the great books lived thus from generation to generation by the breath of people” (p. 84). Mali, with complete disregard for Indian tradition and with a desire to keep pace with modern life, asserts, “Oh, these are not the days of your ancestors. Today we have to compete with advanced countries not only in economics and industry but also in culture” (p. 86).

Grace further informs Jagan that nowadays most of the best sellers are the products of machines. Jagan is not at all convinced by the logic of Mali and Grace, expressed in the favour of the machine. He is also skeptical of the objectives of Mali’s proposed company which intends through machine to “...cut time and distance, and lift the country out of its rut.”³⁶ Jagan with all his traditional values and beliefs upon his back refuses to be trapped in the American mercantile quagmire.

Jagan and Mali hold divergent views even in the matters of their business ethics. In spite of the incongruities in his character, Jagan believes in the Gandhian ideal of “simple living and high thinking.”³⁷

He regards his business as a sort of duty in line of the *Karmayoga* of the *Gita*, which has a humanitarian value also, “I just keep the business so that these poor

fellows (his staff) may not be thrown out of employment” (p. 86). Money is an evil in his favourite refrain and in business he has no motive to accumulate wealth, “I do not accumulate, it just grows naturally” (p. 46). The money he earns he does not spend in buying materialistic comforts for himself. Even in his dress he wears khadi spun by his own hands. So even in the matters of business he has an idealistic approach.

Quite the contrary, Mali represents American mad rush for money, which is acquisitive and non-humanistic. He has an expansionist plan to increase his business with “...American collaboration with two hundred dollars.”³⁸ This high sounding business expertise, which is directionless, is beyond the comprehension of Jagan. Jagan has many other ideals of life to cherish besides money, and the allurements of “...a nice air conditioned room with a couple of secretaries”³⁹ offered to him by Mali, appears bitterly ironical in the context of his Gandhian and traditional approach to life. Shiv K. Gilra asserts:

As a novelist Narayan carries on the great tradition of comedy in his distinctive manner. He shares his comic vision with world’s great humorist from Chaucer to modern times.⁴⁰

He generally aims at the portrayal of life by combining together “comic irony and moral earnestness.”⁴¹ These qualities of Narayan’s art are visible even in the novel *The Vendor of Sweets*.

Jagan and other important characters in the novel have ambivalence in their personalities reflecting the presence of “good and evil ... set in a precarious balance.”⁴² Jagan frequently quotes lines from the scriptures, even though; he has not read them, which accounts for the controlled irony running parallel to the theme. This is true to his practice of Gandhian principles and the Gita as well. He advises to conquer taste to conquer self without knowing why. The ideals of charity for the poor, by keeping the price of his sweet meats lower, has also underlying motive to spread business. He has no scruples in keeping double cash book, as to his knowledge Gandhi has nowhere mentioned sales tax. He even does not forget to take his cheque-book with himself even while, going to *Vanprastha*.

Yet, it is to the credit of “Narayan’s gift as an artist, that Jagan is neither a hypocrite nor a figure of fun.”⁴³ In spite of all his incongruities, he draws our sympathy and in overall estimation. William Walsh asserts:

He is both a comic and anguished figure, comic in his innocent combination of commercial sharpness, fiscal duplicity, vanity, and genuine reverence for Gandhian spirituality; anguished in his lacerated relationship with his sullen, brutish son Mali.⁴⁴

The events of his life also suggest the difficulty in “following Gandhian ideals in present day society.”⁴⁵ As James Dale says: “Perhaps the most valuable element in Narayan’s novel for modern man, caught up in the frenzied rush of the acquisitive society, is his rejection of mere materialism, his insistence on the supreme importance of human relationships the spiritual values which should underline them.”⁴⁶

The ideological differences between Jagan and Mali, thus, signify the clash between traditional, human, spiritual values and modernity that promises prosperity by the use of machine.

Thus to sum up, Narayan has presented all the themes very carefully. Almost all his novels touch upon the above mentioned themes. The average and the middle-class milieu of Malgudi and the family provide Narayan to study at close quarters human individuals and human relationships in all variety and intricacy. His vision is characterized by a unique Indian sensibility.

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CHAPTER - 3
SOCIAL CONCERNS

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R.K. Narayan's fiction forms the matrix of triumph for Indian creative literature in English. Narayan's fifty years of fiction writing earned him immense reputation both in India and abroad. The most fascinating feature of his personality is that he is a pure Indian both in thought and spirit despite his preference for English over his mother language for the expression of his creative urge. His fiction mirrors the microcosmic India caught in the crucible of tradition and change. M.K. Naik opines, "R.K. Narayan is the novelist of the individual man, just as Mulk Raj Anand is the novelist of the social man, and Raja Rao that of metaphysical man."¹

Narayan chooses a central character through whose view-point he looks at the various aspects of society as a silent onlooker. Mulk Raj Anand is a humanist and, therefore, to bring out human predicament is his prime concern. *Coolie* is a study of village-boy's sufferings who because of poverty is compelled to work as a servant. *Untouchable* throws light on the miserable condition of outcaste people. *Two Leaves and a Bud* exposes the exploitation of the peasants by the Assam Tea Estate owners. Anand's concern, therefore, is the economic exploitation and class distinction.

The novels, *The Village*, *Across the Black Water* and *The Sword and the Sickle* are his sharp reaction against the traditional values of village society. *The Big Heart* presents an intimate picture of class and caste segmentation to which Anand himself belongs. *The Old Women and the Cow* depicts the pitiable condition of peasants in post independence days. *Private Life of an Indian Prince* deals with the dying feudal system in India. We, therefore, see that Anand too, like R.K. Narayan, is sharply aware of society and its all happenings. Yet there is a remarkable difference between the two. Mulk Raj Anand looks angrily at the oddities and eccentricities of society but R.K. Narayan stares patiently and smiles.

Raja Rao is a metaphysical man. All his novels are charged with metaphysical. His *Kanthapura* presents the impact of Gandhian philosophy during the days of Non-

cooperation Movement as well as the glory of Hindu mythology. *The Serpent and the Rope* presents symbolical difference between illusion and reality in Indian tradition. *The Cat and Shakespeare* deals with some middle class families of Kerala during the period the Second World War. Raja Rao sees everything in the process of metaphysics, yet his novels are enriched with social consciousness.

R.K. Narayan is neither angry like Mulk Raj Anand nor philosophical like Raja Rao. Narayan's social consciousness is conspicuous in his novels, yet his awareness is covered with a blanket of irony. He maintains a frontier of norms in his fictional writing and therefore is free from all partiality. K.R.S. Iyengar explains how his artistic excellence is maintained under a limitation:

He is one of the few writers in India who take their craft seriously, constantly striving to improve the instrument, pursuing with a sense of dedication what may often seem to be the mirage of technical perfection. There is a norm of excellence below which Narayan cannot possibly lower himself.²

Narayan minutely observes the society and presents the most realistic picture charged with gentle irony and light humour. His approach to subject matter is always marked with intellectual inspirations. His artistic excellence lies in his authentic explorations and straightforward manner.

Narayan's novels are teemed with social consciousness in human relationship. K.N. Sinha rightly observes, "R.K. Narayan is keenly aware of the fundamental irremediable incongruities which life and world are confronting us."³ He accepts the reality as it presents before him. He sees the society and its developments with an ironic detachment and accepts reality ungrudgingly. He sees no point in attempting to criticize or correct things because, as he remarks in *Mr. Sampath*, it seems to him "a futile and presumptuous occupation to analyse, criticize and attempt to set things right anywhere" (p. 63). Narayan's central character shows us

everything that occurs in the every walk of society. R.S. Singh explains Narayan's art and object of fiction writings:

Narayan's male characters are aware of social and political changes, but they do not take sides, nor do they commit themselves to any ideology. Narayan imbues them with social awareness and sense of responsibility only to the extent it helps him to bring out their human qualities.⁴

He exposes the ills of society, and probes them too, but never for sadistic pleasure or for scating disgust in readers. His chief aim is to highlight the hypocrisy of ideals, ambition and pride and not to guide the society in any particular direction but simply to make us realize.

Narayan's early novels are a sociological study of people's manners and mentality in pre-independence days. *Swami and Friends* highlights the existing manners as well as the impact of National Movement on common folk. *The Bachelor of Arts* is a probe into the everyday incidents in a Hindu household in south India and also the odd traditional norms of society. *The Dark Room* demonstrates the typical Indian attitude to family life and exposes the predicament of common housewives. The heroine Savitri typifies all suffering housewives of our society who are exploited by all means in their life. *The English Teacher* tells a tragic love story of the divine separation of two souls, with an anterior motif of satirizing the fault in existing education system which "makes us (nothing but) morons, cultural morons, but efficient clerks for all your business and administrative offices" (p. 206).

The middle novels are Narayan's exploration into the manners and behavior of people in post-independence era. The novels highlight the people's "modern desire for wealth"⁵ asserts Graham Greene. *Mr. Sampath* is a story of a cunning rogue who without any corresponding ability wants to earn enormous wealth in a very short while. William Walsh remarks that "*The Financial Expert* is an exact account of village usury and city deceit and a controlled probing into the motives of money-

making.”⁶ Both Sampath and Margayya represent the modern man who aspires to touch the sky in a jump and ultimately come back to the same old ground. *Waiting for the Mahatma* presents the socio-economic condition in the days of National Movement. It moreover highlights the impact of Mahatma Gandhi on the different strata of society. *The Guide*, the most talked about novel, is appreciated for “depicting the ironies of modern Indian life”⁷ says William Walsh.

Narayan’s metaphysical spirit is reflected from his later novels, based mostly on Indian myths. William Walsh again remarks:

We see that the religious sense of Indian myths is a part of Narayan’s grip of reality, of his particular view of human life and his individual way of placing and ordering human feeling and experience. What one can say about Narayan without qualification is that he embodies the pure spirit of Hinduism.⁸

Narayan is free from any partiality, which lacks in the case of Raja Rao, in all his mythical novels. *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* is based on the Hindu mythological legend of *Bhasmasura*. *The Vendor of Sweets* is based on the Hindu concepts of cyclical existence and four stages of human life. It simultaneously highlights the confrontation of tradition and modern in Indian society. *The Painter of Signs* exploits with adroitness the story of ancient king Santhanu mentioned in *The Mahabharata*. The latest novel *A Tiger for Malgudi* is chiefly an exploration of philosophical Indian myths and metaphysical parables of Hindu religion.

Living absorbed in religion and family, Narayan is quite familiar with the developments within an Indian family. William Walsh rightly observes:

The family is the immediate context in which his sensibility operates and novels are remarkably for subtlety and conviction with family relationship are treated.⁹

He highlights the importance of a mother in *The Bachelor of Arts* and says, “Mother is a sacred object. It is a commodity whose value we don’t realize as long as it is with us” (p. 98). He realizes us that if Kailas had been a mother to look him after, he would have not been spoiled. Narayan in *The Dark Room*, furthermore, believes that parents should deal firmly with their children because “only a battered son will grow into a sound man” (p. 36).

Mr. Sampath too thinks that “boys must be chastised, otherwise (they will) grow into devils” (p. 34), and hence he advises his son’s tutor, “Any time you see him getting out of hand, don’t wait for me. Thrash him; thrash him well... no boy who has not been thrashed has come to any good” (p. 93). Narayan expresses his dislike of Dowry system and suggests the young celibates in *The Bachelor of Arts* that, “If one has to marry one must do it for love, if there is such a thing, or for the money and comforts. There is no sense in shutting your eyes to the reality of things” (p. 155).

Narayan is critical of caste system in Indian society. He makes us see in *The Vendor of Sweets* that if grace fears to come India or Chandran to marry his sweetheart Malathi - caste or class barrier happens to be the reason. Our society is ridden with caste and class feelings and hence when Jagan claims, “We don’t believe in caste these days” (p. 72), or Raju says in *The Guide*, “there is not caste or class today” (p. 72), we know pretty well how untrue they are.

Narayan condemns caste or class division in almost every novel uninvolved yet in *The Bachelor of Arts*; he fails to maintain his detachment and says, “If India must go - community, caste, sects, sub-sects, and still further divisions” (p. 56). He furthermore dislikes the system of child-marriage and appreciates such “rational and modern, people who abhorred the custom of rushing a young child into marriage,” (p. 55). There is nothing in his work of the angry reform which informs the fiction of Mulk Raj Anand. Narayan’s work contains no scalded sense of social injustice, no artificial anguish, no colonial indignation, and yet Narayan is clearly as Indian as any other Indian writer.

We thus arrive at the conclusion that Narayan is an unidentified social reformer who is keenly aware of the various absurdities and eccentricities of society and suggests ironically the ways for their removal. It is; therefore, right to say that the story of Ram Gopal in *Mr. Sampath* is the story of Narayan's own that had almost "devoted his life to the abolition of the caste system and other evils of society. His ultimate ambition in life was to see his motherland free from foreign domination. He was a disciple of Gandhi's philosophy, practicing 'Ahinsa' (non-violence) in thought, word and deed" (p. 98). Narayan presents in his novels "Gandhi's plea for non-violence with a new significance, as one of the paths of attaining harmony in life; non-violence in all matters, little or big, personal or national, it seemed to produce an unagitated, undisturbed calm both in a personality and in society" (p. 95).

Thus, the intent behind this study was to explore the novels of R.K. Narayan assuming social consciousness on the nucleus. All his novels form the simple sad comedy to the mythical nature later parables is born in the smithy of social awareness. He is not an angry old man, nor a politician championing the cause of the masses. But he is a merchant of human metaphors, an artist with milk of human kindness flowing full in his heart.

R.K. Narayan is not a feminist even then he has shown his sympathy for the exploited and oppressed class of women in Indian society. The helplessness and miserable condition of a Hindu housewife is brought to the forefront in Narayan's *The Dark Room*. In an interview Narayan explained, "In *The Dark Room* I was concerned with showing the utter dependence of women on man in society. I suppose I have moved along with the times."¹⁰

By survival, Narayan does not mean continuity of mere physical existence, but a striving for dignity in the battle with society and circumstances. His protagonist Savitri is a victim of either man, or of authority, or of a particular social set-up. Today, a women's goals are expressively defined, first her indignation against the oppression and depression by men in patriarchal society, and second, the consequent quest of her identity. Both the factors go against the socially approved image of the

passive woman. This study seeks to explain the true voice of endurance in the present novel.

R.K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* shows us a somber atmosphere. The novelist draws here the poignant picture of a South Indian middle class family, in which the wife's life becomes much of a hell, because of the frequent fits of resentment and annoyance of her capricious and refractory husband, Ramani. In *The Dark Room*, the happiness or unhappiness, and quiet and disquiet of the household depend mainly on the mood and temper of the husband, Ramani. In the house, the servants, children and even the wife are certainly in a state of extreme fear due to the domineering and cynical nature of Mr. Ramani. The appointment of Shanta Bai in Ramani's office produces more misfortune to the wife, Savitri. Unable to endure any more, Savitri, in a fit of disappointment and rage leaves the house of her husband one midnight to drown herself into the river, Saryu.

But a blacksmith burglar, who was prowling there at that time, saved her life. For a day or so Savitri attempts to get some independent employment for herself. But soon being fed up with the present state of her life, she comes back to her contemptuous home to sulk in the dark room sans much effect on her erring husband, Ramani. It is always an indication and not the description of emotion. Only gesture is significant as when Savitri returns to her family and takes her place in it by offering to serve her husband his meal after forgetting all humiliations:

The car sounded its horn outside, Kamala and Sumati ran to the gate to announce: 'Mother has come': Has she? Ramani asked, and went into the house. He hesitated for a fraction of a second on the doormat and then passed into his room. Savitri sat in the passage of the dining room, trembling. What would he do now? Would he come and turn her out of her house?

An hour later Ramani came towards her. She started up. He threw a brief glance at her, noted her ragged appearance and went into the dining room. He said to the cook, Hurry up, I have to be at the office...¹¹

In this novel, Narayan utilizes Savitri's familiar pattern of domestic disharmony to describe the status of women in Indian society. Women are helpless prey to exploitation and hence when Savitri leaves her house, she is shown to be exploited also by the temple priest where she takes shelter. Sharing the agony and anguish of all helpless Hindu wives, Savitri expressed her feelings by making a flashing speech, "I'm a human being", She said... "You men will never grant that. For you we are playthings when you feel like hugging and slaves at other times. Don't think that you can fondle us when you like and kick us when you choose" (p. 73). Savitri further highlight the anguish of women by saying, "What is the difference between a prostitute and a married woman? The prostitute changes her men but a married woman does not. That's all; but both earn their food and shelter in the same manner" (p. 76).

This novel shows the helpless predicament of the Indian woman, Savitri. She is aware of her mean state in domestic life. Savitri rightly reacts in *The Dark Room* and says, "Women don't possess anything in the world. What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything else that she has is her fathers, husbands or her son's" (p. 75). Ramani, an officer in Englandia Insurance Company, is the complete embodiment of male chauvinistic society that is why he reprimands and makes light of his wife, "...go and do any work you like in the kitchen, but leave the training of a grown up boy to me. It is none of a woman's business" (p. 5). As K.R.S. Iyengar remarks:

The dark Room used to be as indispensable a part of an Indian house as a kitchen, and was a

place for ‘safe deposits’, both a sanctuary – and a retreat; but modern houses are apt to dispense with the dark room. Even in the old houses, the installation of electric lights has effectively destroyed the traditional character of the ‘dark room’. Narayan has thus done well to preserve-like the mummified curiosities of ancient Egypt- the ‘dark room’ in the pages of his novel.¹²

R.K. Narayan shows us as to how the husband is like God in the Indian household and women have to accept whatever fate has done to them. This is the cause that the priest, in charge of the temple, gives the advice, “If she won’t let rest, thrash her that is the way to keep women safe. In these days you fellows are mugs, and let your women ride you about” (p. 100). Thus, Savitri feels nothing is her own and even her children are her husband’s absolutely, “You paid the midwife and the nurse. You pay for their clothes and teachers. You are right. Don’t I say that a woman owns nothing?” (p. 77)

Savitri, in an effort to assert to her individuality, revolts and leaves home only to retreat and compromise with the situation. Here the novelist has tried to infuse confidence and seed of rebellion in Savitri. Savitri represents thousands of other Indian housewives who are depressed and helpless creatures in the hands of their husbands. When Savitri prohibits her son to school due to illness, she is humiliated by her husband, “Mind your own business, do you hear...” (p. 5). Savitri miserable thinks over the problem of her existence, “How important at home and that after fifteen years of married life” (p. 8). This is not only the case of Savitri but also the case of other housewives who lead their life under the complete hegemony of their husbands. The social status of an Indian housewife is evaluated at the end of the novel. The condition of women is reflected from Savitri’s voice, “What despicable creations of God are we that we can’t exist without a support? I am like a bamboo

pole which cannot stand without a well to support it” (p. 113). R.S. Singh rightly says:

Here is the sort of thing that happens in thousands of households in our country; a few Savitries hang burn or drown themselves. The great majority dare not to do it.¹³

R.K. Narayan is too much of an artist to think of dealing with problems, much less offer solution to any problem. The few problems that we can find in his novels are human problems that refer to some strange situation in which the character happens to be placed. He betrays some significant observations clear enough to convey his likes and dislikes and then goes on. Narayan actually dislikes the absurd custom of comparing the horoscopes of bride and the groom. Similarly he does not like the present system of soul-killing educational system, but prefers a new type of ‘let-alone’ schools for children. William Walsh remarks:

The family is the immediate context in which his sensibility operates and novels are remarkable for subtlety and conviction with which family relationships are treated.¹⁴

Among women characters, Narayan generally portrays two kinds of women – typical Indian housewife and fashionable and butterfly type of women. His female character like Savitri finds her place in the first category. This woman is docile, modest, gentle, religious and loving. Her only anxiety is the welfare of her husband and children. Narayan remarks in *My Days*:

I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of a woman as opposed to man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament of the women’s liberation movement.

Man assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning that she herself began to lose all nothing of her independence, her individuality, stature and strength. A wife as an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances.¹⁵

It is a great achievement of Narayan's creative power that he has described the Indian people and the Indian way of life with an abundant measure of success without trying to moralise or philosophize. But Narayan does not lack sympathy for his characters. Each one of his characters wicked or virtuous is drawn with extraordinary delicacy and tenderness. In his sympathetic hands they turn into interesting figures and make the earth very meaningful by their presence and actions. His philosophy of life seems to be that it is foolish to worry about evils that one cannot prevent. Life at best is only an imperfect affair and it has to be lived, what makes life delightful or sad, does not depend on the real texture of life itself but on the way one lives or on the attitude that one has towards it.

The woman's point of view has been totally consigned to oblivion by Marco in *The Guide*. A woman is not gadget as evidently revealed in the character of Rosie who is replete with desires and spirits. And hence, there are breakings in the married life of Rosie and Marco. Som Dev rightly remarks:

If Rosie is driven to the arms of a stranger, it is partly not her fault...Had he considered the basic needs of the woman whom he takes for a wife, perhaps their union would not have sundered in this manner. He has offered insult to the womanhood, and in turn the

**womanhood in Rosie raises its hood to leave
'fran marks' on him.¹⁶**

Marco really wants a wife like the servant Joseph who is in his opinion, a wonderful man. Secondly, for all his outward appearance, he looks down upon dancing, and misunderstands the art as something below his rank and position:

**Old prejudices die-hard, and Marco for all his
erudition looked upon dancing as just street a
acrobatics, and he killed Rosie's instincts for
life and love of art by denying her both of
them.¹⁷**

Rosie belongs to a family dedicated to the temple as dancers, and yet she obtains an M.A. in Economics. Not only that, she discards the convention and enters in matrimonial agreement with Marco. But to her utter shock, she discovers that he is more interested in the sculptured figures on walls and stones in the caves, than in his wife who is living embodiment of these things. Dead and decaying things have attracted him, but not things that live and move and swing their heads. Her position in his company is no better than that of an animal. For Rosie "followed him, day after day, like a dog-waiting on his grace" (p. 151). In the company of Raju too, she fares no better. She feels like one of those parrots in a cage taken around village fairs: the position of a Hindu housewife realistically presented by Narayan. In utter helplessness she gives vent to her feelings, "it is far better to end one's life on his (Marco's) doorstep" (p. 220).

The submissive attitude in Narayan's major characters is but the outcome of a tremendous impact of the Hindu culture and its traditions on their mind; their will power lies crippled under the weight. They do not control events but let the events control them. They appear as helpless creatures, torn by desires and tossed this way and that by the caprice of fortune.

Rosie is portrayed as the representative of a new class of women who have the opportunity to be released from the conventional confinement to join colleges and universities. Rosie acquires a Master's degree in Economics: no mean achievement in relation to her place in a scheme of castes in Hindu society. On the one hand, her education has enhanced in her, the awareness of her own individuality. On the other, it pits her against the society which still has certain well-defined attitudes towards women. Moreover, the class to which she belongs is looked down upon as a low community which does not deserve equal status with the higher caste. Despite the hurdles, she has established her own individuality. Her inner being, it appears, is not prepared to go on playing the traditional role as a suppressed Indian wife for the rest of her life.

Rosie has had a bitter experience in the house of Raju whose mother, an old orthodox woman, refuses to accept her on the ground that she belongs to a different caste. His uncle's insulting questions make her lower her head in shame and disgust "Are you to our caste? No our class? No. Do we know you? No. Do you belong to this house? No. In that case, why are you here? After all, you are a dancing girl; we do not admit them in our families" (p. 169). Rosie survives the shocks and shows to the world that she too has an individual status and aspirations in life, which she tries to accomplish all her life. However, her guilty conscience makes her restless and in the end we see her painful longing to die at the threshold of her husband's house.

Thus, to conclude that R.K. Narayan is a minute observer of society. Narayan's fictional world is circumscribed by a traditional Hindu society where men rather than women hold a superior position. He probes into the everyday incidents in Hindu household of Indian society and exposes the predicament of common housewives who are generally confined to home and hearth. The novelist's world of women is far removed from the modern liberation movement. The female characters are all suffering housewives of our society who are exploited by all means in their life. His novels depict the irony of modern Indian life where women on the one hand

are regarded as deity and on the other are bereft of their basic rights. That is why women in the novels of R.K. Narayan present the true voice of endurance.

Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah points out that R.K. Narayan is “a product of the Hindu middle class.”¹⁸ The whole corpus of his fiction is populated by the Hindu middle class people of his own province, differing in their attitudes, habits, manners, customs and conventions from the rest of classes – lower class and upper class. Narayan deals with the life of this particular class in his fiction, analysing the tensions and conflicts, stress and strains, in human relations within the domestic circle of his own experience, and making them the basis of his works.

His early novels are all domestic in tone, presenting psychological studies of the relationships of husband and wife, parents and sons, brothers and sisters. Even in his last novels he again returns to domestic relationships exploring and delineating them to their considerable limit and presenting men more in relation to each other than in relation to God or some abstract idea of politics.

Narayan is frequently criticized for his exclusive concern with the middle class and very often called treacherous for not having dealt with the ‘Indian poor and the dominantly peasant character of the country. But such criticism sounds not only meaningless but also baseless when his sincere point of view to deal with the class is taken into consideration. William Walsh is right in his description that “...Narayan writes chiefly about the Indian middle-class because he is a member of it, and it is the class he understands best.”¹⁹

These members of middle-class figuring in his novels and short stories are neither too well-off as not to know the rub of financial worry nor too poor to be brutalized by want and overwhelming hunger. By nature they are religious people, but seldom credulous like the poor people. They take religion with an easeful understanding, but they have a tendency towards modernity to the extent of murmuring their educated speech in older voices – “Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth,

the spouse of God Vishnu, who was the protector of creatures” (p. 78), in the words of Chandran, the hero of *The Financial Expert*.

Like various religions of the world, the Hindu religion can also be divided into two classes – the religion based on sacred ancient scriptures the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharat* and the *Puranas*, and the religion which results without texts. Narayan himself relying more on the spiritual understanding of religion, seems to have noted the division of two types of religion prevailing in his own province and the rest of the country.

The religion based on scriptures has a stronger appeal to the common people who look askance at every word that comes out to them without the authority of the sacred text. Common people of India believe in the religious saying that *dharma* protects those who protect *dharma* and it destroys those who try to destroy it. Gods, demons, ghosts and witches have a believable existence for them. As life is said to be a perpetual struggle between the forces of good and evil, the people of Narayan’s fiction also believe in the endless struggle between good and evil.

Almost every character of Narayan’s fiction is the product of these two opposite tendencies. Even the hard core realist Vasu, in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* is not a total symbol of a demon. On the one hand he is a taxidermist, a demon incarnate in the words of Sastri, a huge man of six-feet whose fist was meant to batter thick panels of teak and iron, on the other, as Natraj has observed in this aggressive man of special design, “He had one virtue, he never hit anyone with his hand, whatever the provocation” (p. 242). There is no doubt that self-assertive people in society are disliked everywhere because their assertion is bound to cause a sense of fear. But they are seldom deprived of having no virtue in themselves. Here lies the balanced attitude of Narayan in the observation of human nature.

The majority of Narayan’s fiction indicates that these members of middleclass are psychologically more active, their consciousness is more vivid and they live by virtue of their modesty, lacking in self-confidence. In spite of some room for

independent critical existence, they are always tossed in some kind of tension between this and that as deep source of power to improve their family, as in *The Financial Expert* and *The Vendor of Sweets*.

Margayya in *The Financial Expert* embarks on a journey to get quick rich and improve his social status; Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets* also tries to amass black money for his son Mali. In middle class families, old women represent custom and reason and decide what is proper and what is improper. The family provides immediate context in which Narayan's sensibility remarkably operates.

The joint-family system which was considered Indian legacy in the past has presumably disappeared at present. In *The Financial Expert* and *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* scenes of family – disputes are drawn in order to evince how the new wave of western culture has swept away the human relationship in India. Narayan himself points out:

I fear that the rich subjective life of the individual against the background of that unique institution, the joint family system, is a subject that has not been properly tackled — there is wonderful material here, whether the setting be the earlier political struggle or the present day political achievement.²⁰

And Narayan tackles this subject in his *The Financial Expert*. When Margayya receives a card from Madres containing the incorrect information (incorrect as it is subsequently turned out) of Balu's death, his brother's family comes to his help and solace. Seeing them all in his house and realizing the impendency of their feuds, Margays' effected mind for a while forgets everything about Balu's so-called death and prompts a new chain of thought, "...a ridiculous question (addressed to his brother) kept coming to his mind. Are we friends now – no longer enemies? What about our feud? A part of his mind kept wondering how they could live as

friends but the numerous problems connected with this seemed insoluble. We had got used to this kind of life. Now I suppose we shall have to visit each other and enquire and so on..." (p. 121).

Margayya did his best to suppress these thoughts. His brother whispered among other things, "We will send you the night meal from our house" (p. 128). Such are the characteristics of middle class people and Narayan is not only well acquainted with them but also has a personal experience of living under joint-family system from the outset to this day. In *The Man -Eater of Malgudi* Natraj's complaint against his cousin, "who hates him for staying in their ancestral home is indicative of this family feud, brought about by the break in joint- living" (p. 5).

In the past (still to some extent) it was traditional to live together in joint-family system in India. All the members of a family were supposed to live together under the same roof, in spite of their minor differences. The old people in the family were in charge of laying down the policy with the intention of running the family administration smoothly. But modern culture has started breaking it up not only in the South but all over India. However, P.S. Sundram rightly says:

...the sense of kinship is strong in a Narayan novel. The most notable example of this is... Margayya and his brother, though for most of the time not on speaking terms, are yet next-door neighbours, sharing a well, and in moments of special joy or sorrow simply cannot do without each other.²¹

Apart from religion and family Narayan focuses his attention on private life, the ambitions, success and frustration of middle class people. These people try their best to achieve, in the words of Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*, "a life freed from distracting illusions and hysterics" (p. 72). There is hardly any doubt about it that such distracting illusions are considerably woven in the fabric of Indian tradition.

Amidst a net of human relationships middleclass people display their aspiration towards maturity. They are full of human weaknesses – their craving for money and status, their skepticism dualistic attitude towards life in general and their anxiety, reluctance to face the truth of their beings – which bring them, appear to be made of real stuff of flesh and blood, as all human beings are made of. On the other hand, they are not deprived of human virtues. They are full of life and vitality. It is their own personal experience of their self that they come to realize the truth of life. For instance, Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* realizes the truth of life in his total surrender on the altar of parental love and returns to the old values of the middle class society in terms of marriage.

In *The Dark Room* Ramani continues to be the hypocritical husband and the unmitigated tyrant of the dark room. He is an exception which can also be located in the real society populated by ultra-modern people uprooted from their old culture. Sampath, Raju, Natraj, Jagan, Sambu – all are involved in their struggle to maturity to which they reach at last. The world of Malgudi cannot leave them as they are; it turns them what they should be. Being a moral analyst and having a penetrative eye to look into human nature, Narayan is a past master in giving the reader a picture that strikes him as typical of everyday reality. In this way, he depends on selection and suggestion. He draws a picture of life in such a convincing way as to bring everyday reality.

Human oddities, follies and frivolities of middle class people provided so much interest to the operative sensibility of Narayan that he seldom went for his subject matter beyond his own class. He paints with great skill the surface of life, the externals of characters and manners and passes by the vehement, the profound and the enthusiastic, all that is capable of humorous treatment. Like Jane Austen he worked within his narrow range and relied on his little bit of ivory so many inches wide, remaining a detached observer and testifying his profound vision of humanity. That is why, the inhabitants of Malgudi, despite their discernible local trappings are undeniably human, and have their kinship with all humanity. It is nothing, but

Narayan's artistic self-control, his broad humanity that enables him to achieve greatness within the limited range of his chosen field. And in this way, he achieves greatness.

In spite of his limited range the corpus of Narayan's fiction abounds in a galaxy of immortal characters. His canvas is also limited because like a great artist he does not intent to overcrowd it. However, through his knowledge and experience he depicts students and teachers, journalists and printers, guides and tourists, the champion of emancipation and money-lenders, dancers and temple women, scholar and scamps, taxidermist and sweet-vendor, painter of signs and the arch-priestess of family-planning, circus men and beasts and real saint and fake *Sannyasis* with equal felicity and ease.

His early novels present students and teachers, bank managers and domestic servants, femi-fatale and the doting lovers who achieve maturity in the restricted limits of their operative zeal. From *Swami and Friends* to *The English Teacher* Narayan remained autobiographical in approach and plumbed the depth of his own memory. But from *The English Teacher* onward, K.R. Srinivas Iyengar remarks:

...we enter an exotic world of half-headed or half-hearted dreamers, artist, financiers, speculators, twisters, adventures, eccentrics, cranks, cinema stars, *Sannyasis*, several of them not Malgudi products at all but straying or imported from outside.²²

Swami, Chandran, and Krishnan figure in the trilogy- *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher*. They represent the academic world of South Indian schools and colleges. In the first novel, we are introduced to a cheerful world of young school boys – Swami, Mani, Samuel and Rajam. These boys are the students of Albert Mission School. It is through the eyes of the hero Swami that we also look at the fire eyed Vedanayam and the fanatic Ebenezer boasting too much for

the merits of Christianity and demerits of Hindu religion. But Swami & his companions enjoy their juvenile life, with quarrels and compromises, peals of laughter and quells of sorrow, and the important cricket match between the Malgudi cricket club and the Young Men's Union. Swami's parents and the old granny also play very important role in consoling him for the sake of going ahead.

In *The Bachelor of Arts* Narayan takes the reader to the world of Degree College youths who make a fuss over the problem whether historians should be slaughtered or not. Chandran, the hero, is a bright student of B.A. class. After graduation he faces the problem of unemployment. During his aimless rambling on the bank of Sarayu he comes across the beautiful girl, Malathi, and instantly falls in love with her.

Narayan also indicates how typical customs of marriage prevail in the middle class society of South India. With the ironic detachment of a true artist he presents the world of family in which human relations depend more on adjustment with one another than showing a sense of revolt. He portrays quite vividly the complex texture of social and religious custom and traditions, extremely governing a South Indian Hindu family. Obscured caste divisions, and sub-divisions, class snobberies, absurd marriage custom, blind superstitions and tyranny of astrological calculations – all are relentlessly prevalent in South Indian middle society.

The third novel of the trilogy takes the reader to the world of Albert Mission College in which Krishnan teacher English to notoriously careless students of undergraduate classes. Krishnan and his wife Sushila is an ideal couple, appearing in *Mr. Sampath* as Srinivas and his wife, though placed in different circumstances. In this novel Narayan attempts to show the immortality of soul in Sushila's life after death. Professor Gajapathi, Sri Rangappa, Mr. Gopal, Dr. Menon are Krishnan's colleagues in the college staff while principal Brown, the Englishman, continues to appear again in *The English Teacher* similarly as he did in *The Bachelor of Arts*. The psychic communion with spirit remains to be the important event in the novel.

The Dark Room introduces Savitri who is the most loveable among Narayan's female characters. The poignant picture of a South Indian Middle class family is drawn realistically to display how the life of an old-fashioned but sincere housewife becomes much of a hell owing to the frequent fits of anger and irritation of her whimsical and bully husband Ramani. In this novel Narayan draws a pair of two opposite human beings who are tied by a matrimonial knot together socially, but they are unable to cope with each other. Savitri and Ramani are really poles apart in matters of taste, temper and in their respective assessment of social reality.

The domestic confusion is worse confounded when a butterfly Shanti is appointed in Ramani's office and brings more misfortune to Savitri. In spite of her revolt against the designs of her husband, Savitri is unable to bring any change in Ramani's nature. She agrees to live with her husband to lead a life of so-called domestic happiness only when some part of her personality is dead. Savitri has neither courage nor independence of spirit like Gauri, the female character of Mulk Raj Anand's *The Old Woman and the Cow*, who is placed in similar circumstances of helplessness and hopelessness. Gauri, unlike Savitri, never thinks of committing suicide, but runs away from her husband's house to adopt the profession of a nurse in a clinic with a firm decision never to return home. Savitri is an average type of South Indian housewife who is not capable of taking such a bold step as Gauri in Mulk Raj Anand's novel endeavours'. Savitri is capable of sulking in the dark room.

From *The English Teacher* onwards we are introduced into the world of more crooked and more complex characters. Most of them are imported to Malgudian world. There are roguish, cunning and worldly wise people like Sampath, Margayya, Raju, Dr. Pal, Mali and Vasu who refuse to accept anything in a traditional way. In *The Financial Expert* we watch Margayya rising from a very humble position to be a very big banking magnet. Dr. Pal who helps him in accumulating more and more money by hook and by crook becomes the root cause of Margayya's downfall. He plays the role of a villain, spoils Margayya's son, Balu, spreading the astonishing news of his impending bankruptcy like wild fire. The result is that Margayya's clients

start knocking at his gate to withdraw their deposited money from his so-called bank and within a twinkling of an eye he is reduced to the state of destitution.

Sampath is another crook but he emerges as a very resourceful hero. He begins his life as a printer publishing Srinivas weekly, *The Banner*. But very soon he is fed up with printing and publishing and manages to attract huge funds for starting the film industry in Malgudi. It is named as sunrise pictures. He employs a number of actors and actresses and technicians for this task, the film is named as *The Burning of Kama* and the shooting of the film begins at the appointed time. But the infatuation of an artist Ravi for the beautiful heroine, Shanti whom he tries to abduct spoils the whole undertaking and brings complication in the whole affair. The result is that Ravi becomes mad and is subsequently removed to asylum. Sampath, left without any choice, bows out of Malgudi.

In the entire world of Narayan's fiction, Vasu (H.Vasu) is the only formidable man endowed with extraordinary physical strength, firm-determination and a sadistic outlook in inflicting pain all around. Natraj, the hero of *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, describes Vasu's huge figure which arouses fear in him and in his happy-go-lucky companions, "The new visitor had evidently pulled aside the poet before I could open my mouth, he asked you Natraj? I nodded. He came forward; practically tearing aside the curtain, an act which violated the sacred traditions of my press... he paid no attention, but stepped forward, extending his hand. ...he gave me a hard grip. My entire hand disappeared into his fist - he was a large man, about six feet tall. He looked quite slim, but his bull-neck and hammer-fist revealed his true signature" (p. 13).

H. Vasu is a taxidermist by profession. In the very first encounter with Vasu Natraj is able to know the demoniac, pugnacious and self –assertive nature of this taxidermist:

Vasu – I knew of his (Guru Pahelwan's) weak spot. I hit him there with the edge of my palm

**with a chopping movement... and he fell down
and squirmed on the floor...**

Natraj – You didn't stop to help him?

**Vasu – I helped him by leaving him there,
instead of holding him upside down and
rattling the teeth out of his head.”²³**

In another encounter when Natraj goes to Vasu to request him to spare the sacred temple-elephant, he behaves in an aggressively nonchalant way:

**Natraj – Perhaps you are worried we might
ask (you) about collections... (For the sacred
function at the temple)...**

**Vasu – Who? Me worried? (He laughed
devilishly)... A hundred of you will have to
worry before you catch me worried.”²⁴**

As against the sentimental outlook of Natraj, Sastri and their companions scrutinize the breakdown of the joint-family system. Vasu toys with a modern scientific outlook of a taxidermist (not a zoo-keeper), improving on nature with the help of science. He is a threat to the old Hindu culture of Malgudi. Vasu's diet confirms how strong he is:

**I had to eat a hundred almonds every
morning and wash them down with half a seer
of milk; two hours later six eggs with honey,
at lunch chicken and rice, at night vegetables
and fruits. Not everyone can hope this diet,
but I was lucky in finding a man who enjoyed
stuffing me like that... In a few months I**

would also snap chains, twist iron bars, and pulverize granite.²⁵

Whenever Vasu returns to Natraj's attic of the press – which he had occupied not as a tenant but a guest, his jeep is loaded with bloody objects. He keeps a wooden chest filled with eyes, round ones, small ones, red ones and black circles. William Walsh rightly observes:

Vasu is not only the present as opposed to the past, he is also a darker influence opposed to light and grace. Natraj and his friends express a style of life and habit of sensibility sanctioned by the experience of generations. Vasu disrupts arrangements... He has a nihilistic and menacing air which becomes in the Indian context a force not negotiable on human terms.²⁶

That is why; Vasu takes his place in the Malgudian community as a *rakshasa*, a demon, the formidable side of life. It is nothing but his death which brings about freedom and comfort to Malgudi and its simple, but self-centered community. The frailest of animals, the mosquito, helps in killing this demon-incarnate. It all shows how Narayan is a skillful artist in presenting such a self – assertive man as Vasu who dies by his own hammer-fist hand and the terror-stricken of Malgudi once again heave a sigh of relief.

Fake saints and real *Sannyasi* have also attracted Narayan to delineate them in his novels. Right from his second novel, *The Bachelor of Arts* he has dealt with the problem of renunciation with abiding interest. Chandran, the hero of *The Bachelor of Arts* goes out of home and becomes a *Sannyasi* for some time. His conscience disallows him to deceive the innocent village folks who take him to be a great *Sannyasi*. As a result he throws out the ochre – coloured garb and returns home to

begin with a new life of a normal and hopeful man. This theme of renunciation is similarly explored in *The Dark Room* in which Savitri runs away from home and husband and begins to serve in the village temple as a sweeper. She also returns to her hateful home and sulks in the dark room creating little effect on her erring husband.

Narayan introduces the fake sainthood thrust upon Raju in *The Guide*. The unscrupulous Raju is overtaken by Nemesis and in the process he finds himself in prison for a small fraud of forgery. After he soon becomes famous and attracts a crowd of devotees. The critical circumstances force him to undertake fast for a number of days during which he is allowed by his conscience to let his mind roam and touch the depths of morbid and fantastic thought. It is not the compulsive philosophy of Raju which moulds him into a real saint but the constant service of Velan and the seething humanity of Mangal which moves his heart to make the penance a thundering success, "Why not give the poor devil a chance? Raju said to himself, instead of hankering after food which one could not get anyway. He felt enraged at the persistence of food thoughts. With a sort of vindictive resolution he told himself, "I will chase away all thoughts of food. For the next ten days I shall eradicate all thoughts of tongue and stomach from my mind" (p. 238). This resolution gives him a peculiar strength and he is able to develop on these lines, "If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly? For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort; for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him new strength to go through with the ordeal" (p. 238).

Raju achieves martyrdom at last when a real saint emerges in his heart to serve the humanity and the universe. It is owing to the transformation of his character; his personality is relatively passive. Desirelessness is the ultimate outcome of Indians, and in this way Raju has realized the reality, by renouncing everything. It will not be an exaggeration to state that it is Narayan who know to transform the

common man into the exceptional being. Of course, there are no Hamlets and Othello's in his fiction, any great intellectuals or statesmen among his characters, but he is well-acquainted with the glory of Indian saints and seers, He seems to believe that the self –improvement is the best improvement and here lies his greatness both as the man and creator of unique personalities.

However, among his female characters, he generally relies on portraying two kinds of women as is the case with men. And these two kinds include typical Indian housewife and ultra-modern, fashionable, butterfly type of women. Among these female characters, Savitri, Sushila, Meenakshi (appearing respectively in *The Dark Room*, *The English Teacher* and *The Financial Expert*) fall in the first category. These women are traditional, docile, modest, gentle, religious and affectionate. They are deeply concerned with welfare of their husband and children. Among these women Narayan also presents a variety at times such as Krishnan's mother and Chandran's mother in *The English Teacher* and *The Bachelor of Arts*. These women though equally loyal to their husband and children, are, however, more dominating and free in their actions. As opposed to these wise and loving housewives, Narayan frequently portrays nagging women like the headmaster's wife in *The English Teacher* and the captain's wife in *A Tiger for Malgudi*.

The grandmothers and aunts are also portrayed with a realistic touch as in *Swami & Friends Waiting for the Mahatama* and *The Painter of Signs*. Sambu's mother in *Second Opinion* thought standing as a pole apart from her son in the matter of marriage is really Indian mother. There is another variety of women-Shanta Bai in *The Dark Room*, Rosie in *The Guide* and Rangi in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* – who belong to the seductive or butterfly-type of women. Shanta Bai belongs to the species of artful and cunning flirts, whose only vocation lies in satisfying their own whims and caprices. She is able to tempt Ramani in her seductive grip. Being a professional dancer Rangi is crude and seldom feels ashamed of her alluring designs, acts and ways of life. Rosie too is obsessive and does not come up to the mark of a domestic woman.

There is another type of self-assertive female characters who appear in *Waiting for the Mahatama* and *The Painter of Signs*, Bharati and Daisy are devoted to their missions and at the same time they exhibit no reluctance to boy-friends. Daisy, more particularly, is a strange girl who knows perfectly well how to tackle a simple and feeble-minded Raman and get his whole-hearted co-operation in her mission. Both Sriram and Raman appear to be docile to their lady-love. The post-Independence period has produced such self-assertive women who can show manly-prowess better than men.

Apart from these chief characters, there is equally a galaxy of minor characters in Narayan's fiction. They appear to be unimportant and the lower people of Malgudian (South Indian) society. Mari and Ponni in *The Dark Room*, the cart boy and his companions in *Swami and Friends*, Kanni and Gurupad in *Waiting for the Mahatama*, Muthu, the petty tea-shopkeeper in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* and Gaffur and Velan in *The Guide* are some of the examples of this unimportant section of society. It is evident that Narayan, to a great extent, is traditionalist in respect of characterization. However, he has a large variety of loveable characters that emerge from the soil of South India and in course of their knowledge and experience develop a sense of belonging to the whole humanity. They are a believable blend of virtues and weaknesses as all human beings are.

Narayan's novels and short stories breathe an aroma of the typical Indian life. This Indianness is reflected in a content and form so identical as to guarantee the artistry of the whole. The value system and point of view emerge in a different kind of narrative, plot structure, dialogue and characterization. The middle class people who populate his canvas mark his works as Indian from within and outside all the way.

Narayan is seldom self-conscious, particularly unimitative in regard to Western attitudes and styles seen in some of his contemporary writers – Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and V.S. Naipaul. He does not insist upon cause-and-effect

psychology, the worldly humanism, affirmation of reality and importance of empirical things. In spite of his focus of attention to see absurdity in human behavior, he has a little sense of tragedy, no passion to reform the people and institutions. Narayan seems to consider that the novel is the least satisfactory form for dealing with social ills. And in this way, he differs from Mulk Raj Anand who reflects his passion to improve the society.

Here in lies the clue to Narayan's Indianness. His characters are bewildered by the problems of existence and they get happiness and freedom only when the mundane world appears to them as ultimately insignificant. For them the real world is the eternal static world of absolute being, when they have been confirmed fully about the irrationality of the worldly existence of human beings. It is then they come to realize that the man of wisdom, the sage is capable of viewing the turmoil of existence with serenity, detachment and tolerant amusement, faintly, pitying curiosity, Narayan tries to fictionalize the permanent and transitional values through the comic and ironic mode of fiction.

In this way, his fiction mirrors modern India deep-rooted in ancient traditions and caught up in the crucible of change. The Sarayu River, the Mempi hills, the Mempi forest, the caves and temples are depicted not just to compose the texture of the external landscape; they signify the elements of consciousness and deep-rooted, affirmative Indian vision. The typical Indian protagonist of Narayan's novel begins as a fallen angel having a marked potential or unconquerable will for the quest of truth. He evolves gradually the necessary vision. That is why, his characters move from experience to innocence. Raju in *The Guide*, Margayya in *The Financial Expert*, Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets*, move from innocence to wisdom, symbolized by the still point, the calm of mind, the placidity in attitude with all passions spent.

Narayan does not depict the horrors of the partition days in his novels and in this way his India is free from the problem of communalism. He depicts the struggle for independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi only in *Waiting for the*

Mahatama but his concern is little with the proper movement. The portrayal of Mahatama Gandhi signifies only in the matter of untouchability. In this way, Narayan's India is not very much different from the real India.

Since Malgudi is populated by the lower middle class people lost in the problems of their own lives, on the surface it appears to be the partial depiction of India having no place for the down-trodden and the sophisticated people of upper class society. But Narayan is one of the few writers who do not overstep their self-imposed boundaries of creative endeavour. Politics, war, sex, crime, topical problems and the like which a novelist generally exploits to keep pace with the moving wheel of time have little temptation for him. To him war seems to be the negation of life. It has little place in his positive acceptance of life. Incidental descriptions of sex in accordance with the requirement of the themes occur in *The Guide*, *Waiting for the Mahatama* and *The Painter of Sings*. The Man-Eater Vasu in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* and Kailas in *The Bachelor of Arts* are shown to have criminal passion in themselves.

But they appear to be exaggerated as their actions are limited to their personal whims. Kailas is a drunkard and debauch and Vasu is not a man-eater in the real sense of the term as he is referred to by Sastri time and again. He is an embodiment of a perverted modern man who has little sense of Indian morality rooted in the ancient culture of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharat*. The world of Narayan's fiction is populous with the example of buffoons, prostitutes, adulterers, pick-pockets, money-grubbers, drunkards and would be gangsters, but there is no dearth of virtuous people in it. There is the astrologer who said things that pleased and astonished everyone because his mystical psychology is based on sagacity and shrewd guess work with a matter-of-fact realization that, "Mankind's troubles' could be analysed in terms of marriage, money and the tangles of human ties."²⁷ The postman who is acquainted with everyone's business and is as, "...a part and parcel of their existence, their hopes, aspirations and activities."²⁸

There is the *Talkative Man* who is an irrepressible storyteller relying on anecdotes, a jack of all trades who once brought the municipal statue of Sir Frederick Lawley; Desi, the bridegroom, who was teased into believing that a Madras film-star was inclining to marry him. There is Mani, the mighty- good- for- nothing, who for ever failed his school examinations yet secretly pitied his classmates because he believed that “he got valuable hints from the school clerk who was not only the ‘omniscient’ but also knew all the questions papers of all the classes.”²⁹

Swaminathan’s Granny who, when her: grandson disappears, prays to the God of the Thirupathi Hill’s for his safe return, and on his reappearance prepares to make offerings to the God “to whom alone she owed the safe return of the child.”³⁰ There is Savitri in *The Dark Room* who rebels against Ramani’s bullying and indifference by running away from home and pre-maturely attempting to enter the third stage of Hindu life. Her cook who always has a perennial excuse for being late for work because ‘No two clocks agree.’ “If she wants him to be punctual, she should buy him a watch” (p. 8). All such happenings are usual in India and in this way the whole atmosphere of Malgudi is charged with the aroma of the typical Indian life.

The departure of the British has brought about greater changes in Malgudi. These changes are symbolized by the new challenges occurring in the placid pools of the town. The old generation continues to act as if nothing has happened the new generation of their grown-up children is too aware of a world outside India. The Validity of horoscopes is interrogated in *The Bachelor of Arts*. However, the marriage is permissible within castes. The young quarrels with the old, go away from Malgudi to England, America, eat beef and marry foreigners. They return sometimes to vex and haunt and disturb the uneventful atmosphere of the town. The inward glance of Malgudi is related to India which is being disturbed by new changes.

With the rapid growth of the town, industry arrives. The revolt of the generation marks the arrival of the twentieth century. It is no longer the same old Malgudi of pious people whose love had got no bounds. It is crowded by adventurers,

film stars, pimps and prostitutes. On the one hand, they pollute the atmosphere of the town and corrupt the simple and common Malgudi mans, on the other hand they evoke pessimism through their activities and affect the natives with a number of problems. But as the spirits of Malgudi protects its citizens, the outsiders are overpowered and reduced to nothing as Vasu is killed mysteriously by his own ego and the deeply-hidden seeds of self-destruction in his overbearing personality. In this way, Narayan seems to emphasize time and again in a series of novels and a number of short-stories that those who are uprooted from their own indigenous culture and are led to revolt against the well-established social order have to face unaccountable trials and tribulations.

This happens almost to all outsiders - Rosie in *The Guide* is left by her husband Marco for treachery she has committed along with Raju, Dr. Pal in *The Financial Expert* is belabored by Margayya when he is caught with Balu and undignified women of the town, Grace in *The Vendor of Sweets* finds herself nowhere when Mali is apprehended by the police for having gone against the riles of excise. Shanty, the butterfly-actress in *Mr. Sampath* is also led to frustration at last. It is only Shanta Bai in *The Dark Room* who remains unaffected and unpunished by the spirit of the place. But she is an exception. And exceptions are everywhere. Archer Rosanne aptly points out how Malgudi brings alive the India of foreigners' dreams:

Here is India alive: the bazaar shops, decorated with pictures of Gandhi, selling spices chickpeas, twists of sugar, pockets of cigarettes; streets crowded with children, bullocks, children, dogs and buses; small smoky temples, full of faded marigolds and the sound of drums; the curds, the rice, the little fried cakes; the horoscopes and marriage...the marvelously practical mysticism. Here are the townsmen, their roots

**in the village and their sons in Albert Mission
College.³¹**

Narayan portrays the contemporary India in *Waiting for the Mahatama* which revives the memory of the days of Indian struggle for freedom. In *Swami and Friends* the children echo the vociferous slogans of their elders and ponder over the problem of slavery under the British. But as the author shows little sympathy for the agitators or what they agitated for, his interest is kindled by the brave talk of the youngsters, whom he ought to have seen during his schooldays, collection in street corners and echoing the hyperbolic words of their elders.

Even in *Waiting for the Mahatama* Narayan's focus of attention is centralized on the live-affair of Sriram and Bharati. However the troubled times are portrayed realistically. In *The Painter of Signs* the family-planning campaign that washed off the congress government of its feet in 1977 is projected in order to give a glimpse of India of Late Mrs. Indira Gandhi's period. It is, therefore, clear that Indian atmosphere continues both in Narayan's novels and short stories. Human relationships particularly domestic relationships are treated interestingly and whenever the accepted norms are violated, the normalcy is at stake. The influence of the family is conducive in the restoration of normalcy and the establishment of order. The stress on the role of the family is unmistakably Indian.

Popular superstitions, rituals and beliefs in gods, demons and ghosts, much that is fantastic and imaginary, provide a glimpse of the rural India as depicted in *The Guide* and *The Bachelor of Arts* and *The Painter of Signs* communication with the spirit of the dead and fasting to the extent of propitiating the rain-god and the credulous faith of Indians in *Sadhus*, *Sannyasis* are still prevalent in Indian society, more particularly in South Indian where people are religious first and anything else thereafter. Such beliefs are unmistakably woven into the fabric of Narayan's novels, which recognizes little logic. Frequent references to Indian myths and legends, the exploitation of such motifs as cobras and dancing girls, as *devadasis*, the Indian wild

life as in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* and *A Tiger For Malgudi*, river, lotuses of different colors are symbolical and continue to dominate the atmosphere of Narayan's hypothetical world of Malgudi.

But it is evident that they are depicted, more by way of indelicacy than by way of advocacy. Individual feelings, emotions and actions, explorations of hidden human conflicts, human relations within the limits of the family tend to kindle Narayan's imagination vigorously.

Beliefs and superstitions are universal but India with its deep religious background and age-old customs and traditions abounds in them. R.K. Narayan worked as the Editor and Publisher of a journal, *Indian Thought*. He had a great design in his mind, "to phrase our culture properly to utilize the English language as a medium for presenting our cultural heritage."³² Beliefs and superstitions are part of Indian culture. So a novelist like R.K. Narayan cannot write a novel without them.

As there is no clear-cut boundary between beliefs and superstitions, still there are some beliefs which are completely lacking in rational justification. There will be no hesitation in calling them superstition. But there are beliefs which are accepted by majority of the population as having valid and just ground for believing them. They may be religious or secular nature. There may be superstitious beliefs and superstitious customs and practices. Customs and traditions are founded on the principle of perception. Both beliefs and customs or traditions may be outdated because whatever was perceived or proved useful at a particular time or place may not be perceived or proved useful if time and place change.

Beliefs may be classified in two types: religious and secular. R.K. Narayan's characters believe in God, fate, various physical forms of God as enunciated in Hindu mythology and his human incarnations. Such beliefs have been classified as religious beliefs. The concept of God the supreme force behind the creation and regulation of the universe is best expressed by the Town Hall professor in R.K. Narayan's *The painter of Signs*. Raman meets the Town Hall professor sitting cross-legged on the

parapet delivering a spiritual message to the small circle of listeners. He says, “So why worry about anything. God is in all this. He is one and indivisible. He is yesterday, tomorrow and today. If you think it over properly, you will never sigh for anything coming or going (p. 25).

Although this professor is called eccentric, as often philosophers are called, his message given to Raman proves much helpful to him. The God, these professor talks about, is the God worshipped in the *Vedas*: the God without a shape, the spirit of all living and non living things. The same concept of God is help by the master of the Tiger in *A Tiger for Malgudi*. The Tiger, with the help of the great spiritual strength of his master, was also able to form his own concept as he says, “He described God in his own term as the creator, the Great Spirit pervading every creature, every rock and tree and the sky and the stars, a source of power and strength. Later when my master questioned me about it I said that God must be an enormous tiger, spanning the earth and the sky, with a tail capable of encircling the globe, claws that could hook on the clouds and teeth that could grind the mountain, and possessing, of course, immeasurable strength to match” (pp. 157-58). Most of R.K. Narayan’s characters believe in many gods following the common practice in the Hindu society. These gods are worshipped in their physical forms: human and non-human. The idol worship or worshipping the picture of gods is the result of such beliefs.

Characters of R.K Narayan’s novels also believe in sacred things and sacred places. Raman’s aunt and Sriram’s granny go to Benares in their last days to end their life. There is double benefit in staying at Benares. They take a bath in the holy river Ganges thrice a day and pray to God in the temple. It is believed that taking a bath in the river Ganges dissolves their sins and hence smoothes out their passage to heaven after their death. Raman’s aunt says in *The Painter of Signs*, “It is ambition of my generation to conclude this existence at Kasi to be dissolved finally at the Ganges. That is the most auspicious end of one’s life” (p. 152).

Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets* is extremely happy when he receives a letter from his son Mali, from America. But when he learns that he eats beef, his whole being shudders with repulsion because the cow is a sacred animal for any Hindu and eating beef is prohibited. Similarly Sriram's granny does not want to sit on a canvas chair presented to her by her grandson because she thinks it is made up of leather, probably of the cow-hide, and hence she cannot pollute herself by sitting on it.

Vasu, in *The Man Eater of Malgudi* exploits man's belief in a sacred bird like Garuda which is believed to be the messenger of God Vishnu. People stop on the road to salute it when it circles in the sky. Keeping in mind such a belief of the people, he stuffs this bird and sells them at about fifty rupees each. Similarly people, a sacred tree is generally associated with the divine that is why people worship it. It is found generally in the village that some stones are put under the tree and people worship them as gods. Whenever there is a temple or shrine or any other religious spot, *Peepal* tree is sure to be found, possibly due to its shade giving capacity.

In Narayan's *The Guide* there is a large platform under a *peepal* tree at whose root a number of stone figures are embedded, which is often anointed with oil and worshipped. It is shady, cool and spacious so it is a town hall platform for Mangala. Jagan's Gayatri temple is also surrounded by *peepal* and other trees.

People of Malgudi also believe in the illumination of mind through mantras or prayers. Such types of prayers offered to Sun God or mantras are recited purely for the illumination of mind not for any other purpose. Natraj in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* rises in the morning and sets out to the river for ablutions. He is himself the narrator of the novel, "When the cast glowed a sat for a moment on the sand reciting a prayer to the sun to illumine my mind. The signal for me to break off from contemplation was the jingle of the ox-bells as country cart forded Nallappa's grove, bringing loads of vegetables, corn and fuels from the nearby village to the market" (p. 5). His mind so wraps in contemplation that he experiences timelessness. It is but for jingle of the bell that he returns to the normal world.

Srinivas in *Mr. Sampath* worships a small image of Nataraj which was given to him by his grandmother when he was a boy. He never starts his day's work without spending a few minutes before this image, "He often sat before it, contemplated its proportion and addressed it thus: 'oh, God! You are trampling a demon under your foot and you show us a rhythm, though you appear to be still I grasp the symbol but vaguely, you hold a flare in your hand. May a ray of that light illumine my mind?'" (pp. 18-19)

It is several times in almost every novel of Narayan that prayers are offered by different characters. But such prayers are offered for material purposes. The most interesting is Swami's prayer offered to God when his paper boat and its cargo wrecked in the gutter, either for saving the life of ant or if dead, for the smooth passage to heaven. Again he prays to God for getting six pies which he requires for purchasing a hoop. He believes that through prayer pebbles will be converted into coins. When it does not, he is about to abuse God but only for fear that he will send disaster to him, he changes his mind. Further he prays to God and promises offering to him for his safe escape from the forest at night when he was found conscious next morning by the forester. Although such prayers coming from the depth of our heart does not seem to fulfill our wish in the way we like but purpose is generally served. Although Swami did not get six pies from pebbles but got a loop. His prayer was responded in the forest at right and he was saved.

But Ponni's desire in R.K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* for getting a child was not fulfilled even after she prayed and promised offerings to gods. But solution of her husband's problem of getting a job for Savitri was solved through initiation of Goddess of wealth and had got his only son Balu after praying for twelve years and going to Tirupati. Natraj's deep prayer which exhorted his whole being for saving the elephant, Kumar was responded. Jagan also offers coconuts to Lord Ganesha when he receives a letter from his son Mali who had gone to America for getting a training of the novel producing machine. All the lady characters of Narayan's novels with a few

exceptions have staunch faith in the prayer to God. They pray and promise offerings to gods whatever they face any problem and their prayer is generally responded.

Most of Narayan's characters including all the heroes in his novels believe in fate. They are called unheroic heroes. Whatever they achieve in their life is only due to fate. It is only fate which makes Raju a martyr in *The Guide*. He confesses it to Velan, "He drew his finger across his brow and said whatever is written here will happen. How can we ever help it?" (p. 20)

In *The Bachelor of Arts* Chandran's mother accepts the supremacy of fate especially with regard to marriage. In spite of Chandran's and the whole family's sincere effort, Chandran was not able to marry Malathi and he became a *Sannyasi* out of frustration. When he returned home after he became saturated from his life, his parents settled his marriage and he was happy with the girl of his parent's choice. His mother says, "It is all settled already, the husband of every girl and wife of every man. It is nobody's choice" (p. 159).

In *The Dark Room*, Mari thinks that he should have left Savitri to her fate. Even if he had not saved her from being drowned, she would have been saved if fate had wished so. These are a few examples, but the supremacy of fate is woven in the every texture of R.K. Narayan's novels. There are some beliefs which are called Brahminic because Brahmins are the first to believe in these beliefs. Most of the main characters are vegetarian in Narayan's novels. As a Brahmin boy it is unconceivable to Swaminathan that God should be non-vegetarian.

That is why when Ebenezer criticizes Lord Krishna of stealing butter and dancing with girl, he criticizes Jesus of being non-vegetarian. A Brahmin's whole body wrenches with disgust at the very thought of non-vegetarian diet like Sriram's in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, "Sriram wrenched at the mention of chicken. He made a wry face: 'Chicken! Chicken! I cannot stand the thought of it,' he said, his face twisting with disgust, I do not eat those things! He cried that I have not even eaten cakes because they contain eggs" (p. 132).

R.K. Narayan's characters believe and practice non-violence. In *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, after putting the life of an ant in danger Swami feels regret and prays for its soul and Nataraj completely fed up with the killings of Vasu says about himself and his family, "I had been brought up in a house where we swatted flies. We had to do it without the knowledge of our elders. I remember particularly one of my grand uncles, who used the little room on the pylon and who gave me a coin every morning to buy sugar for the ants, and kept an eye on me to see that I delivered the sugar to the aunts in various corners of our house. He used to declare with approval from all the others, 'you must never scare away the crows and sparrows that come to share our food, they have as much right as we to the corn that grows in the field'. He watched with rapture squirrels, mice and birds busily depleting the granary in our house" (pp. 66-67).

Narayan's characters also believe in extraordinary power of Gurus, Saints or *Sannyasis* as per the traditional norms of Indian society. They are also revered and respected and are highly estimated persons. Chandran's mother in *The Bachelor of Arts* is very much afraid of the curse of the holy man who steals flowers from her garden everyday early in the morning. Before noticing the colour of the loincloth of this *Sannyasi* she tells her husband to surrender him to the police. But the moment she comes to know that he wears ochre dress, she is seized with fear, because the curse of the holy man might fall on the family and tells him respectfully to go.

The old man, Srinivasa's landlord in *Mr. Sampath*, calls himself a true *Sannyasi* and says that a true *Sannyasi* has no need to live on anything more than the leavings of God. His statement is ironical because he is not a true *Sannyasi*. He leads a simple life only for saving money. He spends his money on his relatives and feels pleasure in depositing the whole amount he collects as the rent in Saryu street post-office bank. But what this old man tells is true in case of a true *Sannyasi*. They believe in prayer, and penance and complexities in life may prove obstruction in their spiritual development.

Sannyasi are so highly esteemed in the society that even a fake *Sannyasi* like Raju is revered and worshipped though he does not allow Velan and other villagers to prostrate themselves at his feet, because he does not want to usurp God's right. Villagers' respect for Raju is increased due to his high mindedness. Gradually people's faith in Swami becomes so strong that they gather in crowds around him for seeking cure to their diseases. Raju prescribes them herbs, and presses their belly and they are cured even by the mere touch of his hands. Later on people's faith in Swami gets so much established that they press him to take a fast for rain and their faith in Raju proves right. He had himself narrated earlier about the importance of such penance in causing rain. Not only have that villagers believed that he would travel to the Himalayas just by a thought because of his strange yogic powers.

In *The Painter of Signs*, people assess the quarrelsome priest of the temple, who helps the innocent woman in getting a child, though in an ironical sense, in high esteem. He is believed to talk to forest animals and birds and command spirit. R.K. Narayan, like other novelists, also believes in the basic philosophy – the survival of the good and the defeat of the evil. This belief gets full expression in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* Vasu, the modern Bhasmasura, is ultimately destroyed by himself and the temple elephant, Kumar is saved from being killed by him. The whole Malgudi town is waiting for his distraction especially Srinivas who gives him shelter but whom, in return, he tortures in different ways, Sastri aptly says that if the world is to survive, every person, possessing evil powers is to be destroyed and the supremacy of the good is to be established. Even the minor characters seem to believe that God cannot help the wrong doers.

Beliefs of this sort prevail among characters of Narayan's novels which might still be called beliefs in the modern world with a completely changed situation. But there are beliefs which have completely lost their rational ground and are treated as superstition.

Astrology is a science and the astrologers claim that everything in astrology is based on the calculation of movement of stars. Whatever they say has got some rational explanation. They may be practically verified. J. Abbot writes about the power of Time after a sincere study of different powers Indians believe in as:

There are moments of *sakti* when the movement of the stars and planets produce a *parvakal*, there are other moments when a combination of elements of time produces a *muhurta* the auspiciousness of which is correlated to the horoscope of the person who chooses those moments for action. On the other hand, they are *dies nefesti*, and in all moments of great power there lurks the elements of danger which characterizes all powers.³³

People develop interest in astrology day by day in modern times. There is rarely a magazine without astrological column. Several astrological magazines are published-keeping in mind public's interest in this occult science. Politicians, journalists, businessmen and different professionals depend on astrologers and at the same time they criticize them in public. They call it superstition. They dare not give it the status of science. The correctness of forecast depends on the person who forecasts and how much knowledge and experience he has.

R.K. Narayan himself believes in astrology, when he was young, he did not believe much in such things. William Walsh explains that is why at the time of marriage, "he married the girl of his choice even when astrologers forbade him to marry because the position of Mars in his horoscope was not suitable for marriage."³⁴ Mars in the seventh house of the horoscope kills the life partner, if the other partner's horoscope also does not suffer from the same flaw. And the result was obvious, his wife died only after a few years of their marriage.

The English Teacher is Narayan's autobiographical novel. The use of astrology in his novel is at the time of marriage and in fixing an auspicious time for beginning a project. No marriage in Narayan's novel takes place if the horoscopes are incompatible. The best example of the victim of horoscope is Chandran who had an infatuation for Malathi. Even Malathi's father Mr. D.W. Krishna Ayer expressed his regret to his misalliance with a family like Chandran's father. He believes in the horoscope and the movement of stars but Chandran's father does not, why bother with horoscopes asked Chandran's father, personally I have no faith in them. You must not say that said Sastrigal. How are we to know whether two persons brought together will have health, happiness, harmony, and long life, if we do not study their horoscopes individually and together?" (p. 78). And the result of the failure of alliance was that Chandran becomes a *Sannyasi* out of frustration. Only after eight months of wandering he returned home and could become normal.

No marriage in R.K. Narayan's novels takes place without matching the horoscopes whether it is the marriage of Krishnan or Jagan or Nataraj or Balu, all the marriages are performed only after consulting the astrologers. Astrologers are consulted to fix a date for the marriage in Narayan's novels. Chandran's marriage with the girl of his parent's choice is performed on an auspicious date. The lawyer of *The Painter of Signs* consults the astrologer regarding the inauguration of his professional career as a lawyer. His astrologer says that the letters of the signboard should be slanted to the left because he believes that left slant is auspicious for the lawyer's ruling star. In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* the inauguration of poet's book *Radha Kalyan* is done in consultation with the astrologer.

Characters in R.K. Narayan's novels consult astrologers for knowing their future. The headmaster of the children's school where Krishnan devoted his life after resigning his job as a lecturer in Albert Mission College knows the exact date and time of his death after consulting an astrologer. When Chandran goes to the post-office in the dress of a *Sannyasi* to send a telegram to his home, the postmaster doubts

that he might have come to extort some money by telling his fortune. Chandran has to convince him that he does not know astrology and has come with some other purpose.

Although such pseudo-astrologers help reduce the value of astrology but even for a great scholar of this science, it is a science with equivocal meaning, it cannot tell anything with certainty. This is the reason why it is not treated as science in the modern age in which everything is predicted exactly as it is and there is no change of equivocation in the modern science. So nowadays astrology has become superstition.

There was a time when ghosts, devils, evil spirits and evil eyes had got sanction in the society but nowadays these are treated as superstitions. There may be some such places on the earth where the light of modern civilization has not yet been able to reach but such places are very rare. Especially in the medieval age when a person fell sick, it was thought that he had become a victim of some evil spirit and was treated accordingly.

In modern India there are some people who believe in ghosts, devils etc. But the India in which R.K. Narayan was brought up was rampant with such beliefs. So supernatural beings figure in the early novels of Narayan. In *Swami and Friends*, Narayan's youngest hero an experience of devil or ghost at ghostly hour at night when he was caught in the forest after disappearing from his school. He went and the night fell suddenly. Different shapes started to appear in the darkness of night. His nerve quivered with strain. Narayan has described how ghosts and devils are purely psychic creations. While considering the definition of superstition Jahoda Gustav rightly points out:

The emotional attributes are essential factors for creating superstition since otherwise it will fail altogether to affect behavior and thus not be very interesting.³⁵

In *The Dark Room* Mari, when he is returning from one of his nocturnal visits with a few withered betel leaves, saw an apparition. He thought it might be Mohini, the temptress Devil, who way laid lonely wayfarers and sucked their blood. He watched it with fascination and horror and presently Mohini rose and walked into the river. He further says, “Ah, the Devil can walk on water; at what inauspicious moment did I leave home today? She has not seen me yet. I dare not move. By this time the apparition was in deep water and let out a cry. No, no, I cannot die, I must go back home... And then there was silence. Mari had by now got over his first fright, and said to himself the Devil cannot talk and the Devil cannot draw. He ran down the strips” (p. 132). And he rescued Savitri who was making an attempt to commit suicide.

In *The Financial Expert* the night watchman notices that the ghost of the Registrar of the co-operative society, who had spent all his money in the construction of the co-operative bank has been watching everything going on in the bank in a sad mood from within a teak frame suspended on the central landing. It was but natural for the ghost of the Registrar to feel sad and frustrated because all the principles of cooperation for which he had scarified his life were dissolving under his eyes.

In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* people believe that dogs bark at night because ghosts are visible to them. But neither Nataraj nor Vasu has seen a ghost. In *A Tiger for Malgudi*, villagers believe that the Devil takes away animals and are even prepared to perform propitiatory ceremonies in their village. When the fact was that the man-eater was reducing the number of their cattle’s.

In *The English Teacher* when Susila fell sick, which, ultimately caused her death, her mother was convinced that evil eye had fallen on her. She was definite that if Sushila had not been allowed to go into the lavatory, she would not have fallen sick. She invited a man to exercise the effect of evil eye. He uttered some *mantras* with closed eyes, took a pinch of sacred ash and rubbed it on her forehead, and tied to her arm a talisman strung in yellow thread. The doctor came and saw the goings no

but he did not want to frustrate the old lady by giving the adverse remark about these people. When *Swamiji* left, he uttered “May God helps you to see the end of your anxieties” (p. 72). The end of the anxieties was not the recovery of the patient from her illness but the end of her life itself.

Such types of equivocations are very common in occult matters and hence they are treated as superstitions. In *Mr. Sampath* Ravi’s mother calls a group of men to exorcize her son’s madness. These men claim that they know all about ghosts that haunt this house the people talk about and one of them has got into Ravi, so they will rest only after driving him out.

The study of all the ghosts and devils in Narayan’s novels reveals that he also believes in the emotional element in such fears. These are purely psychological things and have got no concrete existence as such. Hence they are aptly being treated as superstitions. The human mind created heaven or hell because it was essential for establishing order in the society. Such concepts helped people refraining from any such act which is not morally sanctioned by the society. In *Swami and Friends* Rajan narrates a hair-raising account of the torture in hell if one fosters enmity among friends, “He would be made to stand mark naked, on a pedestal of red-hot iron. There were bee-hives all around with bees as big as lemons. If the sinner stepped down from the pedestal, he would have to put his foot on immense scorpions and centipedes that crawled about in the room in hundreds – (A shudder went through the company) – The sinner would have to stand thus for a month, without food or sleep. At the end of month he would be transferred to another place, a very narrow bridge over a lake of boiling oil. The bridge was so narrow that he would be able to keep only one food on it a time. Even on the narrow bridge there was plenty of wasp nests and cactus, and he would be goaded from behind to move on. He would have to balance on one foot, and then on another for ages and ages, to keep himself from failing into a steaming lake below, and move on indefinitely. . . ” (p. 46). This is the exact situation which had given rise to the creation of heaven or hell.

Raman in *The Painter of Signs* thinks that Daisy, in her previous birth, must have been Queen Victoria or in a still earlier incarnation, Rani Jhansi, the warrior Queen of Indian history. This concept was also supported by Lord Buddha, so it is not just to classify it as a superstition. I think this concept would have come into being when human mind had lost control over his situation and had given away him to fate.

There are some other superstitions which may be called the beliefs of the Medieval Age. The coachman in *Swami and Friends* tells Swaminathan that with the help of some special metal pot and some special herbs, he is able to convert copper coin into silver. He could even convert copper into gold but it is difficult to find out herbs required for this purpose. Alchemy was the common practice in the Middle Age but nowadays it has become superstition.

In *The Dark Room*, Kamala and Sumati don't dare to look into cook's eye because the belief was that a person who looked into the cook's eye at certain moment would be turned into stone. They are told that for many furlongs and miles stones were once human beings who had dared to look into cook's eye. Later on the Government people chiseled them into shape and carved miles and furlongs on them. There is also superstition regarding omen. While starting on a journey, if one meets a man bearing the pot of foaming today it is the sign of good omen. Sastrigal in *The Bachelor of Arts* has an experience of such omen when he is coming to match the horoscope of Chandran and Malathi. But his belief deceives him. Malathi's and Chandran's horoscopes did not match. Raman in *The Painter of Signs* regards number three as the sign a bad omen. He justifies his belief by giving example of three witches of Macbeth. So three women workers who came to meet Daisy is shattered.

It is quite clear that only a child can believe in the superstitions mentioned above. Such beliefs have got no rational basis in the modern world and hence they are treated as superstitions. In addition to this, a few rituals and practices are also found in R.K. Narayan's novels and most of them are kept in the category of superstitions. Among such practices and rituals, caste system and untouchability gets frequent

mention in his novels. Ponni, in *The Dark Room* tries to guess Savitri's mind that a Brahmin would not stay with her or touch her food because she belongs to lower caste. Ponni says, "Or stay in our house. I will clear a part for you and never come there. I will buy a new post for you, and rice, and you can cook your own food. I will never come that way. I will never cook anything in our house which may be repulsive to you. Please come with me" (p. 137).

Narayan's male characters Raman and Sriram, are ready to marry a girl of the other caste even without making enquiries about such things. Raman becomes rather frustrated when Daisy changed her mind at the eleventh hour not to marry. If Bharti had not consented to marry Sriram, he would have met the same fate as Chandran had met after he was not married to Malthi. As in the Indian society, Narayan's male characters are less superstitious than their female counterparts. The reason is obvious. The females are more emotional than males. Indian women follow their respective husbands like shadows and it is reflected in Narayan's novels.

In *The Dark Room* Savitri is a devoted wife. She tolerates all sorts of misconducts of her husband. Even when she attempts to commit suicide and fails in her attempt. She has to return home with no alternative left. Almost all the women characters of Narayan's novels with the exception of Rosie, Daisy, Bharti and commandant Sarasa are devoted wives. Although commandant Sarasa also behaves as an Indian wife, she is assertive as she should be in accordance with her profession.

Among other practices the idol worship is the most important and figures in almost all the novels of R.K. Narayan. The annual function of Radha -Krishna temple is celebrated with great pomp in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* Muthu, tea shop owner in the Memphi Hill has helped in the reconstruction of shrine and has installed a four armed goddess who protects people of that area and does not allow any accident of vehicle to happen. Raju in *The Guide* finds many stones under *peepal* tree in the Mangala Village whom people worship with great devotion.

Rituals are also elaborately described in Narayan's novels. These rituals may be related with marriage, cremation, inauguration etc. The trunk of banana tree and the strings of mango leaves are commonly used on auspicious occasions. The mango, plantains, *peepal* etc. are the primeval trees. Hence they are of immense significance for the celebration of any auspicious occasion.

Thus, to conclude Narayan is a great reformer behind mask. He exposes the ills of society in his novels. He creates his deep concern with the life and society of the middle class people. He is a minute observer of society and focuses' his attention on the social problems of the society. Some major social problems which are prevailed in Narayan's time of society and have been discussed earlier in this chapter are beliefs and superstitions, the position of Hindu wife, his understanding of middle class people etc. His observation is highly perceptive with the evils of society but he neither condemns nor reacts. He simply gives an ironical smile on the incongruities and eccentricities of society. If he sees, for example, milkman adding water into the milk, only an ironical smile is seen on his behalf. Narayan carefully sits at the fence while exposing such evils of society.

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CHAPTER - 4
CULTURAL ASPECTS

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This chapter explores how the fiction of R.K. Narayan helps in understanding the nuances of Indian culture such as traditions, customs, religious beliefs, faiths, social hierarchies, family system, bitter & sweet melodies of love and marriage, conflict between Indian and foreign cultures, gap between generations, etc., and its conflicts with some examples from his works. Narayan depicted India of his times and its customs and traditions, myths and magic's, epics and fairytales, to the outside world, in a non-serious manner. To paint the complex yet dynamic culture of India, he has chosen a bigger canvas in the form of a fictitious town called Malgudi, which is a microcosm of India. His novels reflect a true picture of India during the British rule, through the mirror of his locale, an imaginary home town Malgudi, a town somewhere in South India. Traditional concept of typical Hindu thought of status, caste, and creed are visible in his novels. The main characters are linked to these thoughts; this is discussed here as issues related to caste and creed.

The issues of caste and creed are portrayed in his novels, but these matters are left unsolved by the author. There is no constant cure suggested for their abolishment, neither are there any suggestions given for peaceful co-existence. He advocates the Gandhian ideology of being an Indian first rather than the follower of any one religion. Narayan dealt with the problems of caste in his novels in context with man-woman relationship and Indian marriages. He upholds the Hindu traditions and did not support mixed marriages, that is, inter-caste and inter-religion marriages.

In his novels, *The Guide* and *The Painter of Signs*, he raised the matter of caste in Indian culture and tried to show the disparity of cult and faith, or how differences between religions still constitute an obstacle to a legitimate and valid marriage among the Hindus in India. A Hindu in his novel can neither marry a

woman of low origin like *devdasi* (Rosie) in *The Guide*, nor a Christian girl, (Daisy). This latter is often shown as an insurmountable impediment in a Hindu marriage as seen in his novel *The Man Eater of Malgudi*.

Narayan in *The Man Eater of Malgudi* had a definite sustained mythical structure that followed the well known pattern of the story from the *puranas* where a demon grows too powerful and threatens the heavens with his elemental forces of disorder, but finally blows up like a bubble in the sea, leaving the universe as calm as before. Critics have pointed out how closely the novel recreates the old Hindu myth of *Bhasmasura*. At times Narayan uses phrase and dialogue from the characters which inscribe the role of religion in his novels like when Savitiri defines Vasu in the novel, “Every *rakshasa* gets swollen with his ego, he thinks he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him” (*The Man Eater of Malgudi*, p. 95).

There are events which show that religion, belief and faith play an important role in the life of Indian Hindus. It is depicted in the event when Narayan mentions in one of his novels *Waiting for Mahatma*, that “there are a dozen temples within the radius of fifty miles” (p. 115). The Hindu view of *karma* and *mukti* can also be seen in the novel *Waiting for Mahatma* when Kanni, the shopkeeper compels Sriram to settle an old debt of his grandmother of nine rupees and twelve annas so that the dead woman’s soul would rest in peace in the next world.

The Painter of Signs is another novel expressing the mythological view of Indian Hindus which is evident in many of the novels of R.K. Narayan. The mythological characters of holy Ganga and king Shantanu offer a parallel to the relationship between Daisy and Raman. The theme of Narayan’s novel, *The Tiger and Man* is the oneness of soul of all living beings which is so alike, its sublimation through gradual self discipline and renunciation, and the final salvation from the bondage of *karma* and the cycle of birth. According to William Walsh:

The religious sense of Indian myth is a part of Narayan's grip of reality of his particular view of human life and his individual way of placing and ordering human feeling and experience. What one can say about Narayan without qualification is that he embodies the pure spirit of Hinduism.¹

Narayan's novels are essentially stories of Indian life whose basis is religion and tradition based on their caste and community. Most of Narayan's novels trace the growth of an individual who is firmly rooted in the Indian social order that is in turn based on their religion. The protagonists - Swaminathan, Chandran, Krishnan, Ramani, Raju, Sampath, Margaya, Jagan, Sriram and Raman are literally the members of a Hindu joint family. The individual of his novels like any other Indian has to grow in this environment and his character is shaped at times under the influence of his caste and religion, from the selection of his career and the selection of his life partner. The family itself observes the age-old customs, tradition and beliefs of the Hindu religion.

Narayan in his novels present the Hindu view of *Varnasharama*, that is, the imperatives of Hindu society. *Varna* and *Ashrama* which regulate the lives of every Hindu, whether modern or traditional in India, does the same with the lives of all individuals in R.K Narayan's novels. Narayan's characters, like a fair majority of Indians, implicitly accept the manners, mores and professions of their castes. The issues of inter-caste marriages are raised in some of his novels to portray the picture of the Indian audience who frown on inter-caste marriages and outcaste the person from their caste. They can find no place in the fixed pattern of the Hindu society where matching of caste, religion and horoscope is the most important feature of Hindu marriage. This adherence to caste, religion and horoscope is quite evident in Narayan's novels. Krishnan loves the English teacher, but he marries Susila, a girl of his caste, in spite of the mismatch of their horoscopes.

Another matter of morality is evident from Narayan's most read and popular novel, *The Guide*, where Raju's mother objects to his affair with Rosie partly because she is a married woman, but largely because she is a *devdasi*, a dancing girl, whose caste is not known. Again, in his novel *The Vendor of Sweets*, Jagan the hero is shocked when his son Mali imports an American girl and intends to marry her. He does not accept her as his daughter in law and does not have peace until he succeeds in booking the girl's passage back to America. The issue of caste can be evident from the lines of Jagan, "Assured by this protestation, Jagan said, what I shall do now? About what? About Mali and that girl. The cousin gave a clear-headed statement, Get through their marriage very quickly in the hill temple. It can be arranged within a few hours. Alas! I don't know what her caste is, so how can I" (p. 86). In addition, Jagan also mentions that Gandhi fought against the caste system in India, when his daughter-in-law innocently asks what is the present status of caste-system in India?

The next event is from Narayan's novel from *The Painter of Signs* when Raman, the hero announces his decision to marry Daisy, a Christian girl. His aunt shows a lot of agitation towards this marriage and threatens to leave home for ever. Raman has to contend with this issue of caste due to the traditional force his aunt is embroiled in. The very first question she puts to him when he announces his decision to marry Daisy is, "That girl! What is her caste? Who is she? Isn't she a Christian or something...a name which is...How can you bring in a Christian?" (p. 76) Before she asks all these questions, she shows her distress and drops the vessel, as if she has lost her hold on things.

Raman's announcement to marry a girl of another community and religion touch something primordial, exposing the racial prejudices dormant in his aunt, who has slaved all her life to bring him up as her son. This decision of Raman ends in her aunt's decision to leave home for *Kasi*. The above events and dialogues expose the issues of caste and creed that take precedence in the novels of Narayan's time and again.

Narayan in his novels has limited his characters to the cultural limitations of India of that time and those male characters were often very weak and they could not break the barriers of the strong cultural effects. The culture was mainly the strict following of the caste system, creed and religion and any change or new traditions were strongly opposed. He raised the issue of caste in Indian culture and tried to show the disparity of caste and differences of religion which still bring impediments to legitimate and valid marriages among the Hindus in India. Variation of caste and creed are an indomitable barrier in a Hindu marriage in India, in his novels.

Apart from caste, there was a strong feeling of patriotism in the hearts of Indians and they were revolting against the British domination and power. Narayan beautifully depicts the characters as having a strong love of their country, despite the fact the characters are not very strong as individuals. Narayan also evaluated and exposed the issues of communalism in his various novels. Narayan created a mini-India in Malgudi, so as to bring out all the essential characteristics of Indian culture. Curiously enough, Hindu culture of which Narayan is the product has come down to us surviving the terrible shocks in the Mughal and British empires. No wonder, poets and writers sang and wrote about its glorious past. It still has tremendous impact on the minds of Indian public. Narayan writes:

The impact of life, the material and substance of our thoughts are the same everywhere in any state. Traditionally, India is *The Ramayan*, *The Mahabharat* and *The Puranas*. The value remains the same in every village, town or city.²

The main stories and characters are vividly real to most people young or old. It is possibly the reason why the traditional concepts like the *Ashramas* and *Purushastras*

in various disguises and distortion and subterfuges have influenced Narayan in portraying many of his characters in the novels.

Generally, the middle class people of the conservative Hindu society that Narayan presents in his novels are hardly ever ready to bring about reformative change; nor do they seem to receive with interest any alien influence. They are just complacent with what they possess and are absorbed in glorifying the culture to which they belong. And yet, under zealously guarded norms, mores and values, there appears simmering discontent amongst the people of new generation, who awakened to their rights and liberties, try their utmost to rise above the so-called preordained roles they have been playing for generations together. Some have gone to the extent of revolting against the established customs and traditions. But since, they are firmly rooted in them from their very childhood, their attempts prove futile, they fall back in the end to their normal station accepting defeat in life.

Hindu culture with its norms and value which Narayan depicts in his writing discussed here in two aspects - Moral and Philosophical, practically speaking, have a far-reaching effect on the minds of Indian people. Narayan faithfully presents in his novels Hindu beliefs and myths around which his themes are usually built. Being a product of Hindu culture he simply could not avoid the impact of the cultural surroundings around him.

Conservative South Indian society that Narayan presents with all its irrational customs induces a sense of futility amongst the people of new generation. Most of his characters believe that everything on earth is pre-ordained and that they are helpless creatures. Chandran, *The Bachelor of Arts* who is intensely in love with Malthi at last runs away from home because he feels frustrated with the irrational and absurd custom of telling horoscopes. *Mr. Sampath*, the cunning shark, also is impelled by the circumstance to leave Malgudi forever. Krishna, *The English Teacher*, after the death of his wife, finds solace in the world of Spirits. Raju, in *The Guide*, dies a ruined man, not because he wanted to die, but circumstances so conspire that the only

alternative before him was to become an unwilling martyr. Truly speaking, all his characters cherish a heritage of faith and values, customs and rituals and even dogmas and superstitions. As a result, they have all returned in the end to the original station accepting defeat and futility of action. Dr. Badal rightly observes:

His characters, mostly printers, journalists, teachers, shopkeepers, moneylenders, guides, astrologers, saints, students etc., are people oppressed with much the same sense of futility and helplessness generated by age-old social conventions within which there is no scope for their talents.³

Total submission largely owes to the cultural atmosphere in which they are caught. For example, Savitri in *The Dark Room* finds herself like a bamboo pole which cannot stand without any support. She has absolutely no rights in her own household. And yet she puts up with insult and maltreatment at the hands of her husband. But when she finds it all intolerable, she leaves the home to assert her individuality. However, she has no courage to face the challenges of life. In the end she comes back accepting total defeat. Janamma another character in the novel also believes that total submission to the husband leads to peace.

The dictum laid down by Manu and later moralists that a woman shall have no right is so deeply embedded in the minds of both that Ramani could bluntly tell Savitri that she has no right whatsoever. Utterly helpless she repents, “In Yama’s world the cauldron must be ready for me for the sin of talking back to a husband and disobeying him, but what could I do?”⁴ It is very shocking that even in modern times Ramani quotes the ancient epics and scriptures which enjoin upon women the strictest identification with their husbands. Even Rosie who is highly educated, and leaves her husband for the sake of her aspirations, longs to die at her husband’s doorstep. How

pathetic her words are, "...he may not amidst me over the threshold, in which event it is for better to end one's life on his doorstep."⁵

Narayan's novels are not vehicles of mass propaganda. But they depict the breakdown of feudal society and express the changed ideas concerning the family as a unit and the conflict between the old and the new. The strains of growing individualism have not spared the age-old joint family system in India. But it is gratifying to note that, though the old system is in peril, the sense of kinship is always strong. For example, Margayya and his brother are next door neighbours, and they are not on talking terms. But they are always ready to share each, other's joys and sorrows.

However, there is a considerable change in human outlook with regard to some of the cherished ideals. Daisy in *The Painter of Signs* refuses to pay obeisance to her would-be-in-laws. And Raman considers it odd to fall at anybody's feet. Daisy rebels against her parents' wishes and domestic orthodoxy. S.P. Bhardwaj rightly observes:

Narayan has certainly moved along with the times and the change in his presentation of domestic life can be clearly seen when his two novels *The Dark Room* and *The Painter of Signs* are read side by side.⁶

The perennial struggle between the young and the old has been touched in *The Vendor of Sweets*. The portrayal of Mali's character that makes his father go out in wilderness is truly a representative of the moronic mentality of present-day youths. In spite of the changes in his surroundings, Jagan continues to live up to the traditions of his times. It appears that in Jagan Narayan depicts a Karmayogi, a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi and one who tries to live in accordance with the teachings of the Gita. He represents the timeless and unchanging values of the Hindu way of life, of course, with its obscuritanism and irrationality too. But much of Jagan's pietism is

humbug. Tara Malhotra writes, “His artistic pose his Benthemite zeal for public service, but ostensible high regard for Gandhian tenets bespeaks a hypocrite.”⁷ Jagan renounces his home to watch a goddess to come out of stone, but he does not forget to carry a cheque book with him. It clearly shows that his renunciation is a farce.

Marital fidelity is perhaps the most precious and durable of the Indian values. Savitri, the silent suffering housewife in *The Dark Room*, puts up with insult and maltreatment at the hands of Ramani, her husband. But she could not bear her husband’s infidelity with a trainee officer working under him, “Don’t touch me.” She cried moving away from him, “You are dirty, you are impure.”⁸ Sampath himself is to be blamed for the collapse of his domestic life when he gets emotionally involved with Shanti, the film actress. Margayya, unable to bear his son’s debauchery, assault Dr. Pal, responsible for it, so violently that he loses his financial edifice in no time. Marco disowns his wife Rosie when he learns of her emotional attachment with Raju.

The puritan and holistic Indian approach to sex is also reflected in Narayan’s novels. A man and woman living together without getting married are regarded as sinners. Jagan is shocked when he knows that Mali, his Americanized son Grace is guilty of outraging this eternal tenet. However, Narayan never allows sex to become an exciting commodity in writing. Sexual passion, in fact, is not a theme which we come across anywhere in his novels.

Narayan seems to think of it as something too private and holy to appear publicly. He treats the theme in *The Painter of Signs* but in a mocking manner. The morbidity in sex obsession and its ultimate dissipation comes out in Raman’s frustration. Actually, there is no place for sex permissiveness in the Indian ethos. The carnal side of sex and its futility is also brought out in *The Vendor of Sweets*, when Jagan feels fatigued by all the apparatus of sex, its promises and its futility, the sadness and the sweet at the end of it all.

R.K. Narayan is evidently making use of the Indian myth of a sinner becoming a saint on the lines of *Valmiki*. Raju in *The Guide* is an admirable modern version of

the Indian myths. That an ex-convict Raju should be mistaken for *Sadhu* by gullible masses is not new to Indian culture. The events leading up to the death of Raju may sound fantastic to a rational mind, but in India, writes S.C. Sanyal:

Whenever, there is a drought village saints are always expected to fast and work miracles and some of them like Raju may die which thousands watch with devotion studded eyes.⁹

In fact, Raju has no moral discipline to guide him in his life. Shiv K. Girdla rightly says, “An excess of intellectual pragmatism, coupled with a Machivellian desire to succeed, result in the total disintegration of his ethos.”¹⁰ He finds himself alienated as the vital links of traditional ethics snap one after another. He feels utterly lonely and miserable in the midst of a vast ocean of people. The anguished realization which Krishna had after Susila’s death – a profound and unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life – is also echoed in Raju’s feelings.

Unsettling impact of materialism on the traditional world of Malgudi is projected in the major novels *Mr. Sampath* and *The Financial Expert*. Both Sampath and Margayya uproot themselves from the traditional ethos to run after illusion (greed) of material success. It is not that something above them has caused their financial collapse. But it is their weakness and that unquenching greed that has ruined them in the end. Sampath gets emotionally involved with the film actress Shanti, and has to leave Malgudi abruptly. Margayya’s financial edifice gets ruined by his own misdoings. Narayan rightly comments:

He was like a fanatical mountaineer who sets his heart on reaching the summit of Everest. He might be standing on the highest peak. Yet he can never feel that he has really attained the highest.¹¹

Margayya thus loses his way in the wilderness of materialism. His pursuit of money corrodes the very foundation of his being. The realization of the abiding value of life love dawns on him but only after his material collapse. And yet Margayya does not seem to learn anything from his experience. His fatalistic attitude has still held his mind under its firm grip. Margayya puts his arm round his son Balu and pointing to his old knobby trunk, says, "I hope the tree is still there. Go there, that is all I can say; and anything may happen thereafter."¹²

The present education system has come under severe criticism as it is completely dominated by materialistic consideration. "This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture, and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leaving and garbage."¹³ Narayan favoured a leave alone system adopted by the Headmaster in *The English Teacher* which he felt, would transform children into wholesome human beings. This type of education is, in fact, a revival of the old Indian tradition of open air schools run by saintly teachers with specific stress on inculcating moral principles among the students.

The most prominent note in Narayan's view of life is reflected in the restoration of moral order with the liquidation of Vasu, the taxidermist, (*The Man Eater of Malgudi*). The traditional and quiet, unruffled by social or political upheavals, Malgudi has never had such a demonic slaughter of gross materialism. Vasu, the only villain in Narayan's fictional Malgudi is allegorically a demon on the *puranic* pattern. His act of self-destruction like *Bhasmasura* is viewed in Malgudi as something symbolic of the triumph of good over evil.

However, the belief in such triumph that moral order establishes itself, and that everything on earth is pre-ordained as we have seen in the case of Natraj and his friends, has robbed the people of their intellect and human potential. That they are dependent on an outside agency implied that they are utterly helpless in the hands of the so-called divine power. As a result, their individual will power lies crippled under

the tremendous weight of cultural taboos and irrational customs and traditions leaving no scope for their talents.

Even Shrinivas, the journalist, and Krishna, *The English Teacher* come under the same category as Natraj is, totally passive onlookers at the happenings around them; giving every chance for black marketers, drug stockiest, garrison engineers, and the like to exploit the gullible masses in every possible way. Even Raman “felt abashed when he realized that he was perhaps picking his own loot in the general scramble of a money mad world! He wished he could do without it, but realized too that it was like a desire for a dry spot, while drifting along neck deep in a cesspool.”¹⁴ This being the case of a majority of persons in traditional Malgudi, one can only imagine as to what would be the lot of the subjugated dumb race. Malgudi is conservative and self-complacent, so why should they care for the miserable have-nots?

R.K. Narayan owes a great deal too Hindu philosophy of life. So great is the impact that he once admitted to Ved Mehta:

...his inability to write novels without Krishna, Ganesh, Hanuman, astrologers, pandit and devdasis or temple prostitutes and explained his point of view by adding in his characteristic humble way that in any case that has turned out to be my India.¹⁵

He simply brushes aside the subject other than the Hindu myths and legends around which his novels are usually woven. With his recent books *Gods, Demons and Others*, *The Ramayan and the Mahabharat*, and also the novel *A Tiger for Malgudi* Narayan plunged wholeheartedly into the revival of old Hindu myths. The Hindu epics and folklores are constantly referred to in his Malgudi circle showing Narayan in his true spirit.

It would not be out of context if we peep a little into the basic assumptions that lie at the heart of Hindu religion which has largely molded Narayan to the core of his heart. While Hinduism has roots in the literature of the Vedic age extending from about 1500 B.C. to 600 B.C., the term Hinduism cannot be appropriately applied to the religion of the period. It can best be called, and as many scholars referred to it as Brahmanical religion. The Vedic literature that has come down to us through *Sanhita*, *Brahmnica*, *Aranyaka* and *Upanishad* was mostly in the form of hymns created and memorised throughout ages by the priestly class. Hinduism is a modern term coined by him possibly because it would not then be totally confined to the Brahmin caste. To put it in a nutshell, it is old wine in new bottle labeled as Hinduism so as to shrewdly hide its true nature and to accommodate a larger part of Indian population into its fold.

In fact *The Veda* is neither a book nor the collection of books like *The Bible* or *The Koran*. It is the collection of diverse materials created over a period of a thousand years. Naturally it is bound to have several contradictions. There are a number of Hindu myths not at all consistent with each other. At times the universe is represented as having been created by God after the analogy of the work of a carpenter but at other times it is suggested that the whole of creation including the gods is the product of the process of natural generation. As regards the *Upanishad* it is said that:

Over a hundred works are given the name of Upanishad but only about thirteen of these can be dated with assurance as belonging to the Vedic age. They do not present any consistent religion or philosophical system.¹⁶

Such contradictions in Vedic literature and even in later additions such as *Shrutis* and *Smritis* have one way or the other benefited the priestly class to a considerable extent. For they have interpreted them differently at different time to suit the changing moods of the time. And that has been given legal sanction. Special

provision has been made in *Manu Smriti* to accommodate all the conflicting views, “When two sacred texts (*Shruti*) are conflicting, both are held to be the law, for both are pronounced by the wise to be valid law.”¹⁷ While they proclaim rigidity in the matter of one’s calling according to the station in life accorded by the so-called Divine *Shastras*, they allow too much flexibility and pave the way for double standard in every walk of life.

The dominating theme of the *Upanishad* is the identity of *Brahmin* and *Atma*. The formula ‘*tat tvam asi*’ (that art thou) has different meaning to different authors. Shankara the much acclaimed Hindu sage held that individual soul *Atma* and the universal soul *Brahmin* were completely identical, *Brahmin* being the only reality. The word *Brahmin*, the first of the four *varnas* was consciously used to make it synonym to *Brahma*, the supreme God. And the *Shastras* have been created to show that the individual soul *Atma* identified as being beyond change, something that is in fact, immortal, that *Purush* the immortal and the fearless is no other than *Brahmin*. S.N. Dasgupta comments, “Underlying the exterior world of change there is an unchangeable reality which is identical with that which underlies the essence of man.”¹⁸

Ramanuj, another South Indian Hindu scholar interpreted the formula ‘that art thou’ is a non-monistic sense believing that the human soul and the universal soul called God were distinct identities. It was this qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja that has played a very influential role in the history of Hindu religion by proving a metaphysical basis of the devotional worship.

In fact, the priestly classes have attempted everything possible to maintain their supremacy. They have gone to the extent of making the will of God almost irrelevant while performing sacrificial ritual to win him over; the ritual has assumed enormous significance within the whole cultural tradition. If a sacrifice were properly performed, the gods could not withhold the boons sought. Thus the sacrifice was regarded as controlling power that could bring blessings or destructions. After all,

their main endeavour was to extol their supremacy and make all possible attempts to make the writings to suit the purpose. They have thus come to occupy the key position in the drama of the cosmic order. The priest is said to have controlled the secrets of the universe.

Making himself unchallenged and superior even to gods, by virtue to his being *Brahmin*, the priest has subjugated all others belonging to the lower strata of society, brainwashed them to accept the things (writings) as divinely ordained and lulled them into eternal passivity, in the fond worship of God, fasting and praying, sacrificing everything to relieve themselves of the miseries and sufferings heaped upon by the self proclaimed *Bhu-Devs* of Hindu society.

Fasting and praying to God for his blessings seem to be a common feature most popular among Hindus. Narayan's characters are no exception. Nartaj and his friends in *The Man Eater of Malgudi* prayed to Vishnu to save the temple elephant from Vasu, the taxidermist. 'Oh Vishnu, save our elephant' and lo! The temple elephant is miraculously saved when Vasu, to trap a couple of mosquitoes bangs on his forehead with the flat of his palm and dies of concussion. We have a similar incidence of praying for the boons of goddess Laxmi in *The Financial Expert* where Margayya, in order to propitiate the goddess undertakes the forty day ordeal of fasting and praying till, "his jaws ached, his tongue has become dry...he fell faint with hunger since he had to fast completely while praying."¹⁹

When there is a drought in the surrounding area of Malgudi, Raju (*The Guide*), an ex-convict who has taken refuge in the temple is mistaken for a *Sadhu* and is implored by Velan and others to undertake a twelve-day fast for the rains.

He went down to the river; stood facing upstream with his eyes shut and repeated the litany. It was no more than a supplication to

the heavens to send down rains and save humanity.²⁰

It sounds incredible that a pseudo-saint like Raju should bring down rains by fast and prayers. Dr. Balram Gupta observes:

It is wrong to believe that Raju who is a selfish opportunist, a gross materialist and a voluptuous hedonist has all of a sudden become a martyr capable of making grace descend from heavens. The rains he sees (or thinks he sees) are indeed, a pathetic hallucination of a starving impostor.... For Raju life has become one stupendous hollowness and he collapses in the effusive and deceptive belief that there are rains in the hills.²¹

The events leading unto the death of Raju may sound fantastic to the western reader. But here in India it is a common phenomenon. Absolute faith in the invisible God makes Indian masses gullible and superstitious. Narayan's is a realistic portrayal. Some elders in the village *The Painter of Sings* points out:

God gives us children, how can we reject his gift? The chieftain argues: There is an old shrine in a cave over there where barren women can go and pray, and bear children. How would you explain it? Daisy answers, you should ask the priest of that temple.²²

Jagan and his wife in *The Vender of Sweets* are taken to the temple of Santana Krishna, and very soon after this Ambika conceive. Similarly, the ritual carried out by Margayya (*The Financial Expert*) bears the fruit promised and as expected. Despite

all planning and progress it is shocking to see people living in abysmal ignorance. Even long after independence the monster of illiteracy stands unvanquished and the social workers like Daisy have to face humiliation at the hands of the priest, and R.K. Narayan remains as unattached and objective, as if he has nothing to do with such things. As a result, the coming of a new child in the family is still regarded as the gift of the Almighty, and not as men owns doing. Barren women still seek the blessings paying lonely visits to the priest in the cave temple to get exercised their sterility.

God is supposed to be the infinite spirit whose presence is felt everywhere. Assuming that there exists a God outside us, the question is, would he really help us in relieving of our miseries and granting boons in life? Assuming it to be so, the God is most unjust to low caste people. In fact the so-called untouchables (a large part of the Indian population), have worshipped the God honestly and yet they have suffered untold miseries and sufferings, and also inhuman cruelties at the hands of the high-caste people. Are they free from subjugation even today? *The Times of London* adds:

Various incidents are mentioned such as slicing of the ears of a Harijan girl in Bihar for drawing water from a caste well. An unpleasant thought especially not common mutilation is the cutting of pieces of Harijan young man with an axe by a caste Hindu mob in a village in Aurangabad...over the renaming of Marathwada University as Dr. Ambedkar University.²³

As a matter of fact, whether we pray to God or not, his benevolence should be alike to one all, for we are supposed to be equal in his eyes. A.R. Kulkarni says, "If the supposed God could be won over by prayers it means that God is partial or in any case it will mean that he likes to be praised. Such a conception of God is revolting to a human mind."²⁴

Man is so much accustomed to be belief in God that he finds himself amiss without him. Therefore he creates a God to fill in the void in his mind. It is further clear that God exists in the mind only, and has no separate existence. The conception of an extraneous God is mere speculation. The theory that God is omnipotent and is all pervading, is without any basis and no rational being can accept it. A.R. Kulkarni observes:

In fact two evils flow when a man places reliance on God for the solution of the problems...firstly; he is always dependent on God and is not prepared to take any initiative himself. There is no scope for self-reliance. Faith in God and faith in one-self run counter to each other. Secondly, this belief leads to idleness and inaction.²⁵

Most of Narayan's characters dependant as they are on God, appear mere puppets. To them everything on earth is pre-ordained, and that they are absolutely helpless. For most part of their life they remain captive of circumstances. As a result, they are frustrated either with their own self, or with the world around them. Sometime they run away from home in protest and take to the role of *Sannyasi*. Sometime they accept defeat in total submission to age-old traditional beliefs and social customs. Swami (*Swami and Friends*), Chandran (*The Bachelor of Arts*), Sampath (*Mr. Sampath*), Margayya (*The Financial Expert*), Jagan (*The Vender of Sweets*), Raju, (*The Guide*) and Shrinivas of (*The Man Eater of Malgudi*) are all helpless creatures torn this way and that by the caprice of fortune. Savitri (*The Dark Room*) is more than a bamboo pole which cannot stand without support. She runs away from home in protest against her husband's illegal love affair with a trainee officer working under him. But she too accepts defeat in the end. The futility, the frustration and her own inescapable weakness made her cry and sob. R.K. Narayan

asserts in *The Dark Room*, “a wretched fate that wouldn’t let me drown the first time...this is defeat. I accept it I am no good for this fight.”²⁶

Narayan consciously deals with the immortality of soul and its ultimate merger with the divine Spirit as is evident in the second half of *The English Teacher*. The death of the wife fills the hero Krishna, the English teacher with belief that death is not the end of everything and that human personality has several other planes of existence. With this belief in mind perhaps Krishna on his wife’s death undertakes psychic contact with the spirit of his wife on the lines the writer has undergone when he too lost his dear wife. Narayan writes, “This outlook may be unscientific, but it helped me survive the death of my wife... I could somehow manage to live after her death...”²⁷

To the completely western-oriented persons who have no use for ghosts and planchettes, Narayan would no doubt seem to stretch their faith excessively. So far as they are concerned, Narayan’s attitude in *The English Teacher* would be a puzzle. How could he, an English educated man, writing in 1945, tell us that the dead wife of his hero communicated with him regularly through a medium and referred to events and things in the house known only to her while living and found when checked, to tally? To the question whether the *Tathagata* exists after his death, the Buddha has a very rational and convincing reply:

That such a question is incapable of an answer as nobody can say what happens to the soul or mind after the death of the saint.... To say that the mind of the person dying with his desires unfulfilled hovers somewhere and again reborn is a baseless speculation and no rational being can accept it.²⁸

Death is the termination of life. The so-called soul is a combination of both life and mind. Since life and mind cannot survive without body it is meaningless to talk about

an everlasting life or an immortal soul. Narayan seems to believe in an existence within a series of existence in the past and the future with spiritual and moral dividends – the result of accumulated actions leading to our present predicament and future prospects. This is evidently seen in many of his novels, and most of Narayan’s characters take their present sufferings with a sense of resignation.

The theory that all people were divided into four classes is one of the most important aspects of the Hindu religion, laying emphasis on the performance of social duties and obligations according to carefully formulated codes of behaviour so as to keep the Brahmins on a higher plane in the society of all times. Of the four classes such as *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vashya* and *Shudra*, it is the two classes, the first and the last that attract attention of the scholars. For, the Brahmins controlled the religious institutions while the *Shudra* constituted the bulk of the composition.

Literature of the Hindu religion was mostly written by the priestly class; and naturally therefore they presumably forward their own class interest. The statement of A.T. Embree is, “A *Shudra* is the servant of another to be slain at will, would have led to social anarchy, whereas the emphasis was always on social order.”²⁹ The origin of the class structure was supposed to be divine and not human. “No priestly class in any other civilization perhaps has made such claims for its sanctity, as did the Brahmins; but neither has any other received such willing recognition of that sanctity.”³⁰

Manu, the acknowledged Hindu law giver gives a graphic description as to the duties of each class and prescribes penalties for the transgression of the customary law in his *Manusmriti*:

To Brahmins be assigned teaching and studying (*The Vedas*) sacrificing for their own benefits and others and giving, accepting (of alms). One occupation only the Lord

prescribed to the *Shudras* to serve meekly even these (other) three castes.³¹

From the emphasis on the correct fulfillment of the proper duties of one's class; two main features come to the fore. On the one hand, it explains the high privilege accorded to Brahmins as the key stone of the social structure, on the other, it keeps *Shudras* entirely deprived of the basic needs required for the development of their personalities. The social order so structured and declared as divinely ordained has been maintained all through even in the great epics *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*.

It is interesting to note that while scholarship was confined to only one caste i.e., the *Brahmin*, *Valmiki* has been singled out for special favour and made the creator of the great epic called *The Ramayan*, possibly with the intention to show that there was no rigidity in caste barriers and that even *Valya* the low caste, could attain the status at par with the high caste. However, we are shocked to learn therein the instance of one *Shambhuk*, the low caste, harassed and done to death for the alleged transgression of his Dharma he was supposed to follow, staying within the limits of the Divine social order.

What the duties of the *Shudras* are, *Bhisma* said in *Mahabharat*, "The creator intended the *Shudra* to become the servant of the other three orders. For this the service of the other three classes is the duty of the *Shudras*. By such services of the three, a *Shudra* may attain great happiness. He should wait upon the three other classes according to their order of seniority. A *Shudra* should never amass wealth, lest by his wealth, he makes the members of the three super classes obedient to him. By this he could incur sin."³² The religious laws so propounded and maintained all through ages have been upheld above everything else in *Bhagwad Geeta* also:

Better in one's dharma (class duties) which one may be able to fulfill but imperfectly, than the dharma of others which is more easily accomplished. To adopt the

dharma of other is perilous... Krishna further adds: The fourfold class system was created by me in accordance with varying disposition and the actions (resulting from them).³³

From the above passage one common feature that comes out vividly is the interpretation of the system of *Chaturvarna* being more or less the same in all the religious books said to have been divinely ordained. Well all know it that the religious books have been written by the priestly class. But to say that they have been divinely ordained and therefore eternal and perfect is to befool the gullible masses and rob them of their natural rights. They had been foolish enough so long to tolerate the unnatural social stratification in the name of religion. But to expect the same thing from new generation standing at the threshold of 21st century is an attempt at self-deception.

The irreligious things perpetuated so unashamedly in one form or the other now stand openly criticized and ridiculed by educationists and scientists alike. The new generation cannot be so easily taken for granted. They accept only when they find anything natural and reasonable. When we see them revolt against the age-old social tradition, we dub them as sentimentalists. But we fail to understand the feelings that lie choked up in their hearts. Their attempts at self-assertion simply fail to prevail. Narayan appears vehemently opposed to any kind of sentimentalism. And restoration to normalcy is widely welcome by Narayan.

It is really disgraceful that even today the system of *Chaturvarnya* is being upheld in one form or the other. The lower castes are looked down upon with disgust. Raju's mother (*The Guide*) is first sympathetic towards Rosie, but she changes her attitude when she learns that Rosie belongs to the dancing girl's class. She flares up: "Are you of our caste? No, our class? No ...After all you are a dancing girl. We do not admit them on our families."³⁴ Jagan (*The Vendor of Sweets*) is reluctant to accept a non-Hindu girl as his daughter-in-law. Even Raman's aunt (*Painter of Signs*) does

not favour Daisy to be Raman's wife. Narayan does really touch the pulse of the Hindu society in depicting the perverted mentality of the Hindus.

Malgudi wears a festive look on Mahatma Gandhi's visit to the town. But Shriram's Granny appears restless for the reason that he allows untouchables to touch the Hindu gods. But the crux of the matter lies elsewhere. It is not simply allowing them to enter the temples but in giving them equal rights, and treat them as human beings. From the conversation Mahatma Gandhi undertakes with an urchin of a sweeper occupying the Divan much to the chagrin of the Municipal Committee chairman, it becomes clear that he takes immense interest in listening to him about his father's calling. The Mahatma advises him to be neat and tidy no doubt, but he never enquires of him whether he goes to school at all. This shows how the Mahatma looks at the problem. It is a paradox that a person, who thinks untouchability as a bolt on the Hindu society, should defend the system of *Chaturvarnya*.

Now the question remains, whether Narayan too upholds the Hindu philosophy with all his customs and traditions. Apparently it appears that Narayan's is an objective method of writing novels. And he has depicted what he has seen or observed in the society around him. But one should not overlook the fact that Narayan's writing centers round one common pattern of order disorder and return to normalcy with revival of old social order. K.R.S. Iyenger interprets this theme of "a flight and an uprooting, a disturbance of order followed by a return, a renewal, a restoration of normalcy."³⁵ However there is something arch and elusive about Narayan's treatment of Indians. In the words of H.M. Williams:

The key to the Malgudi cycle appears to me to lie in the complicated nature of Narayan's conservatism. He is typically (orthodox) Hindu in his celebration of the static: change and progress and 'future shocks' – all beat in vain

**upon Indian eternal passivity and on the
persistence of her ageless traditions.³⁶**

The pattern is seen clearly revealed in *The Man Eater of Malgudi* where the peaceful life of Natraj and his friends get completely disturbed on the entry of one Mr. Vasu, the taxidermist. His self-destruction in the end is viewed as symbolic of the validity of faith in the age-old religious system. At the end of the novel Natraj and Sastri return to printing bottle labels for aerated water company and the blue curtain of printer's room is peacefully drawn upholding the moral order of traditional Malgudi. The moral order seems to be something divinely ordained rather than the one to be instinctively followed by human beings on earth. It also establishes the fact that man is a mere puppet and that he has no scope whatsoever for his talents and potentialities to develop his personality in Hindu religion.

Narayan perceived a balance of power in human relationship as is evidently seen in the philosophy of life upheld by Shrinivas, the journalist in *Mr. Sampath*. He marveled at the invisible forces of the universe which maintained the subtle balance in all matters. The whole scheme of things "seemed so perfect that it was unnecessary for anybody to do anything... it seemed to him a futile and presumptuous occupation to analyse, criticize and attempt to set things right anywhere."³⁷ It is this kind of philosophy that has resulted in total inaction of the part of Hindus and hence India's social backwardness! P.S. Sundram asserts:

**Shrinivas is by profession a journalist who
would like to wield his paper 'The Banner' less
as a flag than as a broom to sweep the many
cobwebs that has taken possession of every
nook and corner of our land. Is it for him to
talk of the futility of action, of reform?³⁸**

The doctrine of *Karma*, an important aspect of Hinduism is one of perfect justice, nor is there anything pessimistic about the scheme, since man is master of his

fate; but the crux of the matter lies elsewhere. Indissolubly linked with the concept of karma is the other great characteristic feature of the Hindu thought, the belief in transmigration of soul. The idea that the human soul in death finds lodging in another body and to link it with the doctrine of karma has given it a different turn. And all the three concepts, such as karma, rebirth and transmigration of soul, in the ultimate analysis are linked with one's calling or *dharma* according to his station of life in the so-called divine order of Hindu society.

While it is admitted that all scholarship was mostly confined to Brahmin, it must be recognized that the selfish interest of a person or the class to which he belongs always acts as an internal limitation which regulates the direction of his intellects as it happen in the case of R.K. Narayan despite the fact that he is placed in high esteem for his objective method of writing. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is worth quoting when he says:

The power and position which the Brahmins possess is entirely due to Hindu civilization which treats them as supermen and subjects the lower classes to all sorts of disabilities so that they may never rise or challenge and threaten the superiority of the Brahmins over them. As is natural, every Brahmin is interested in the maintenance of Brahmin supremacy be the orthodox or unorthodox, be he a scholar or not.³⁹

R.K. Narayan's portrayal is realistic and authentic. The unfounded beliefs and irrational attitudes have come down to us from generation, and there is nothing uncommon about views and philosophy of life, the Hindus follows in their life. What is surprising is that they never question the validity of the *Sashtras* and *Puranas*. The Hindu philosophy upheld therein along with myths and legends are accepted as they

are. And if at all any one comes forward to denounce them, his attempts beat in vain on Indian's eternal passivity. He simply fails to withstand the collective force of the society. His total submission is looked upon as something traditionally good, serene and transcendental. His outlook is considered as matured when he accepts the traditional good of the society. This is what we find in most of the novels as suggestive of Narayan's bent of mind however detached he appears to be to the readers.

Narayan's novels and short stories reflect almost all the elements of Indian culture in their conflicting form on different issues - religion, Indian philosophy, myths and magic, superstitions, rituals and beliefs, belief in stars and fate, respect to *Sannyasis*/ godly men, family system, marital system, art and literature, freedom struggle and Gandhian philosophy, and corrupt government and Hypocratic officials etc. Hinduism and Hindu traditions and customs play a dominant role in the fiction of R.K. Narayan. In his stories, Narayan portrays the conflicting environment of religions and religious faiths. In the novel *Swami and Friends*, when Swami complains against his fanatic teacher Ebenezer for his venomous criticism of Hindu Gods and traditions in the classroom, it appears more as the inner feeling of Narayan against the propagandists of Christianity.

The influence of religion on Hindu life is also evident from the portrayal of women characters in Narayan's novel, Savitri of *The Dark Room* and Susila of *The English Teacher*. He created the characters to show the pathos and superficial pride of Hindu wives in accordance with the accepted Hindu concept of a married woman immersed in the daily rituals of their caste and religion. Other features like the decoration of the threshold of homes with a festoons of green mango leaves, and the floors and doorways with white rice flour drawings of many designs; then there are the traditional reception of welcoming the daughter-in-law with *arathi* – bringing a huge plate or tray full of oil with a piece of camphor burning in the center and moving the plate up and around in front of the girl - before she enters her new home, and such rituals are

some of the influences of cultural and religious, as well as caste traditions in the novels of R.K. Narayan.

In *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, the festival procession is organized to celebrate the poet's completion of his epic on Radha and Krishna. In the novel, *The Vendor of Sweets*, the protagonist Jagan is considerably influenced by the *Bhagavadgita*. The four *ashrams*, *dharmas* of Hindu way of life also are intervened in Narayan's stories. In *Vendor of Sweets*, the protagonist Jagan finally hands over his business to his son and leads a retired life in an ashram. In the novel *A tiger for Malgudi*, even a tiger also goes through the four ashrams. The novel *The Painter of Signs* presents the dilemma of the modern generation over religion.

Indian culture does not attach much value to money and physical attainments. But, the western influence on material acquisition is on increase in 21th century. This conflict is very well presented in Narayan's works. The novel *Mr. Sampath* reveals the general Indian belief in the futility of running after money. *The Financial Expert* also echoes the same philosophy. But, the materialistic philosophy of life has humorously been presented by Kailas in *The Bachelor of Arts*, who says: "A man must spend forty years in making money and forty years in spending it" (p. 28).

Narayan writes about the myths and magic's in his novels, which may appear unconvincing to the modern and western readers. In his autobiographical novel *The English Teacher*, the protagonist Krishna, after the death of his wife Sushila, communicates with her spirit, with the help of a *Sannyasi*. Frequent use is made of Indian myth and legends in his novels and short stories. An Indian myth *Bhasmasura* forms the background to *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*.

Narayan frequently narrates the rituals, superstitions, traditions and beliefs as if they are quite common and credible in Indian context. Many popular superstitions, rituals and beliefs are frequently exploited in his novels and short stories. In *The Guide*, there is fasting to bring down the rain, and Raju is easily taken to be

a Mahatma by the credulous villagers. Communication with the spirit of the dead is also shown in *The English Teacher*.

Astrology plays vital role in the day-to-day life of Indians. The conflict between the believers and non-believers in stars and fate is frequently seen in Narayan's stories. In *The Bachelor of Arts*, there is mismatch between the horoscopes of Mr. Chandran and his dream girl Malathi. In *The Financial Expert*, Margayya is assured of a better future by an astrologer. In the same novel, another episode reveals how "money can dictate the very stars in their courses" (p. 40). In the short story *An Astrologer's Day*, Narayan presents an astrologer who dons the role under forced circumstances.

Indian culture respects the *Sannyasis* and Godly men without waiting for a proof of their virtues or miracles. The role of *Sannyasi*, whether as a truly remarkable and powerful holy man in *The English Teacher* and *The Tiger for Malgudi* or as a cheat in *The Guide* or merely as a wanderer in *The Bachelor of Arts*, is a recurring character in Narayan's fiction. Foolish veneration of *Sannyasis* reaches such a height in *The Guide* that Raju, originally, a cheat, mistaken by the villagers as *Sannyasi*, is worshipped by them. Interestingly, Raju is compelled to live in the character by fasting for twelve days to appease the rain gods.

Almost all the works of Narayan show the traditional patriarchal family system where the men are dominant and the women are true representatives of traditional Indian womanhood. However, in his novel *The Darkroom*, the central character Savitri questions the patriarchal family system and women's place in it. But, she too realizes the futility of her attempt to escape from her bonds with the temporal world and returns home. In the same way, Rosie in *The Guide* shows her essential Indianness in her solicitude for her husband. Perhaps, this is the reality that exists in Indian family system which Narayan wanted to project.

Narayan presents the conflicts pertaining to family systems. In *Swami and friends*, Swami's grandmother tells him stories during bedtime. In the novel *The*

Painter of Signs, the aged aunt of Raman tends to her nephew's needs. But, in other stories like, *The Vendor of Sweets* and *The Financial Expert*, the strained relations between parents and spoiled sons are seen.

The conflict between the concepts of arranged marriages and love marriages is frequently seen in Narayan's novels. Narayan gives reverence to Indian marriage and family system. He tries to present love episodes, some with success and some others with failure. In the novel *Vendor of Sweets*, when the son of Jagan returns from America with an American woman whom he did not marry, he is unwelcome in his own family. In the novel *The Painter of Signs*, Raman finds himself being torn between his Aunt and Daisy, the traditional way and the modern way.

Narayan's novels and short stories depict the writers, poets and other artists who are interested in creating the literature and art influenced by the ancient Indian classics, Hinduism and epic stories. The poet in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* composes a story of Krishna and Radha in monosyllabic verse. In the novel *The World of Nagaraj*, the protagonist is interested in writing about life of the great sage *Narada*. Rosie in *The Guide* is interested in dance. In *The Painter of Signs*, Raman is interested in art and calligraphy. Occasionally there are persons like Mohan (poet) in *The Bachelor of Arts*, who, under the influence of the waves of western art forms, try to experiment in them.

Narayan touches upon the issue of conflict between languages by referring to the education system of his times. The Education system introduced by the Britishers in India allowed the dominance of English language over the regional languages. The negligence of regional languages can be seen in the novels like *Swami and Friends*- where the students don't pay attention to the Tamil Pundit's class but are very much attentive in English class.

The adoration to Gandhian principles and the hypocrisy attached to it are very well presented in Narayan's works. The plot of the novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*

has the freedom movement and Gandhian principles as background. In the novel *Vendor of Sweets*, the protagonist Jagan is a staunch follower of Gandhi. He wears Khadi and spins Charkha. But he is very careful about money and keeps two account books to avoid paying income tax – which shows the hypocrisy of his principles.

The major and minor characters of Narayan's novels and stories pass their remarks on the inefficiencies of governments and corrupt acts of officials. In the novel *The Financial Expert*, Margayya manages the police, and contributes to the war fund when asked to do so. In the novel *The Talkative Man*, the Station master at the Railway station is manageable with money.

In the novels of Narayan, Malgudi in the 1930s is a small town across the river Sarayu with an officers' club and two schools, a municipality, a town hall. There is Nallapa's mango grove and the Mempi forest. The hold of traditional values on characters like Swami is as strong as the effect of modern civilization. Malgudi is shown as a town at the crossroads of Indian culture. It is tied to its ancient moorings, yet submits to various compulsions of change. The railway station, the England Insurance Company, the Truth Printing Works, Anand Bhavan, the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank, Lawley Extension and many other modern institutions go to build up Malgudi's existence. Thus Malgudi exists on two dimensions simultaneously- the age old values and beliefs that have gone deep down the Indian psyche shaping its cultural and emotional outlook, and the new way of living that the Western notions of economic progress have forged.

Grandmothers, uncles and aunts with their rigid caste system, their innumerable religious rituals are finely counterpoised against the new generation represented by Mali, Balu, Dr. Pal and others. A.N. Kaul writes:

Malgudi ...stands at a nicely calculated comic distance between the East and the West... Just as the true tragedy of colonialism lay in the culturally untouched but economically ravaged Indian countryside, the true comedy of this

**same historical fact was to be observed in the
Indian small town.⁴⁰**

Narayan's writing spans over sixty years and we can see that he is the direct witness of the modern transition of India and his writing can be regarded as the epic of modern India because the background of nearly all his fiction is an imaginary town called Malgudi, somewhere in South India, which is actually a sample for the change of the whole country. Through his writings we can see what has been actually happening to India in these years. From his story we experience the change of their life, the change of their values and their way of looking at themselves. He faithfully reflects the change of women's social position and also the change of their role in the households. He creates a series of New Women who dare to pursue their own happiness, ignoring the confinement of the tradition or the codes of religion. But to a certain degree, his writing about the modern transition of India only relates to the elites, or at the most, the middle class.

From *Swami and Friends* to *A Tiger for Malgudi*, it is a march along a historical time. With each of the novels, Malgudi unfolds new vistas of life. A simple, innocent and conservative society undergoes fast changes because of the incursions of modern civilization. From a sleepy, silent and small town atmosphere on the banks of river Sarayu to a fast developing metropolitan ethos with modern streets, banking corporations, talkies and smugglers' den, and even a circus, Malgudi marks a movement in time. This movement not only affects the geography of the place, but also the social and cultural milieu. Innocence gradually gives way to *Wessex* experience and Malgudi begins to live up to the modern spirit. Like Hardy's and Faulkner's *Yoknapatawpha* which experience the gradual decadence of the agricultural community of England and that of the Southern aristocracy of the United States respectively, Malgudi at different points of time experiences the swift changes, the innumerable contradictions that make a mark on the orthodox Indian society with its age-old culture, beliefs and superstitions. Graham Greene in the introduction to *The Financial Expert* remarks:

...the life of Malgudi never ruffled by politics proceeds in exactly the same way as it has done for centuries and the juxtaposition of the age-old convention and the modern character provide much of the comedy.⁴¹

In most of his novels, however, Narayan's concerns as a citizen-writer are voiced in a much more complex manner. Instead of taking the form of columns on civic failures or letters to newspapers, they work themselves out through his characters and their conflicts. This is how Narayan's novels show India negotiating the complex terrain of the modern. Malgudi, in that sense, becomes a laboratory where various possibilities and positions are tried out. With such a view, *The Guide*, undoubtedly Narayan's best-known novel can be examined as a narrative of modern India. More specifically, it is about the nature of an ancient Indian institution, that of the *Guru*. Indeed, this word, *Guru*, has no exact English counterpart.

R.K. Narayan's use of the slightly lighter, slightly more frivolous, and certainly more ambiguous word, "guide," is therefore telling. The central question for such a reading of the novel is precisely whether *The Guide* undermines in Narayan's famously ironic manner, the idea and the institution of the Guru, of a man or woman who attains to a higher state of consciousness and is therefore able to lead others? Or does it, despite such an undermining, eventually reinforce it? This question is by no means casual or trivial because it suggests a larger method of dealing with the entire corpus of Narayan and how it engages with India's modernity. The characters are situated against the backdrop of Post-Independence economic theories of India and analyzed in the light of those theories. There is also a discussion of the impact of westernization and modernization and how the new culture, new ideologies, new trends, gradually transform the idyllic mindset of the protagonist, Raju.

Narayan's novels represent a section of Indian society where life is steeped in middleclass consciousness. His characters portray certain characteristic features - either they are docile, timid, adhering to traditional values and pacifist by nature or they appreciate vulnerability, violence and excessive greed for money. In this context

we can expound the fact that Narayan studies economic problem minutely and exquisitely and thereby frames several economic groups. While Marco and Rosie represent the well-to-do class, Gaffur and Joseph denote the low wage earner. In the words of Prof. Krishna Sen:

At first sight, the world of *The Guide* seems to be structured along simple binaries- Malgudi and Mangala, the town and the village, urban sophistication versus rural simplicity, modernity versus tradition, and cynicism versus faith. On closer inspection, each of these components reveals itself to be highly problematic, full of hybrid ties, fissures and contradictions. As with the binary that Shakespeare created in *As You Like It*, settings off the court against the Forest of Arden, but with positive and negative elements existing within each ideological space so here too Malgudi and Mangala stand for cultural locations that appear to be simple only from a distant view.⁴²

His third novel, *The Dark Room*, tries to handle the issue of subaltern groups. In the fiction, the dark room is not only a place for the retreatment of the woman when she is abused by her husband, but also a metaphor which discloses the miserable conditions of women and the oppression by men. They are often victims within a marriage. This is the first novel that casts spotlight upon women issues. From Savitri in *The Dark Room* to Bala in *Grandmother's Tale*, Narayan's women characters grow stronger and show that the emergence of the 'New Woman' is not a myth or a utopia in India. She struggles for freedom, asserts equality and searches for identity.

Narayan's new woman might not have brought earth-shaking changes to India, yet she has certainly brought positive changes not only in her man but also in Indian society. It is usually noticed that, though R.K. Narayan is a traditionalist, he is undoubtedly aware of the oppressive elements of Indian traditional culture, which is quite different from the findings of many other Indian experts who attribute all the sufferings of subalterns to colonial rule and western culture. And further from his depiction we can also see that in his understanding, the modernization of India not only means the reexamination of colonial rule and its left over but also the re-examination of their own tradition which is cherished by the nationalists.

The Financial Expert is considered to be among his greatest masterpieces. When the miserable conditions of subaltern groups are talked about, this book is most likely to be mentioned as the supportive evidence to indicate that colonial institutions are the source of the sufferings of the subaltern groups. In the story, British opened the bank in the small town which actually trapped the poor into deep debt and they could not get out of the circle. But a closer reading reminds us that it is the native financial advisors who misled the poor people and brought them to misery.

Narayan notices the social stratification in the modern transition of India. The elites are actually the groups who take the share of the benefits from colonizers' institutions and after independence they are comfortable with the existing hierarchical structure and unwilling to make any significant change, which is the real source of the sufferings of subaltern groups. In his writing, he seems satisfied with the exposure of India's clumsy imitation of modernity.

The Guide was cheered by many readers for the heroine's strong resistance against the deeply-rooted patriarchal culture of India. First she has the courage to get out of unhappy marriage and associate herself to a tourist guide she loves deeply. Second, when she finds that her new love is just using her as a moneymaking machine, she leaves him without slightest hesitation. This broke the stereotype of Indian women, who were imagined as cowardly, dependent and fragile. The book won him the Sahitya Akademi award in 1958 and his contribution lies in his boldness and courage when facing Indian nationalists who are always blindly

against outside civilized elements, labeled colonial and defend everything traditional, even oppressive elements, as Indian civilization essence.

In 1961 Narayan published his next novel, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, which was reviewed as having a narrative that is a classical art form of comedy, with delicate control. The Man-Eater is also a metaphor here. The elites, both from foreign country or from India, are actually the man-eaters. They take profits from the mass of India, but they never know that they should pay back or at least show their slightest gratitude to the people. On the contrary, they take them as prey and maltreat them. Subalterns here are the victims in his writing and besides the author believes that the strength, muscle or power of the dominant groups is not a blessing but a tomb for themselves, like Vasu. The figure of Rangi (*The Man-Eater of Malgudi*), a temple public girl of Malgudi shows us that the condition of Rosie is not the worst. She is the temple prostitute, and in being a woman of the temple, she is married to the God of that temple, who in this case is Krishna. She is both the highest woman and the lowest woman. She is looked down upon by the people around. Rangi also makes a very important comment when she says, “Sir, I am only a public woman, following what is my dharma” (p. 68).

Ironically, the author tries to make us believe that Rangi has followed her dharma and acquired some sort of higher power, and then Rangi could have caused Vasu to end his life through the blow to his head. She is so selfless that she is even willing to risk her own happiness for the sake of the temple by aiding Nataraj in his attempt to stop Vasu from killing Kumar. It makes one realize that women are trapped in all kinds of futile Indian traditions that are illogical, resulting in their endless suffering. The pictures of the middle class women are discernible from *The Dark Room* of the colonial period, to *The Guide*, a piece written after independence.

Women in India, not like their male counterparts, who hold the instinctive hostility to western culture, begin to make use of the concepts, values and lifestyle of the West as a tool to subvert the oppressive forces. That is only part of the story. Rosie is resistant and independent and has courage to seek the happiness of her own

because she is a great dancer and able to survive herself without any financial aid. But for most women, destiny is not so merciful.

The Guide which won for Narayan huge accolades shows the novelist's skill in placing the orient into focus for occidental eyes. In this novel Narayan depicts a comprehensive picture of human activities, the comic and the tragic, the silly and the serious, the ridiculous and the sublime. Here we witness the spectacular representations of an ordinary man who eventually becomes a *Mahatma* as he begins to identify himself with the world and takes the terrible decision of sacrificing his life for a noble cause. K.R.S. Iyengar rightly holds the view:

Speaking generally, Narayan's is the art of resolved limitation and conscientious exploration; he is content, like Jane Austen, with a 'little bit of ivory', just so many inches wide: he would like to be a detached observer, to concentrate on a narrow scene, to sense the atmosphere of the place, to snap a small group of characters in their oddities and angularities: he would, if he could, explore the inner countries of the mind, heart and soul, catch the uniqueness in the ordinary, the tragic in the prosaic.⁴³

So a critical study of this novel gives a complete vision of free India with all its varied economic, social and spiritual problems. One without a doubt agrees with K.R.S. Iyenger:

...that Malgudi is the real hero of the ten novels and the many short stories: that underneath the seeming change and the human

drama there is something-the 'soul' of the place? – That defies or embraces, all change and is triumphantly and unalterably itself.⁴⁴

Thus, as seen from the above, Narayan's novels and short stories reflect the elements of Indian culture and the conflicting features in the 21th century. They help non-Indians understand the vibrant culture of India in its widespread form. Further, the photographic narrative style of R.K. Narayan presents the cultural nuances of India in their realistic state than in the idealistic or imaginative condition. One who reads the novels or short stories of Narayan cannot help but appreciate Indian culture along with its shortfalls. So, it can be undoubtedly said that the fiction of Narayan is a window to Indian culture and its conflicts, to the outside world and foreign readers.

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CHAPTER - 5
NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

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Form and theme are inseparable in the works of a writer. “The true basis of criticism is the harmony of style with subject, of form with vision”¹ says Charles Morgan. Technique or form is the most suitable device of developing the theme. It explores the possibilities of the subject and prepares the ground of evaluation. The form of a novel is essential for its existence. It is the basic source of its aesthetic sense and significance. A critical evaluation of the novel is inextricably related to question of the novelist’s quest for form. The point of view or the angle from which a novel is narrated is an important aspect of its technique. Laying stress on the point Percy Lubbock opines:

The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, is governed by the question of the point of view-the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story.²

The nature and growth of the novel has led to several experiments in form. Major experiments in the field of ‘form’ have been carried out by great novelists such as Emile Zola, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Patrick White and other great stalwarts. Henry James has shown serious endeavours towards an effective focus of narration. E.M. Forster lends support to this approach that novel aims at not completion but expansion.

Indian novelists writing in English are not unaware of the importance of technique in fiction, though early writings like *The Princes of Destiny* (1909), *Hindupur* (1909), *Nur Jehan* (1909) had numerous technical faults. From about 1920s when the novelists turned towards contemporary problems of politics and society

avoiding historical tales and romance they became serious about their craftsmanship and developed a methodical approach to form and technique.

Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, “drew the first models of character and elaborated the peculiar logic of the Indian novel.”³ They had to overcome several constraints of tradition and culture in the process of shaping the “Indian novel in Indian languages.”⁴ While following the most popular models of narration they also fully naturalized the western techniques like myth, symbol, irony etc. At the same time they made experiments in their technique to suit the changing moods of India’s set-up. Narayan’s technical experiments have done a lot for the rise of the novel. Declaring Narayan, “simply the novelist as novelist,”⁵ Professor Walsh adds:

His writing is a distinctive blend of western techniques and Eastern material, and he has succeeded in a remarkable way in making an Indian sensibility at home in English art. ⁶

Narayan exhibits his interest in the different modes of the point of view to suit the stuff in his novels. In his works he has used both internal and external viewpoints and their variations. He follows Dickens’s mode of narration as presented in *Bleak House*. ‘I’ as protagonist and ‘I’ as witness, the two-variations of the first person narrative, appear in *The English Teacher* and *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* respectively. The device of irony, a western import, has been used by Narayan in his earlier novels which later turned to be his vision. Narayan and Raja Rao choose Indian classical myths.

R.K. Narayan whose narrative technique is the subject of study in this chapter is remarkable for his technical maturity. In his more than six decades of literary career he has chiselled, sharpened and improvised his literary tools to convey his world vision. As discussed earlier, Narayan deals with a variety of themes in his novels, but this element of thought never subdues the emotional essence of his

characters. A successful piece of art is formed only through the combination of good content and good form. As achieved content is the criterion of successful art, a thought of technique becomes essential in such a study. It is significant to study Narayan's artistic achievement by analyzing his use of some major fictional techniques time-design, method of characterization, and language and style.

Conforming to the Indian classical conception of time, Narayan believes in its eternity in its movement in a cyclical order. While explaining his conception of time vis-à-vis the human personality he says, "The characters in the epics are prototypes and moulds in which humanity is cast and remain valid for all time."⁷ Like the other elements of its craft, designing of time in *Swami and Friends* does not show any novelty. Time's movement is here outward and it crosses over the narrative without cutting through it. This outward movement of time does not help the reader much to read the inner recess of the character not does it help him to probe his mind.

Temporal experience in the novel is felt mostly through natural time. The novel begins with "Monday Morning" and ends in "Tuesday Morning". The story time in the novel spreads hardly over one year as action of the novel begins in the middle of the school session with Rajam joining the school on the re-opening day of the second term, possibly January, and ends in the early winter, the indication of which is found in chapter seventeen where there is reference to the exposed portion of Swami's body lying on the Jungle path "dumped with the slight early dew" (p. 162.)

In no other novel as here, this physical movement of time is indicated in clear terms of the passing of days, weeks and months. There is a clear indication of the movement of time in the novel as, after we are informed of a new arrival in chapter seven, we are told in chapter eight that, "This little one was now six months old..." (p. 55.) This indicates that the time passage from the seventh chapter to eight is six months. This lapse of time in its slices is a trick of the novelist to arrange the incidents as happening to the life of Swami in a chronological order, thereby to mark the liner progress of his (Swami's) experience. Of course, reference to intermediate

time in the novel like “in a few days,” “one afternoon” etc. leads us nowhere while reference to determinate time like “three later” (p. 43.), “Tuesday Morning, ten days later etc.” (p. 174.) etc. reminds us of the flow of physical time in a unilinear scale. Swami is put against this unidirectional form of time which enables us to record his physical and mental growth.

A novelist is very often flexible in handling the element of time in his work. He can, according to his need and desire, expand or squeeze the span of time to describe an event of few hours; Austen Warren opines “he passes over years in a few sentences but gives too long chapters to a dance or tea party.”⁸ Thus the reading time is always controlled by a novelist.

In the first chapter of *The Bachelor of Arts* time moves very slow, rather in a leisurely pace, and events do not fall into quick succession. Events of a single day, the day on which Chandran participated in the college debate with an astounding success receive an unusual elaborate treatment covering more than fifteen pages. The movement of time in *Swami and Friends* is almost external; it does not have any internal effect on the character. But in *The Bachelor of Arts* time has its effect on Chandran’s mental as well as on his physical state. On his mental plane the duration of four years makes him more experienced in life, frees him from “distracting illusions and hysterics” (p. 123) and helps him achieve a kind of emotional equilibrium.

As in *Swami and Friends*, here too movement of time is recorded clearly and neatly enabling the reader to mark its passage and progress. Four crucial months in the life of Chandran are dismissed in a single sentence- “July, August, September and October were months that glided past...” (p. 17) Again towards the end of the narrative definite passage of time is recorded with the mention of Chandran’s observation, “But I am nearly twenty-four” (p. 125) against the narrator’s comment, “He was not eighteen but twenty one” (p. 11) thus, indicating that three years have elapsed during the period.

A study of time-design in the novel reveals how throughout the work two time scales run side by side, time in its impermanence and time in its reflection of a proper order. For Chandran, time is romantic and transient. This view helps him switch over easily from the thoughts of Malathi to the thoughts of Susila and accept the experience of the moment. But for Chandran's mother, an idealised order of events is a frame for awareness of time. The observation of Lakshmi Holmstrom in this context is pertinent. To quote her:

It was because of romantic view of time and events that Chandran falls in love immediately and intensely with Malathi. While for Chandran the experience of the moment alone counts, his mother takes the opposite view. For her, events in time have value only in so far as they reflect the "proper order" prescribed in time-honored formulas.⁹

Narayan's treatment of time in *The Dark Room* marks a little deviation from his earlier novels. In *Swami and Friends* time in blocks corresponding to slices of incidents moves in a chronological order and in *The Bachelor of Arts* linear movement of time gets a little jerk towards the end. But in *The Dark Room*, though time moves considerably in a linear scale, sometimes character motivated time in the form of memories, reminiscences, dreams etc. moves backward and forward bringing before the reader a full view of the protagonist.

The Dark Room opens in an indeterminate time capturing the incidents of a day in the life of the protagonist and the same continues till the third chapter. Expressions like "as ever," "one evening" in sentences like "At eight thirty Savitri's ears as ever were the first to pick up the hoarse hooting of the chevrolet horn" (p. 11). "Savitri was in Janamma's housing one evening..." (p. 23) suggest what Wallace

Martin while discussing narrative temporarily says, “Iterative narration,” i.e. “...repeated occurrence of the same event...described once.”¹⁰

Narayan allows his reader to form an opinion about Savitri, get a glimpse of her past, her hopes and aspirations by comparing and contrasting her present with her past. He achieves this by taking the helps of her memory, recollection, dreams etc. that do not disturb the chronological order of the narrative. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan opines:

**The act of remembering, fearing, or hoping is a
part of the linear unfolding of the first narrative...
It is only the *content* of the memory, fear, or hope
that constitute a post or future event.¹¹**

Not that all segments of the text in a novel correspond to story duration, there are some that correspond to zero story duration. In *The Dark Room* such a descriptive pause occurs in chapter eight where the novelist describes Mari’s burglary habit. The pause interrupts the action between Savitri’s plunging into the river water and Mari’s rescue operation, but it does not carry forward or retard the story.

By the time Narayan began to write *The English Teacher* he had undergone a great psychic development following the untimely death of his wife, and his subsequent reconciliation to it. This had its effect on his views on schemes of life that, in turn, made a strong impact on his conception of human time. Once his views on human life on the material plane got changed, his conception of time also underwent a transformation, and he portrayed time more and more from Indian classical angel who is mythical and regenerative.

This counterpoise of human time with mythical time is not found here for the first time; it is also visible, albeit faintly, in his first novel where Swami prays for the salvation of the soul of an ant. But what is significant here, in comparison to his

earlier novels, is the assured application of the mythical time. Commenting on the time scheme in the novels of R.K. Narayan, K. Chellappan says:

...R.K. Narayan in whose novels the mythic or metaphoric vision successfully penetrated by the metonymic or ironic mood; and in their vision and structure we can see the intersection of the timeless with time, the still point with the turning world still moving, of which the dance of Nataraja, which is also his favourite image, is the archetype.¹²

What catches reader's attention first in *The English Teacher* is the presence of two categories of time which gradually emerge in two sections of the novel; one, time's movement till the death of Susila, and the other, time on the temporal plane running from chapter four till the end of the narrative. So long as Susila was alive, Krishna experienced intensely physical time and the narrative moved following the natural time, day after day, week after week, month after month. When Susila came to live with Krishna, their daughter Leela was only seven months old and on the third birth day of Leela, Krishna's father desired to make an arrangement for providing them a shelter. The couple led a blissful life these twenty-nine months time, time did not prove oppressive for Krishna, it moved in keeping pace with the marital bliss, barring certain minor domestic conflicts.

The novel where strands of autobiographical voice are maintained with the narration in the first person, events most often tend to appear remote in time, the illusion of presentness and immediacy is rarely achieved, the hero reader identification is seldom maintained. Mendilow says:

...a novel in the first person rarely succeeds in conveying the illusion of presentness and immediacy ...and there is an avowed temporal

distance between the fictional time - that of the events as they happened and the narrator's actual time-his time of recording that events.¹³

But in *The English Teacher* this does not happen exactly. In the second part of the book time becomes pre-eminently subjective, a kind of purely personal epiphany, an illumination of consciousness that succeeds in creating illusion of presentness and immediacy. The other technique that the author adopts to make his reader involved immediately in the cause of his protagonist is by narrating the events through letters and diaries. The diary recording of the events following Sushila's cremation and letters all written in present tense induce the reader to have a sense of immediate involvement in the cause of Krishna.

So while discussing Narayan's conception of time, it is worthwhile to say how through human time the author moves towards timelessness because physical time always possesses "a meaningful relevance to our own experiences and our own way of life."¹⁴ In *The English Teacher* Krishna reaches a point in timelessness but as this point of human experience is hard to bear for long, he comes down again to his temporal self.

Time-design in *The Guide* is more complex than found in all the earlier novels of the author. Narayan's artistic excellence in handling the counterpoint aspect of time contributes here to the clear expression of the underlying theme of the novel, i.e. illusion vs. reality. Two threads of time, present and past, operate on the narratorial level. Raju, the protagonist, unreels his past in his own narration while the omniscient narrator narrates the events now happening to Raju. In the narrative time swings forward and backward enabling the author to present the story of Raju's past and present authentically and realistically. These two threads of time are woven in an intricate but artistic fashion.

Modern writers intertwine very often the exposition with main thread of action; in short, the narrative oscillates between backward and forward movement of narration. Mendilow asserts that:

The *time shift* technique is used to get in the character first with a strong impression and then work backwards and forwards over his past.¹⁵

The time-shift technique is so exquisitely used in *The Guide* that when the past of Raju gets revealed in a braided manner with the main line of action, it does not serve as an appendage to the main thread of the story but remains as an integral part to it without which the main action would have remained incomplete and unconvincing. The story covers more than thirty years of natural time. The time past is a contour of Raju's metamorphoses to Swamihood through his life roles of a guide, a lover, a dance manager and a prisoner. The past events when recounted are shortened, summarized intricately and events spanning over thirty year's time are told in one night. The narration of past life of Raju covers about one hundred and fifty pages in the text, and after it concludes we move to the present situation as narrated by the omniscient narrator.

The method of parallel placing of Raju's past with Raju's present while draws the reader's sympathy for him also makes him look sharper, more authentic and more tragic. To quote M.K. Naik says:

This persistent juxtaposition of the present and the past... shows with inexorable logic how the protagonist's present is rooted in the past and how the past also inevitably shapes his future.¹⁶

The method of showing the past of the protagonist in his own narration and the present of him by the omniscient narrator helps the author connect his two worlds. The narrative captures beautifully the movement of natural time along with the

internal time of the character. It is achieved through description of the movement of natural time indicated by harvest periods, festival time and changing positions of the sun, rain and mist and the cycle of season.

If *The Guide* manifests play of mythical time and the human time in a subtle manner, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* manifests it in an obvious manner. Here Narayan affirms loudly his vision of time in its mythical and repetitive nature, in its circular movement. This vision of the author is found not only here, it is seen even from the beginning of his literary career. But what is significant here is the obvious imposition of the regenerative time on the narrative by drawing a parallel between it and the myth of *Bhasmasura*.

The cyclical pattern of time is thrust on the narrative when, at the end, Shastri told, “Every demon appears in the world with a special boom of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the *rakshasas* that were ever born” (p. 242). We are told further, “he narrated again and again for my benefit the story of *Bhasmasura*, the unconquerable” (p. 242). But immediately against this recurrence of mythical time, we are allowed to experience the human clock time happening in history, “When you are gone for lunch it will be drying and ready for second printing when you return” (p. 242).

Thus, we experience in the novel both mythical and human time in the same breath, the human time imitating the cyclical pattern of time set by recounting a myth. Narayan in a talk to William Walsh once said, “In an otherwise philosophical country concrete evidence in continuity and mortality lies in little things...”¹⁷ This continuity and morality in little things mould the experience of an individual.

Time’s continuous movement, oblivious of human humdrum, is repeatedly referred to in Narayan’s novels. Malgudi, the micro world of the author, the stage for human drama of his fictional characters, remains calm and placid despite occasional threatening coming from the outside world. This continuity in time is reinforced in

The Man-Eater of Malgudi taking cue from the Indian myths and using mythical characters in it.

Vasu, the modern version of *Bhasmasura* is crushed under the wheels of time; time is least concerned about his physical power, about his knowledge-power. The hands of the clock in his room move on, least touching the drama of Malgudi life ruffled by the threats of Vasu. Vasu had set his alarm clock to arouse him from the deep sleep but, during the period, his death occurred and the author tells how time is not at all bothered about this important event in the temporal world of Malgudi, “The alarm clock which had screeched in the dark on the previous night was now ticking away modestly. Its pale pink patch must have watched the process of Vasu’s death” (p. 221). Thus time is a mute witness to the rise and fall of Vasu.

Tenses used in the novel do not have the same temporal implications as tenses used in our daily life. Bronzwaer while discussing the importance of the study of tense in a novel says:

There is a difference between time within the novel and time outside the novel- the physical clock-time in which the author lives and the fictional time in which the characters live.¹⁸

The study of time invariably leads to the study of tense. Martin also declares, “Time and tense are indispensable axes of analyses.”¹⁹ In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* past is the principal tense of narration, it becomes the focus where the whole problem of time and tense is visible.

The Vendor of Sweets opens when Jagan, the protagonist is fifty five and closed when he is sixty. But the narrative is presented in such a manner that the picture of his three generations dances before our very eyes. The novel connects two worlds of Jagan, i.e. the world before Mali went unruly and the world which he now faces with the challenge emanating from Mali. To cast the vast material of Jagan’s

two worlds spanning over forty years, the flashback device is adopted. The device contributes a good deal to condense the narrative; otherwise, if the narrative had events arranged chronologically, the whole presentation of it would have lost much of its effectiveness and vividness.

A long flash back towards the end, in chapter twelve, takes us forty years back to Jagan's student life, to his preparation for marriage including the bride seeing and marriage ceremony and then to the family discord at the temporary barrenness of Ambika. To quote J.K. Biswal:

The long flash back in which Jagan nostalgically ruminates over his past helps to build up a framework in which Jagan's past and present stand in ironic contrast, and the father-son relationship is presented in shifting perspectives of irony. Jagan's anxieties and his fond dreams, the traditional rituals and the euphoria in the entire household when Mali was born pathetically embarrassed and undone by the absurdly crazy son with his unconventional social behavior, his new-fangled ideas about manufacturing stories.²⁰

T.C. Ghai's observation that the long flashback is unnecessary, unaccounted for because it has little connection with the main story line is difficult to take. When he says that the flashback fails to fully integrate with the story and rather has an independent existence, the sort of which, "could have been added to almost any of Narayan's novels,"²¹ he fails to grasp Narayan's aim at introducing the flashback. Moreover, the flashback provides necessary psychological impetus for Jagan to take a final decision to leave the life of worldly humdrum and enter a life of renunciation.

The action of *The Painter of Signs* is set against the backdrop of an historical time and later the action is appropriated to a legend, happened in mythological time,

to explain the repetitive nature of such actions in human life. The historical time alluded in the novel is to the period of population explosion in India and government's concern about it, bank nationalization in India, the reference to which is given in lines like, "Indira Gandhi is dynamic no doubt, but I do not approve it" or "it could be nationalization of banks..." (p. 16).

Raman and Daisy are created to represent opposite views towards this human problem; one, for his senseless breeding instinct and the other for her ruthless measures to control the population growth. Their story is made analogous later in the novel to a legend in the *Mahabharata* where Ganga, in her bid not to carry the burden of rearing children, lays certain condition on her Santhanu, Raman agrees to all conditions of Daisy and yet Daisy leaves him when she feels that her mission in life is more important than the pressing demands of Raman. So an event that occurred in a mythical time serves as a framework for elucidating an event that happened in the temporal history of Malgudi. It is this imperviousness to time, this almost mythical permanence experienced in the story that deepens our delight in the theme and in Raman and Daisy.

There occurs in the novel frequent interspersions of mythical time and the specific time in history as if to remind us that human time imitates mythical time in its cyclical pattern. Self professed "rationalist" Raman after his headlong dive into the love of Daisy rationalizes his fall by taking the help of *Puranas* where he finds a number of instances about "saints failing in the presence of beauty" (p. 40). The village school-master also narrates how the villagers spend their time during rainy season in listening to tales from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Daisy interprets the teacher's analysis and asks, "Very well ...At the end of the discourse. Men and women do go home, don't they?" (p. 66)

Time scheme in Narayan's novel is a medium of art for effecting gradual revelation of an individual's personality. As the individual consciousness reflects part by part of its changing moods in slices of time, so also totality of the picture of an

individual gets reflected in the mirror of time when all the moods/moments come together. To quote Hans Mayerhoff:

Time is particularly significant to Man because it is inseparable from the concept of the self. We are conscious of our organic and psychological growth in time. The question, what is man, therefore invariably refers to what is time?²²

Time is indispensable to both story and text; any possible attempt to eliminate it is to eliminate narrative fiction. In Narayan's works, through beautiful arrangement of time the hint of profound awareness about self is repeatedly illuminated.

Narayan presents a nice galaxy of characters in his novels. The inhabitants of his fictional world are pulsating with life and its verve. R.E. Wolseley concludes, "My focus is all on character. If his personality comes alive, the rest is easy for me,"²³ His essential ironic comic vision bestows upon his art of characterization a spirit of detachment and good humoured acceptance of the incongruities of life. Graham Greene remarks, "...and how vividly Narayan's characters do live."²⁴

The relationship between the author and his character is not as we are to other people; his relationship to him is "God-like."²⁵ So creation of a character in a work of art is mostly an expression of the hidden creative power of the author. It is beyond one's comprehension what mysterious power does help him (the author) create and give life to a character, a fact that may prompt many to say that the subject of the character creation cannot be a technique in a novelist form.

This sort of view cannot be brushed aside together; but it is also true that for him who takes his craft seriously character creation is not a hidden magical power, it is conscious, careful method to render his people a dual aspect "life – like and art – like."²⁶ So without going deep into the mystery behind character creation, it is better

to search for the methods that the writer employs in his work to reveal the thoughts and moods of his persons in which are embodied his life values.

Narayan is often praised for his truthful presentation of the middle class in the Indian society. Almost all his major characters belong to this class and his novels deal with their hopes and frustrations. His little Malgudi is a prototype of the world at large. Human nature in a variety of colors finds a vivid projection on his creative canvas. R.K. Narayan opines, “My focus is all on character. If his personality comes alive, the rest is easy for me.”²⁷ As a novelist enlivens his fictional world through his characters, skill in characterization is a measure of his greatness. To quote Graham Greene, “his characters must live, or else the book has no claim whatever on our interest. And how vividly Mr. Narayan’s characters do live.”²⁸

However, Narayan does not focus merely on a clash between the role and personality, nor does he present role as the only means of realizing personality; instead, he concentrates on how role and personality interact, sometimes reinforcing, sometimes conflicting, but always affecting each other dynamically. His protagonists are not what he tends to make us believe that they are “an unchanged, unchanging, old self... and cannot be transformed,”²⁹ they do change, but their change is in their realization of the futility of their pursuance after illusions of life, their change is at the level of their psyche.

So studying the methods that Narayan has employed in his novels to reveal the moods, illusions and passions of his fictional beings, and to see far do these methods help him to transmit his world views through his characters will be rewarding. The study will also show if the methods so used have become effective or they have remained inadequate in exploring the individual personality. It will also help us trace gradual development of the skill of the author in the method of characterization.

Narayan’s portrayals are sharp and penetrating. His characters do not lose their identity even in the crowded Malgudi. M.K. Naik opines that:

My main concern, Narayan declares is with human character-a central character from whose point of view the world is seen and who tries to get over a difficult situation or succumbs to it or fights it in his own setting.³⁰

They become live because of Narayan's sense of community and innate warmth of humanism. With his characteristic comic irony Narayan presents his characters with a peculiar synthesis of detachment and good humoured acceptance of life in which evil exists along with good. Because of this comprehensive point of view, Narayan does not portray his men only in one colour. They do not strike us as deliberate abstractions but live figures equally human in their virtues as in their oddities or eccentricities. Hayden Moore Williams remarks:

Narayan's characters are not lined up on opposing sides of the field like football teams, the peasants versus the landlords, workers versus capitalists, noble Satyagrahis versus the *Red Men* (the British) as in *Raja Rao* and earlier still in *Anand*.³¹

Swami and Friends, *The Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher* are a trilogy that depicts the chief character in various names at different stages in his life. Swami is Chandran and Chandran is Krishna, each changing his name at different times and in different set ups. In these novels Narayan follows little variations in identical methods of characterization to focus on the growth and development of the main character.

Swami and Friends is episodic in construction, and with the help of small episodes the novelists discovers different shades in Swami's character, like his innocence, ignorance, impulsiveness, fear, fantasies, and his confusion about the inscrutable adult world. Each of these traits distributed over different chapters when

joined together gives a wholesome picture of Swami. The episode like Swami's unusual clash with the scripture teacher highlights his innate impulsiveness and his cultural trappings, while the episode of inexplicable hostility of his friends towards him reveals the intensity of feeling and conflict in his mind. An apparently casual sentence records, "This was perhaps Swaminathan's first shock in life" (p. 31).

Narayan adopts both descriptive and dramatic methods to reveal his characters. It is his strategy to put side by side such characters that are both complementary and contrasting to each other. He places Rajam beside Swami; Rajam with his "socks and shoes, fur cap and tie, and a wonderful coat and knickers" (p. 14) looks like "a European boy" (p. 176) while Swami dressed in tucked khaddar dhoti and khaddar cap looks very Indian. Rajam has a dominant tone airing English life style and unorthodox colonial temperament while Swami is deeply rooted in Indian cultural tradition and abhors all that the British system stands for. In their respective views, albeit silently, "towards English rule and English way of life one finds the clash between two system-western and eastern colonial hegemonies and anti-colonial protest."³²

A frame work that Narayan selects to delineate his characters is the family system. Narayan says to Wolsey, "I fear that the rich subjective life of an individual against the background of that institution, the joint family system, is a subject that has not been properly tackled...There is wonderful material here..."³³ Swami's essential goodness, his finer feelings, his simple jealousy, his impulsive nature are revealed through his interaction with his grandmother and the infant brother. Moreover, by placing in a subtle way Swami and Rajam in their contrasting family atmospheres, the author portrays traits of their respective characters.

In *Swami and Friends* locale and the characters do not fuse, they remain separate. The scene on the river bank where Swami and Mani wait for Rajan to arrive or the scene across the Trunk road where all the three sit together are merely external, they do not serve as an aid to action. However, towards the end, the locale plays an

important role in shaping Swami's action and revealing his personality. It plays here a malevolent role leaving a dreadful experience in him. Swami runs away from the Board school and walks across the Mempi forest road, the road with its "White ball – like wood – apple, green figs, and the deep purple Eugenia" (155) attracts him like an enticing witch only to make him frightful at night at the noise of fluttered wings of night birds having "an uncanny ghostly quality" (153).

Narayan uses the device of irony to inform his characters. By shortening the full name of Swaminathan to Swami the author tinges it with irony. "Swami" evokes in us the impression of a spiritual head while in the novel we encounter a young boy. This dissimilarity between the name and the traits creates an ironic effect, and more we enter the text, we encounter this more. To quote Rimmon-Kenan, "Rather than stressing similarity, analogy can also emphasize contrast between name and trait, frequently creating an ironic effect."³⁴ But the ironic effect produced so does not present Swami in a negative light, rather it "serves as merely a technique of amused and tolerant observation expressing of a superior satisfaction."³⁵

Narayan's method of characterization found in the novel is inadequate as he fails to dramatize much of the ego bloated sense of Swami in the company of his set of friends or his wounded self, and the cause of this can be largely attributed to the episodic structure of the work.

The Bachelor of Arts depicts the experience of an adolescent who is on the shadow line between carefree youth and responsible manhood. Chandran is the Bachelor of Arts. By generic use of the definite article to specify and universalize the character, the character becomes an allegoric reduction, the only member of a class. To quote K. Chellappan:

The definite article can also be justified in the sense that the character is part of an environment shared by us and the character, who is reduced to a quality or profession; he is also extended in the

sense of being representative of men in a particular aspect.³⁶

Narayan employs the method of psychological analysis to record Chandran's attempt to come to his own and carve a niche for him in the world, an attempt found in every adolescent faced with a psychological revolution. The episode of his tremendous success at the college debate fills him with unconcealed pride, much common among adolescents. The adolescent stage in the life of a man is most challenging where an individual has a compelling desire to defy parental authority and asserts his own identity. But at the same time he behaves like a child afraid to encounter his parents. In the words of T.A. Harris:

Through the troubling years of adolescence, when young people sometimes seem to turn a deaf ear to the words of their anxious parents, there is nevertheless a hunger to hear and experience reassurance of Mum and Dad's love and concern.³⁷

Chandran's journey through his adolescence stage with his concern for his parents and teachers and his desire to insist upon his individuality is found in his response to two situations. One, in his decision to visit a late film show despite having full knowledge that his father was against it, "he realized that what he usually did was a piece of evasive cowardice worth of an adolescent. He was not eighteen but twenty-one. At twenty-one to be afraid of one's parents and adopt sneaky way!" (11) and the other, in his encounter with his History teacher Raghavacharya. At his summon to his chamber, Chandran becomes scared and falters in front of the door but on the next moment. "He suddenly pulled himself up. Why this cowardice? Why should he be afraid of Raghavacharya or anybody? Human being to human being" (26).

Narayan depicts a fine moment in the life of Chandran that reveals the depth of his passion and dimension of his mood at the loss of his object of love. He narrates the tune of the pipe working in Kalyani raga and the sound of vigorous drum beatings on the occasion of Malathi's marriage that serve as an environment to reveal the mental condition of Chandran. The tune of the pipe and its accompanying symphony creates a depressive mood in him; the duress of it becomes so unbearable for him that he shouts, "Will nobody choke the piper? He is murdering the tune" (92).

Rimmon- Kenan remarks, "The naming of fictional characters are very often based on literary allusions or mythological prototypes."³⁸ One of Narayan's favorite methods of characterization is naming his protagonists after mythological characters. By modeling on those prototypes Narayan reveals them either through ironic treatment or by plain perception. Chandran is the other name of *Sasanka*, the mythical character who was madly in love with Tara, the wife of his guru, a love that is out of ethical bounds and impossible to be actualized. Chandran's pining for Malathi and his desire to marry her is out of socially sanctioned rules, it is unethical since society believes in star concurrence for solemnization of marriage.

Krishna in *The English Teacher* takes further the theme of Chandran's growth towards maturity. In Krishna there is a subtle development towards mental stability and a growth towards spiritual maturity, achieved through utter realization that "There is no escape from loneliness and separation... a profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth in life" (218). In the beginning Krishna is shown as a romantic young man, oppressed at times by a melancholic temperament. He is always overloaded with a sense of something missing. He is a poet and writing poetry is his passion. It is the essence of his individuality. Poetry to him is a tool for singing the glowing beauty of Susila, for overcoming the tyranny of dejection. It is his heart's expression, a means to reveal much of his vision towards life and surroundings.

Krishna is an extension of the novelist's own self; he is the fictional life model of the author. Narayan enters his life, views him from within and understands

him fully. Narayan had passed through such trials and tribulations after the death of his wife which he subjects Krishna to pass through. Thus by projecting his own self into Krishna, author uses the method of objective correlative. By means of detailed description of the agonies and sufferings of Krishna and his response to it, Narayan makes an attempt to, “weaves a cultural, social, economic and emotional complex from which the individual emerges with his dreams and aspirations on his way to salvation.”³⁹

It is Narayan’s technique to realize his chief characters through their interaction with some ordinary, eccentric figures. The nursery school headmaster is such a figure who facilitates a college teacher’s journey to emotional equilibrium. The nameless headmaster serves as a catalyst to hasten Krishna’s search for a harmonious existence. He also serves as a foil teaching him (Krishna) how to endure the physical loss of his wife and treat family life as a hurdle on the way of attaining the freedom of mind. By the time Narayan set to work on *The English Teacher*, he had acquired a good experience of writing for about a decade. It becomes abundantly clear from a study of this work that he is on the way to maturity.

Introducing Narayan’s third novel *The Dark Room* professor K.R.S. Iyengar remarks, “*The Dark Room* which appeared between the ‘Bachelor’ and the ‘Teacher’ is a novel apart, a study of domestic harmony...”⁴⁰

The plight of the traditional Hindu wife forms its central theme here, the story is told from the neutral omniscient point of view. Savitri remains the main view point character in the delineation of most of the incidents. But sometimes the shifting of the focus becomes necessary because of the thematic thrust.

The Dark Room is conceived of the author’s “obsession” with the philosophy of “woman as opposed to man, her constant oppressor” (*My Days* 118). To illustrate this theme, the method of characterization demands a set of characters of opposite sex in their opposite attitudes, opposite value judgments and opposite response to a given situation, what Rimmon-Kenan says “Reciprocal characterization in the contrasted

behavior.”⁴¹ As such, the main characters designed in the novel are a married woman and her husband. They are pitched against each other, each holding fast to his views on man-woman relation.

In characterization, *The Dark Room* makes a definite, improvement. Narayan uses the technique of indirect presentation to bring out the contours of his characters. Here every character is living, real and loving. Ramani is loud and assertive. He is a little dictator who makes the entire family dance to the tune set by him. Savitri is the traditional mythical Hindu woman. She is indeed an amiable housewife. The oppressive measures of her callous husband compel her to revolt and leave the house temporarily. However, it is difficult for her to forget the needs of her children. Hence, she returns to her family. She is not at all transformed, but she is definitely defeated and broken in the end of the novel.

Narayan present Savitri through a complex of roles that often conflict with one another. It is a method of the novelist to present “a character through a complex of impersonations, ‘roles’ or ‘masks’.”⁴² Savitri’s role as a woman with her fierce sense of freedom conflicts with her role as a wife. Both these, in turn, conflict with her role as a mother. This last role triumphs over all her other roles; she succumbs to the call of her duty as a mother and returns home swallowing her pride as a woman.

Ramani and Mari form another pair in *The Dark Room*. Ramani is educated but uncultured and Mari is poor, illiterate but yet cultured. Ramani is sensuous. The moment he sees Shantabai who comes in his company for her interview, he gets attracted towards her. He does not care for his wife or children. His love is sensuous. Such an exquisite complexion came only from Mangalore, Ramani thought; you could see the blood coursing in her veins (p. 73). Ramani looked after her and mediated. What a delightful perfume even after she was gone (p. 73).

The setting in the novel is not merely incidental, it is closely associated with the growth and development of Savitri’s character. Narayan develops and delineates her by visualizing the character against a background. The environment of two dark

rooms, one of the family kitchen and the other of the temple shanty, has been used by the novelist to project the inner drama of Savitri. The dark room in her house where she sulks more often to protest against her husband's cruelty reflects the gloominess, loneliness and dejection in her. It is the objective correlative of the psychic darkness of Savitri, like *The Old Playhouse* of Kamala Das.⁴³

While creating Savitri Narayan shows his technical ability in filling the mould of type with individuality. One feels the presence of double self in her, the woman as she is and the woman she imagines or wishes to imagine that she will be. Her character is an instance of a social type individualized. From Ramani's point of view she is theatrical but from Ponni's angle she is pathetic. This variability in her is possible only because of problematic quality in her character.

Since Narayan designs this work to highlight a social problem in its opposite value systems, he makes Ramani a foil to Savitri. To present his protagonist in a favourable light the author deliberately makes Ramani a grotesque figure. His actions like hooting the car incessantly, his cruelty in slapping his son, his inhumanity in driving his wife out of home in the dead of night are some of his external actions that inform his personality. His speech charging Savitri with holding a stage show or his accusation of her as an ingrate is an expression of the coarseness in his taste. As Rimmon-Kenan observes:

A character's speech, whether in conversation or as a silent activity in mind, can be indicative of trait...(and) what one character says about another may characterize not only the one spoken about but also the one who speaks.⁴⁴

Thus to conclude, *The Dark Room* is a carefully constructed novel. The story of the middle-class life has not failed to produce a powerful effect. There are hardly a few diversions from the main story. The form of the novel is in tune with the nature of its theme. Narayan's language, in this novel, is a convenient tool of expression of

the feeling of the different characters. It is equally appropriate to different occasions. No doubt, the novelist has successfully exploited the possibilities of his limited store-house of language.

The Guide is the cream of Narayan's fictional world. It is a serious comedy based on a vastly complicated theme. Here, the novelist used the intercalation of the first person. Efforts of protagonists to find out the meaning of life through self examining and self questioning continue more vigorously and more forcefully in *The Guide*. Obviously, we have two parallel narratives, one told in the third person by an unnamed narrator in the present tense, and the other in the first person past tense by the protagonist Raju himself. The two narratives concerning the same hero get intertwined in the structure of the work. The autobiographical technique of narration describes Raju's life from his childhood to his imprisonment for his crime. The third person narrative depicts his life after his coming out of the prison till the time he becomes a Swami and sacrifices his self for the general cause of the rural folk. He fasts unto death to bring rains for the drought affected people.

Raju's character becomes more and more complex and he gets more confused due to his gradual more awareness during his desperate struggle to assert his individuality. The novelist is here less interested in telling the story of a love triangle by presenting a psychological analysis of the cuckold husband or neglected wife or the lover when caught; his aim is deeper, more probing and more religious. He tells here not about the "detection of crime and punishment but of sin and expiation,"⁴⁵ to borrow T.S. Eliot's words used in another context; Raju remains the main player in this drama of life.

Had the novelist told the story in a single narrative, he would have faced the problem of assigning reasons for the period of two years of Raju's imprisonment. Not only this, but the plot of the novel would have been divested of its variety and vitality. His clear understanding of his leads him to open the novel in the middle of the protagonist's career. This is indeed the vital point from where he can see

comfortably the past and the present of Raju's life. Indisputably, in *The Guide* Narayan shown his mastery of the craft of the novel. Professor K.R.S. Iyengar rightly says:

Technically, *The Guide* is an advance on the earlier novels: the present and the past are cunningly jumped to produce an impression of suspense and anticipation.⁴⁶

Raju, Marco and Rosie are the three major characters in the novel, *The Guide*. Raju is decidedly the central character who starts his colourful career as a railway guide. His character is realized through a multiple of roles, from a shop keeper to a Swami. He searches earnestly for the meaning of life in his different roles and this search is unfolded before us in two ways, one by self analysis made by the protagonist and other by the observation of the third person narrator.

Raju's trouble starts, in his own confession, from the time when he emotionally gets involved in Rosie, the involvement that also arouses jealousy in him for her husband Marco. William Walsh comments that Marco is "a queer cold abstraction of a man"⁴⁷ and Raju is vivacious, bubbled with warm feelings and swayed by instinctual way of living. Both serve as ironic foil to each other. Narayan places these two characters side by side as if to measure the depth of each, more particularly of his protagonist.

Like other novels, so is here, we have a number of minor but colourful characters. They are people both from Malgudi and Mangala. Raju's sympathetic mother, uncle, adjournment lawyer, the saint, the village idiot, Velan, Gaffur, Joseph and many more minor characters are not futile but they give a meaning and a shape to the novel.

Narayan explores the problem of evil in his ninth novel, *The Man- Eater of Malgudi*. To explore this idea, to make it explicit and then to resolve the problem, the

author conceives a set of characters that are opposite to each other. Vasu is created to serve the purpose of the novelist to elaborate his views on evil. He is an abstract character, fits into the garb of classical prototypes while the character of Natraj is designed in such a way as to inform the novelist's views on goodness. Since the character of Vasu is chosen to make it stand for something in the world of ideas, he is doomed in advance to be mechanical and artificial. It is worthwhile to mention here that Vasu is presented to us as seen through the eyes of Natraj, the symbol of goodness. And since he (Vasu) fits into the idea of evil of the novelist, he remains an allegorical figure. So in him we do not find rich psychological realism or inner conflict or roundness that makes a character life-like and real.

The Man-Eater of Malgudi presents a richly peopled world. We have here a crowd of minor characters, mostly eccentrics besides the two prominent characters Natraj and Vasu. Natraj is a self-effacing and altruistic character. He is ready to help others with lots of inconvenience to himself. He is a timid fellow at heart. Vasu, on the other hand is diametrically opposed to Natraj. If Natraj is the symbol of timidity, Vasu stands for temerity. Vasu is well-educated but he is a cruel taxidermist by profession. He has been presented as a confirmed villain.

In terms of character, we have a good number of eccentrics in the novel. Natraj and Vasu are opposites in their relations with human beings or even with animals. Natraj in his own confession can never be a successful enemy of anyone. Any such thing worries him day and night. This is well contrasted with Vasu's bullying tactics, first with his *Pahelwan guru* and then in his dealings with his benefactor Natraj. In their relations to the animal life they are also opposites. Natraj feeds rice and sugar to ants. He never eats feed without distributing first pieces of bread among the crows, but Vasu goes on destroying animal life killing cubs, eagles, and even pet cats. Natraj protects nature, Vasu rivals it; "Natraj is the symbol of 'pro-life' and Vasu that of 'anti-life.'"⁴⁸ Commenting on this obvious opposite traits in Vasu and Natraj, Naik says:

The interplay between Vasu and Natraj indicates a larger theme: namely the contrast between two diametrically opposed attitudes to life, each shown to be disastrous in its own way. It is a contrast between the demoniacal, self-centered egotism of Vasu and the ineffectual, self-effacing altruism of Natraj, between the temerity of Vasu and timidity of Natraj.⁴⁹

Natraj is not only a contrast to Vasu; he is also complementary to him. As evil allures instantly, Vasu attracts Natraj immediately, and this peculiar relation between the two has been emphasized to show that Natraj provides humane feeling to Vasu and Vasu provides sensual pleasure of life to Natraj, thus completing the sense of totality in man.

While discussing the methods of characterization that the novelist have been following from the beginning of the genre until modern times, David Daiches mentions two conventional methods; one of complete initial portrait followed by events which confirm the portrait and second, emergence of the complete picture from the action. About the first method, Daiches says:

In some novels we are given a descriptive portrait of the character first, so that we know what to expect and the resulting actions and the reactions of the character provide a filling in and elaboration whose justness we can appreciate by comparison with the original portrait.⁵⁰

Narayan's aim in the novel is to probe into the nature of evil. So he creates the character of Vasu to fit into the design of his matter. When the author places Natraj with all his goodness and innocence beside an evil character like Vasu, the latter looks more grotesque and more bizarre. So the character of Natraj is created as if to

measure the depth and dimension of evilness in Vasu. Vasu is a ‘static’ character. Docherty observes, “A static character is one whose existence is entirely accounted for in the fiction; this character is simply a function of the plot or design of the whole and cannot step outside the bounds of the fiction.”⁵¹ Narayan chooses this ‘static’ character to inform his world vision in a lucid way.

The Man-Eater of Malgudi is a beautifully organized novel. It can be read in the form of a conflict between an insulated personality and the vulnerable one. The complex love-hate relationship between the two prominent characters Natraj and Vasu forms the dynamics of action in this thrilling work of art. Here Narayan shows his wonderful mastery of clarity and lucidity, manner and material.

Narayan’s tenth novel, *The Vendor of Sweets* deals with his favorite theme of man’s quest for identity and it is depicted through Jagan, the sweet vendor. The opening lines of the work focus the theme very clearly. Besides selling his sweets, Jagan also sells his philosophy of life. He is a Gandhian and believer in the Gita. It is simply ironical that Jagan is attached to a profession which itself encourages people to taste the flavor of sweet and thereby swayed by the tyranny of taste.

Here, the novelist has employed external point of view or the third person-narration. The limited omniscience keeps the protagonist always at the centre without any shifts in the focus. The general-gap or the conflict between an ageing father and his young son plays a significant role in shaping the narrative and developing its action. However, the novelist prefers to unfold the story only from the point of view of the father. All the events depicted in the novel are seen through the experienced eyes of Jagan.

Narayan uses flash on flash back technique to present a complete view of Jagan’s life and his dealings. The full chapter twelve is devoted to his sweet and sour reminiscences at the foot of Lawley statue. We peep into his past and learn a lot about his youth and his married life. Incidents in the life of young Mali are presented as seen by Jagan or as communicated to him by his cousin who is his alter ego and

Mali's so-called beloved Grace. The novelist's choice of Jagan as a view-point character is in keeping with the tone and temper of the novel.

Narayan has a special sympathy for Jagan. His life oscillates between the ideals of the scriptures and the imperfections, he is destined to lie. His lofty ideals of charity for the poor stand in comic juxtaposition to his free-cash. However, his petty hypocrisies do not deter us from admiring him. Mali is the spoilt son of Jagan. He has no reverence for tradition and he ruthlessly rejects his own culture. He is lured away by the charms of the West. But the end of his dream is the real beginning of his career. After coming out of prison, he is bound to carry on his father's vocation of vendor of sweets.

The other characters who hold our attention are cousin, Jagan's alter-ego China Dorai, the sculptor and Grace-Mali's half American and half-Korean girl friends. Malgudi is susceptible to the currents of change. Its fast expanding nature cannot be missed in *The Vendor of Sweets*. Narayan shows his complete control over his manner and material. The relationship between Jagan-Mali faces the ironic reversal. At first, Jagan neglects Mali after Mali's return from America the son learns to avoid his father. The picture of the retreat to aesthetic purity is highly interesting. The sculpture describes the goddess with a lyrical intensity.

Narayan's eleventh novel, *The Painter of Signs* written after a long silence of a near decade is a packed and slim work of art. The return to fiction after such an unusual gap of time has divested him of the fertility and glory of the days of his masterpieces. In the words of Professor M.K. Naik, "As its narrative outline indicates, *The Painter of Signs* is obviously a novel which is thematically a light weight."⁵² Narayan present a contrast between privacy and crowdedness. In this work, the third person narration also includes the authorial intrusions of the omniscient narrator. The story is told from the point of view of Raman.

Narayan's favourite method of characterization is the conscious use of landscape as a means to influence the moods and motives of characters. The novelist

as if in complete agreement with Watt's observation, "we cannot visualize any particular moments of existence without setting it in its spatial context also,"⁵³ sets some of the moments in the life of Raman against his spatial context to reveal him. One such particular moment in the life of Raman is when he and Daisy are left stranded in an open field, an imposing tamarind tree canopying the stranded spot. The spot washed by the soft light of half moon rising on the distant horizon is gently blown over by cool breeze and all meet to create an exact atmosphere to arouse in Raman such sensation and passion that can affect his equanimity to behave like Rudolph Valentine in the *The Sheik* (92).

A physical scene reflects inside of a character. One such scene found in the novel is the cave scene that reflects the inner mind of Raman. Raman is taken inside the cave surrounded by thickets; he is led to the inner sanctum on a path which is circular and narrow with a low roof. The stone image is faintly visible by wick-light and the sanctum exudes fragrance; the spot is charged with an atmosphere of holiness. Narayan's brief, measured setting and his choice for physical correlatives show metaphorically how Raman's thought's filled in with strong passions are evil while his soul is pure and innocent.

Narayan's usual method of presenting contrasting characters to measure the depth of each is also found here. Daisy is antithetical to Raman in the sense that she has a mission in life and except that all other things is gross, drab and meaningless to her. She searches her identity in the solitary pursuit of her goal. She does not lose her time away in cherishing illusion pointless like Raman. And by placing Daisy beside Raman the novelist gives a fresh meaning to Raman's character.

The novel has a tightened plot. The characters have been properly placed in the scheme of the plot. Here we have a host of minor characters mostly eccentrics. The young lawyer, Gupta-the businessman, the owner of Bhandari stores, the second-hand book-seller at the market, Raman's aunt's grand-father the Poona Grandee, the Town Hall professor and many more are minor delightful characters. All these

eccentrics have no thematic concerns in the manner of their counterparts in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. They are comic, hence interesting.

Now, it is abundantly clear that Narayan is conscious literary artist whose novelist form is beautifully determined by the dramatic need and nature of his material. Prof. K.R.S. Iyengar rightly remarks:

He is one of the few writers in India who make their craft seriously, constantly striving to improve the instrument, pursuing with a sense of dedication what may often seem to the mirage of technical perfection.⁵⁴

The language question is related to different levels or experience. Indian writing in English is a natural and spontaneous expression of a writer's sensibility. Narayan has proved himself as one of the most delicate, sensitive, and capable novelists of our country. His language poses no problems. Simplicity and clarity are the key-notes of his style. He cautiously avoids what his first person narrator in the *English Teacher* terms, "the traps that the English language sets for foreigners" (p. 12). The simplicity of the dialogues and the first person narrations is adequate mirror of reality. V.Y. Kantak finds his language casual, convincing, objective, modest but "closest to the language of the newspaper and the Sunday Weekly."⁵⁵

His narrators maintain credibility in their handling of the English language. We find that when he chooses for a first person point of view, he gives his narrator a style which is humorous, self-deprecating and usually calm and stoical. The abusive language of the school master in *The Guide* is never demonstrated as the novelist seems content with a tame allusion to the old man as one "who habitually addresses his pupils as donkeys and traced their genealogy on either side with thoroughness" (p. 24).

There are many scenes of anger in his novels but the strongest curse is “you earth-worm” (*The Financial Expert*, p. 15). Sometimes, Narayan’s use of English slips. The farmer spiritualist of *The English Teacher* uses the word “epigraphist” (p. 127), and the first person narrator says, “All right, why not you let me take you both” (*The Man Eater of Malgudi*, p. 154). But unlike Forster, Narayan is not afraid to let his characters chat the hours away.

Narayan is careful in not using much of Indian terminology. Nearly all are names for food, clothing, furniture or vehicles. Only in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, Narayan uses religious and philosophical terms relying on the reader’s basic knowledge of those terms. His wit and irony are gently amazing for the young and the old, traditional and the modern. But readers do not easily acknowledge him as a serious artist. One of his critics H.H. Gowda views him as a, “genial story-teller, without much purpose, which voices a common objection. He raises no fundamental values: the mystery of existence is outside his scope.”⁵⁶

Narayan is a person who maintains privacy. He “rarely comments in print of his writing or intentions and issues he deals within his novels.”⁵⁷ He is a successful artist of language. He presents realist details of day-to-day life with an air of authenticity, a realistic and concrete texture. It consists of minute details of the situation. Narayan says:

English has proved that if a language has flexibility and experience, can be communicated through it, even if it has to be paraphrased sometimes rather than conveyed, and even if the factual detail is partially understood... We are still experimentalists. It may straight way explain what we do not attempt to do. We are not attempting to write Anglo-Saxon English. The English language, through sheer resilience and mobility, is now undergoing a process of Indianization. In the same manner as it adapted...

All that I am able to confirm, after nearly thirty years of writing, is that it has served my purpose admirably of conveying unambiguously by the thoughts and acts of a set of personalities who flourish in a small town located in a corner of South India.⁵⁸

A creative writer has to struggle hard for communicating his vision honestly in a language other than his own. Our novelists have made laudable efforts to harness the rich resources of English and mix it up with native colours. It is due to their sheer creative brilliance that English is not a handicap with them. Summing up this aspect C. Paul Varghese writes:

The Indian social, and linguistic set up has affected the features of the English language as used by the Indian creative writers in English, especially the novelists, and Indian English is only a variety of English whose characteristics stem from the life and culture of the people of India.⁵⁹

R.K. Narayan uses the spoken English of a small town in the Tamil state country side. His style is similar to Tamil usage and there is also spontaneous use of Indian English idioms. His Tamil usage is most obvious in the use of verbs. It is common that the interrogative 'have' is often used without 'got' as in, "How many sons and daughters have you?" (*Mr. Sampath*, p. 55). Another common device is the use of the imperative 'let' at the beginning of a sentence, "Let him demand them immediately if he wants betel leaves also" (*Mr. Sampath*, p. 160). And "let her not worry, but just look into a mirror and satisfy herself" (p. 161). New composite words such as 'nose led', 'line-cleared' have been used at times. One such construction is, "Do not eat off all that eating stuff on the shelves" (*The Guide*, p. 64).

The telescoping of words is a common feature of spoken Tamil and it appears in Narayan's English in the frequent use of it 'd'. "The door was so bright and I thought it 'd' be clean inside" (*The English Teacher*, p. 67). It is also in some abbreviated sentences such as, "Saffron stock out will last only another day" (*The Vendor of Sweets*, p. 51).

Many Indian-English idioms commonly appear in Narayan's writing:

It is still paining me, I never knew that..., If only he started cross-examining the teachers, the teachers would ne nowhere, mug up, behave like a rowdy.⁶⁰

There are uses of Tamil proverbs:

She sighed deeply and said... A lot of people are saying that... After the rent control case..., Oh shut up, I cried impatiently... What nonsense is this? You may close the mouth of an oven, but how can you close the mouth of a town? She said, quoting a Tamil proverb.⁶¹

Another use of Tamil proverb is, "...and what would one do with many mansions? asked by Jagan. He quotes a Tamil verse which said that even if eighty million ideas float across one's mind, one cannot wear than four cubits of cloth or eat more than a little measure of rice at a time" (*The Vendor of Sweets*, p. 76).

The English catch-phrase, "I want to be of service in my own" (p. 77) has been used with equal felicity by Sampath, Jagdish and the elderly cousin in *The Vendor of Sweets*. In Narayan there is no break down of English and artificiality in intimate conversation within a family. There is a great naturalness and ease in such conversation. For instance, in *Swami and Friends*, the relation between the generations is always implicit:

His father stood behind him, with the baby in his arms. He asked, what are you lecturing about, young man. Come on, let me know it too. It is nothing. Granny wanted to know something about cricket and I was explaining it to her. Indeed, I never knew that mother was a sports-woman. Mother, I hope Swami has filled up with cricket wisdom. Granny said; Do not tease the boy. The

child is so fond of me... You are not in the habit of explaining things to me. You are all big men.⁶²

Narayan does not let his readers know that the conversation takes place in another language. He seldom tells us which language his characters use. But it is evidently clear from the conversations that these are in Tamil. There is such an example in *The Dark Room* in the conversation between Ramani's servants. Here the English comes very close to the regional language Tamil:

What should a father do? I merely slapped the boy's cheek and he howled as I have never heard any one howl before, the humbling. And the wife sprang on me from somewhere and hit me on the head with a brass vessel. I have sworn to leave the children alone even if they should be going down a well. It is no business of a wife's to butt in when the father is dealing with his son. It is a bad habit. Only a bettered son will grow in a sound man.⁶³

A particular kind of wit is derived from the fluency, which is characteristic of the use of Narayan's language in shorter conversations. Narayan explains it in his novel *The Dark Room*, "Here is the vessel I borrowed yesterday, and here is the key of the room. Are the things in it safe? Yes. As you see, I am carrying nothing with me. H.M. There is nothing worth taking" (p. 124).

In *Mr. Sampath*, Srinivas tarried and said, "I am in hurry. Who is not? The old man asked promptly. Every creature is in a hurry, every bird is in a hurry, every fellow I meet is in a hurry. The sun is in a hurry, the moon is in hurry- all except this slave of God, I suppose" (p. 60). Sometimes Narayan's language is highly emotional. *The English teacher* is such a book of personal experience of the main character. There are several beautiful passages which are symbols of Narayan's handling of artistic language, "It was ineffably lovely- a small pond with blue lotus, a row of stones leading to the water. Tall casuarinas tree swayed and murmured over the banks" (p. 124).

Krishna, the English Teacher, becomes poetic and quotes to Sushila the whole of Wordsworth's poem, "She was a phantom of delight" (p. 126). How beautifully Narayan describes Krishna's first visit to the house of Sushila:

I visualized her all tremble with excitement as on that day when I went to her place to see and approve the future bride... As I waited in the hall, I caught a glimpse of her in another room through a looking glass, agitated and trembling. I had never seen her so excited.⁶⁴

Narayan's use of imagination is simple, precise and concrete:

He picked up his pen, the sentence was shaping very delicately, he felt he had to wait upon it carefully, tenderly lest it should elude him once again; it was something like the very first moment when a face emerged on the printing paper in a printing tray.⁶⁵

There are two such passages in *The Guide* also, "A complexion, not white but dusky, which made her only half visible as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice" (p. 83). The other passage is, "The sun was setting. Its tint touched the wall with pink. The top of the coconut trees around were aflame. The bird cries went up in a crescendo before dying down for the night. Darkness fell" (p. 31).

Narayan's style of writing was in fact, unpretentious and simple with an element of humour. It focused on lay men and women comprising the readers of next-door neighbors providing a greater ability to relate the topic. Unlike his contemporaries, he could write about the intricacies of Indian society without modifications of his characteristic simplicity to conform to trends in fiction writing.

Narayan's favourite stylistic device is remarkable for shorter passages of digressive nature. This is used as a narrative device to connect the past with the present and the present with the future. It also serves the purpose of exploring the state of mind, attitude, and responses of the characters:

Savitri squatted down and wiped the dust of the dolls and old memories of her childhood stirred in her. Her eye fell on a wooden rattle with the colour coming away in flakes, with which she had played when just a few months old. So her mother had told her. There was a...⁶⁶

It is always a suggestion and not the description of emotion. Only gesture is significant as when Savitri returns to her family and takes her place in it by offering to serve her husband his meal after forgetting all humiliations:

The car sounded its horn outside, Kamala and Sumati ran to the gate to announce, mother has come. Has she? Ramani asked, and went into the house. He hesitated for a fraction of a second on the doormat and then passed into his room. Savitri sat in the passage of the dining room, trembling. What would he do now? Would he come and turn her out of her house? An hour later Ramani came towards her. She started up. He threw a brief glance at her, noted her ragged appearance and went into the dining room. He said the cook, hurry up; I have to be at the office...⁶⁷

The same describes in detail when Sushil's cremation in *The English Teacher*, completely dwelling on the action and gesture rather than on emotional description of the situation:

The half a dozen flies are still having their ride. After weeks, I see her face in day light, in the open, and note the devastation of the weeks of fever. This shriveling heat has baked her face into a peculiar tinge of pale yellow. The purple cotton sari which I bought her on another is wound round her and going to burn with her. The priest

and the carriers are ceaselessly shouting for someone or other... They build up a pyre, place her on it, and cover her up with layers of fuel... leaving only the face and a part of her chest out, four layers deep down, pour ghee and drop the fire.⁶⁸

Thus the detached listing of details, i.e., the half dozen flies, the yellowish things of Sushila's face, the purple sari, the hairy man under a tree perfectly conveys the numbness caused by grief rather than grief itself.

William Walsh sums up Narayan's use of English language:

Narayan uses a pure and limpid English, easy and natural in its run and tone but always an evolved and conscious medium, without the exciting, physical energy sometimes adventitiously injected that marks the writing of the West Indians. Narayan's English, in its structure and address, is a moderate traditional instrument but on obstructed from the context in which it was generated. The history, the social condition, the weather, the social memory - and transferred to a wholly different setting - the brutal heat and hovering vultures... Narayan's language is beautifully adapted to communicate a different, an Indian sensibility.⁶⁹

Narayan handles most critical situations with a fine touch. In *The Guide*, there is such a great scene of conflict - between the uncle, the mother, Raju, and Rosie - which breaks up Raju's original home and ends with the angry departure of the mother:

My mother had adjusted herself to my ways as an unmitigated loafer, and I thought she had resigned herself to it... One morning I was watching Rosie's foot-work... my uncle dropped in like a bolt from the blue... and was a sort of general adviser and director of all our family matters... My Mother came running out of the kitchen with tears in her eyes. She flew straight at the sobbing Rosie... The girl looked up with her tear-drenched face... The moment she gets a telegram that the line is clear and added. We are not the sort to let down our sisters'... uncle carried the trunks and she carried the basket... I was afraid to turn round and face her, because I was crying.⁷⁰

Similar success in treatment of language is found in the scene where Raju gives a dressing gown to Marco in the Peak House:

We reached the Peak House... You know I have only one principle in life. I do not want to be bothered with small things... whereas if you gave him a slip of paper, you could probably get him to write off his entire fortune. Now I knew the trick... It pleased him; he opened his purse... with limited language.⁷¹

His characters are wonderful having peculiar innocence, and distinctive artistic presentation. Narayan is objective in the treatment of his subject matter. He can cause to work as a miracle even a modest language resource with honesty a confidence. This miraculous working of language as a tool of his art is his achievement. He sticks to standard English and never attempts to convey the flavor of Tamil or the other Indian language. There is nothing sort of distortion of the rules of English grammar and use of a lot of Indian words. His English is clean, racy, and

vivid. His themes, characters, and dialogue are able to carry the feelings and sounds of the South Indian town, Malgudi. He need not resort to unusual structures.

Narayan's language is easy and graceful, direct and straight forward. It is remarkable for economy of expression. The vocabulary is adequate to deal with the range of subjects. It is also able to express true Indian sensibilities. There is no unique or obscure phrasing. He avoids constant use of compound sentences. In his language, syntax comes closer to the pattern of the normal conversation of an educated Indian. It hardly picks. It only generates affluent humour and life. Narayan combines satire with humour to laugh at the laughable foibles of human nature. He portrays the adjournment lawyer in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* to provide a good deal of humour by his angularities:

Clients who went to him once never went there again; as they sneezed interminably and caught their death of cold, asthmatics went down for weeks after a legal consultation. His clients preferred to see him as he laughed about this premises of the district court in search of business, and he tackled their problems standing in the verandah of the court or under the shade of a tamarind tree in the compound.⁷²

Narayan has a keen sense of observation and masterly strokes of satire which bite but softly. The humour tickles and pinches smoothly and yet leaves its mark. There are such instances on almost every page of his novels. To take an instance:

A strong dog lay snoring on a heap of stones on the road side, kept there since the first Municipal Body was elected for free India in 1947 and meant for paving the road.⁷³

Narayan's novels are peopled with all types of South Indian characters-peasants, aristocrats, thieves, clerks, artists' shopkeepers, teachers and others. At times his language is even coarse while he cynically deals with middle class values, but his heart seems full with the milk of human kindness. Whether it is fiction or

story he has a perennial appeal to his readers. To this aspect of Narayan, Prof. Venugopal rightly points out:

He has no purpose but to delight, but to help the over worked and the tired to while away a few moments with a wise delight. He does not get involved with the characters nor is he interested in any deep psychological analyses. He looks at life with a detachment, ignores its darker aspects and seems to enjoy every moment of its apparently lighter side. Above all, he has the gift of the ideal humorist- he can laugh at himself.⁷⁴

Narayan's dialogue is not normally peculiar to his character's family background, education, age and social status. They all speak alike, so far as expression is concerned. He individualizes his characters, and as such they are more memorable. He has ability to bring a character to life with deft-strokes of his pen. He avoids both religion and politics and seems to view all such things with an amused detachment. C.D. Narasimhaiya rightly observes:

Indeed the world makers and world- forsakers never caused to amuse him, such was his detachment from everything that was going on around him that it only helped to sharpen his wit and quicken his compassion for everyone, everything, but mainly for what fell within his province. And his province was the South Indian middle class.⁷⁵

The narrative method of Narayan has the advantage of flexibility because of his assumed omniscience. He is governed by the question of point of view. It is the question of relation in which the narrator stands to the story. His first person narrative has the advantage of the warmth and interest a person may be supposed, to feel in his own affairs. The reasons he gives for this preference are perfectly sound. The first person narrative is a method which has helped to produce a good many masterpieces in its time.

It is this method that he adopts in *The Guide*. It is used to give perspective and variety as well as authenticity to the narrative. He is able to give interpretation of private feeling and individual self expression. He portrays everything without a single direct comment from himself as narrator:

His beard now caressed his chest, his hair covered his back, and round his neck he wore a necklace of prayer-beads. His eyes shone with softness and compassion, the light of wisdom emanated from them. The villagers kept bringing in so many things for him that he lost interest in accumulation. Whatever he had he gave to the gathering at the end of the day. They brought him huge chrysanthemum garlands, jasmine and rose petals in baskets. He protested to Velan one day, I am a poor man, why do you give me all this? You must stop it.⁷⁶

Narayan's characters have a stature transcending our normal experience and at a certain moments voice the impersonal utterance of passion. His characters may be unmistakably a part of his design. We can never transfer them to the world of another writer nor can be mistake their family resemblance. But they are rarely to be mistaken for each other's and they inhabit a world of realized particulars. His characters are recognized by the strength of individualist abstract speculations and oddities. They are certainly made to fit into the pattern of his own moral universe.

Dialogue adds to characterization. It is one of the most exacting techniques of fiction. In order to convey the sense of individual identity the novelist describes appearance, gestures, cloths, actions, habits and manner. The characters get many of their best effects through dialogue. The dialogue of a sound craftsman like Narayan manages to be natural and at times extremely funny:

Don't you feel sleepy? Raju asked, No, Sir- - keeping awake is no big sacrifice, considering what you are doing for us. I don't attach too much value to it. It's just a duty, that is all, and I am not

doing anything more than I ought to do. You can go home if you like. No sir, I'll go home tomorrow. When the Headman comes to relive me, he will come here at five o'clock and stay on till the afternoon. I'll go home, attend to my work and collie back, Sir.⁷⁷

The background and setting of his scene is as integral as his design of plots, his characters, his dialogue and his narrative technique. The setting has genuine imaginative relevance to his novels as such particular settings evoke particular emotions. But on the whole he places everything at a comic distance. To some extent his social conscience has helped this tendency. He shapes a character and makes him what he is. Malgudi is in the background of his novels and he makes use of it. One can breathe and smell and feel the atmosphere of such a small town of Malgudi. The description of Malgudi is like a character and not only as the background.

Narayan's stylistic virtues never tend to interfere with his technique as a novelist. Our belief in the reality of the report is never destroyed and it never diverts our attention from the content of the report to the skill of the reporter. Narayan's style is intelligible and free from clichés and grammatical mistakes. There is clarity and exactness in the composition of the sentences. There is no vulgarity and flatness in Narayan's fiction.

Narayan's writing style was in fact, unpretentious and simple with an element of humour. It focused on lay men and women comprising the readers of next-door neighbors providing a greater ability to relate the topic. Unlike his contemporaries, he could write about the intricacies of Indian society without modifications of his characteristic simplicity to conform to trends in fiction writing.

Thus Narayan cannot be brushed aside as a traditional novelist, at least when we take into account of his story-telling art. For his choice of various devices used in modern writings, his novels exude an aroma of modernism. His careful and painstaking selection of narrative devices and his skilful use of it in his work are instrumental in making him a meticulous painter in words.

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CHAPTER - 6
CONCLUSION

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The final chapter of the research work is an attempt to summarize socio-cultural perspectives in the selected novels of R.K. Narayan in light of his contribution to sensitizing the elite Indian society to the sufferings of the low caste poor masses caused by inhuman but ingrained religious, and social institutes in our tradition bound country which are presented with social reality. R.K. Narayan is the novelist of the people and for the people, which is why his fiction deals with different aspects of social concerns.

Narayan probes deep into the various facts and facets of human life through his galaxy of characters- it is a specific study of his social ethos which has been betrayed by the evil design of society. His novels summed up with so many facts as this master of literature has dynamic command over language, which he has used in minute observation of society and culture. His presentation of the realistic picture of the society reveals the social background with the eye of social reformer.

The final fact derived from this study is the conclusion that these selected novels of R.K. Narayan highlighted by the shade of different colours of life but social-cultural perspective has kept at the central position. These fictions are the real description of Indian masses. Narayan is the true representative of his age and had a definite social purpose in writing his novels. His works reveal that he is not merely great observer but penetrating commentator on life.

Thus, on the basis of the consideration of R.K. Narayan's selected novels in the preceding chapters, it has pointed out that Narayan is a pure artist, an unidentified social reformer who is keenly aware of the absurdities and eccentricities of society. Remaining a pure artist at the core of his heart and observing life as it is known to him, he interprets Indian life aesthetically and with unprejudiced objectivity. Writing

fiction over fifty years Narayan has earned a great reputation, if not a great deal of critical attention outside his own country. Some of the well known foreign writers recognize his worth and hold him in high esteem for his professional skill and perfect sense of dedication. His distinctive individuality has been admired by E.M. Forster. Graham Greene became his champion in England.

Narayan's close friend and a curious reader of his novels, Greene himself is an established British novelist. He has high praise for the Malgudi novels. He says, "Whom next shall I meet in Malgudi? That is the thought that comes to me when I closed a novel of Mr. Narayan's."¹ John Updike, a famous American novelist has presented an elegant and incisive review of Narayan's autobiography *My Days*. He finds the extremely popular Indian novelist absolutely immersed in his material. William Walsh a widely known Critic of commonwealth Literature weighs and evaluates R.K. Narayan's works and discusses his place in the Indian novel in English.

Though R.K. Narayan is much appreciated by his contemporaries, the multi-dimensional nature of his vision is not yet fully apprehended. This is, in fact, the test of a great artist. The present study is a fresh attempt to comprehend the socio-cultural outlook in his novels and also to assess Narayan's achievement as a social realist artist. Socio-cultural broadly means signifying the combination or interaction of social and cultural elements. It also refers to the idea that language, rather than existing in an isolation that is closely linked to the culture and society in which it is used.

The study reveals that almost all the novels of Narayan explore various customs, traditions that shape the life of the society. His novels throw light on the Indian culture and tradition. Narayan's strength lies in his depiction of basic human themes, essentially in the context of the social situations. He aims to present not the working class but concentrates on the middle class people in the contemporary Indian society. His characters who are common human beings of middle class society reach

perfection through the illumination of their inner being and here lies Narayan's greatness as a novelist choosing the ordinary material and making it a piece of perfection. William Walsh favours him with a sympathetic evaluation, "... a writer of character and maturity."² He has won a great acclaim in so many genres for a long period. His writing spans the greatest period of change in modern Indian history.

In this way, he is traditional, seldom affected by Western modes and ideas in fiction. That is why his novels can be read by the entire sundry, having no distinction of age and outlook. They provide a flash of hope to those who are bewildered by the pangs of sorrow in their lives and direct them to live without anxiety. But there is a restriction regarding the balance of mind without which the predicament of life cannot be eliminated.

Narayan has created a special place as a writer of Indian writing in English. The genre-novel is quite new and undeveloped up to the time of Narayan but Narayan has contributed a lot in the development and nourishment of Indian English Literature. From the time of Indo-Anglian literature, Indian novel flourished in its fullest at the time of Narayan and his contemporaries. The work has provided a brief history of Indian writing in English. The brief history itself indicates that the Indian creative writing flourished in the hands of Narayan and his contemporaries. In India, the form of literature - novel was new but Indian writers in English as well as in regional languages writers have accepted it very easily.

The purpose of this research has been obviously achieved with a noticeable tendency that Narayan emphasizes in the portrayal of social life in India. A class struggle is not the only reality; Narayan's social novels transcend this ideological boundary and present the real picture of society and culture encompassing the broader humanity. Through his chapters he enlivens the contemporary Indian life. Narayan's continual exploration in regard to the relation between India's classical past and his contemporary society remains a dominant aspect of his form of fiction. He is a perceptive interpreter of the contemporary Indian society which has repeatedly faced

the onslaughts of Western culture making deep inroads in the life of the common man. He does not step beyond a set of moral and cultural values which have remained India's legacy from time immemorial. He portrays man objectively in relation to society without making him a mouth-piece of any preconceived ideology.

Narayan thus, deals with various aspects of social reality. He is sure of himself while dealing with the innocent world of children and the youth as he is with the complex world of adult experience, as expressed in the earlier chapters. In spite of the generation gap, his characters are bound to one another with strong family ties. Narayan is equally interested in human relations beyond family. In his expansive world, village folk find place along with the city people. His tradition-bound Malgudi world also records his consciousness of the contemporary political tensions. Narayan, thus, presents a panoramic view of the Indian life. V. Panduranga Rao also confers well – deserved praise on Narayan as a writer of great commitment:

Narayan is a writer with full commitment to... spiritual values and ideas, with which Indians are normally familiar. Narayan's vision is essentially moral, for the problems he sets himself to resolve in his novels is largely ethical. This is not to underplay the comic irony of an artist much admired in the West: on the contrary, it is his comic vitality that humanizes Narayan's grand vision. The elusive charm of his success is the direct result of a rare combination of comic sense and religious sensibility.³

Narayan reflects a mirror of Indian society and culture in his literary works. He owes a great concern to Hindu philosophy of life. His novels and short stories emulate almost all the elements of Indian culture in their contrary form on different

issues - rituals and beliefs, belief in stars and fate, respect to godly men, religion, Indian philosophy, myths and magic, superstitions, marital system, art and literature, etc. The work depicts the different cultural aspects such as traditions, customs, religious beliefs, conflict between Indian and foreign cultures, issues of caste, inter-caste and inter-religion marriages, mythical structure etc.

This research study investigates the intense social awareness of the Indian society not only of his age but also of the ancient India. The present work is an attempt to examine the general characteristics of Narayan's fiction, including his realistic rendering of day today life, the importance of family relationships and the role of caste system in India. The research also highlights the social elements in his writings such as social status, roles, social networks, the symbols, values, material artifacts and rules of behavior that a society or group collectively creates and uses. His narratives provide a feel of his characters through everyday life.

The study probes the intricacies of society, clash of cultures, specifically the clash of Indian and Western cultures. Details about everyday Indian life and his warmth and sympathy towards his characters create stories that are universal. The work delves into the social problem of poverty, greed, marriage and sex. In some of his novels, Narayan highlights the problems with certain socially accepted practices. His writings often bring out the anomalies in social structures and views. An effort has been done to look with fresh perspectives at Indian traditions and mythology, post colonial issues in India, industrialism, caste and deep rooted traditions depicted in his novels.

The research displays a mirror of Indian society and culture from past to present. The study presents the contemporary society and culture of Narayan's India and how it gives a universal appeal to his work. This is what keeps Narayan alive even today and how a study of his novels finds relevance even in the present.

The study analyzes some of the classical principles which make classical myths what they are: the inevitable triumph of good and the destruction of evil, the

laws of Karma, the time scheme of gods and specific stylized role of gods, demons and sages. The research also focuses on some of Narayan's basic themes - family-relationship and feminine sensibility, myth and reality, the theme of renunciation, tradition and modernity etc. Narayan follows some social concerns which are also highlighted in this study- the position of a Hindu wife, his understanding of middle class people, beliefs and superstitions, the role of Hindu society, hypocrisy, man-woman relationships, treatment of love and marriage etc. all are aimed to add a new element by perceiving his novels with a socio-cultural angle.

The work also depicts how Narayan uses language and technique in his novels to mirror the microcosmic India between tradition and change. Narayan exhibits his interest in the different modes of the point of view to suit the stuff in his novels. He uses some major fictional techniques like time-design, plot construction, and method of characterization etc. in his novels.

The study would remain incomplete unless we compare Narayan to some other writers. Narayan's novels resemble the novels of character as written by Dickens, Smollett, Thackeray and Henry Fielding. In the similar manner of their works, Narayan's characters too are not conceived as parts of the plot, they exist independently and the action is subservient to them. The part of 'structure' is too loose and rambling like that of picaresque novels of character. However, the Narayan's 'Picaro'- Sampath, Vasu and Margayya hardly travel wide and breathe in space of a single town.

Nevertheless the characters of Narayan are unchanging and static; they are the creatures of flesh and blood. Like Thackeray's characters, he can also say "I know the people utterly... I know the sound of their voices."⁴ He drew the characters both as individuals and types. Strictly speaking, he portrayed the species in terms of the individual. Natraj is a typical printer, Margayya is a typical financial wizard and Daisy is an enthusiastic activist for the cause of family planning, still they are fully

individualized characters with their own idiosyncrasies, entirely different from the other persons of their class.

Like R.K. Narayan some of the contemporary Indian women writer's Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, Shobha De, and Sashi Despande who express their feministic articulation bringing to the fore an extremely pertinent question of women's equality with their male counterpart. Some of the Western writers like Dorris Lessing, Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison who have used and interpreted different shades of feminism in his writings as Narayan has expressed in his novels. The quintessential in a woman is her motherhood; this kind of essence has been capsulated in the novels of Virginia Woolf and Kamala Markandaya. They expose the inherent woes of womanhood in their distinct style and techniques. We also find dutiful wives which have not been imparted formal education in the novels of Virginia Woolf. A woman is exploited by man as though, it was their birth right. Virginia Woolf and Kamala Markandaya have evocatively delineated women simultaneously from the plan of orthodoxy to the changing Modern trends in contemporary society as Narayan expressed Savitri in in *The Dark Room* and Margayya in *The Financial Expert*.

Another outstanding woman novelist is Ruth Prawar Jhabvala whose six novel deals with the middle class family as Narayan articulates his concern about the middle class society in his novels. Jhabvala is mainly concerned with the family life, the personal relationship and the social problems. She maintains a sympathetic but ironic tone, seeing Indian social problems objectively and coolly. She observes the metropolitan variegated life in Delhi in her novels, *To Whom She Will* and *The Nature of Passion*, with objectivity as Narayan discussed in his novels.

Some other women writers are Nina Sibal, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, etc. All of them have advocated feminism that Narayan pointed most in his novels and have created space for their own articulation of the female angst intensified by their femininity.

R.K. Narayan is considered to be the most authentic 'stylist' of Indian writers as he presents the people as they are without any personal bias. Thus he is often compared to Anton Chekov and Jane Austen. Just like Chekov, he too addresses the reader in his own person as a dispassionate observer. His prime motto is to present a scene formed in his mind very convincingly. He takes utmost care in not touching the issues such as social, economical and political. He does not uphold nor denounce any cause. His writings are away from ideological prejudices. With his own temperament, he holds himself aloof, not as an actor but as a spectator sympathizing but not sharing in the interests of the world around him. He does hold mirror up to nature like William Shakespeare and does not give distorted version. Moreover, the middle class family life in a South Indian ambience has remained a common ingredient in all his writings.

As Narayan depicted in his novels there is also a comprehensive portrayal of man-woman relationship in Manohar Malgonkar's novels. Malgonkar's speaks of what it was in the medieval period in India, and how it extended to the modern times without much change. He describes how superstitions and infidelity affected conjugal relationships. As a novelist with a keen observation of life, he analyses the reasons for happy and unhappy marital lives. With the keen insight of a psychologist, he portrays pre-marital and extra-marital relationships, and shows sex as the primary instinct in man-woman relationships. Like Narayan he portrays the frivolous attitude of man who casts away women like worn-out shoes in the presence of new ones. He shows that man is not able to fathom the mysteries of the feminine mind. He wants man not to consider woman merely as a means for the release of his sexual energy.

Finally the study concludes that socio-cultural element is the foremost and chief essence in Narayan's novels. Narayan's work is a fascinating study of social & cultural layers of human consciousness. He has shown his involvement for the betterment of society, particularly the downtrodden, suppressed untouchables and all the sufferers at the hand of the social design. For the exploration of such society, Narayan has presented social concern in his novels.

Thus, there is no doubt that social – cultural frame is the principal layer in the major novels of Narayan. He is truly the social reformer as well as minute observer of Indian culture, at the same time I cannot forget to mention his other aspects which I have found in the process of my research work. These include Narayan as a great visionary of life, novelist of human being, master of literary crafts, ideal in philosophy, religiously humanist, performer as socialist, realist in narration and tried to remove the tears of poor by presenting his passionate echo against existing evils in society.

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APPENDIX

PROOF OF PRESENTATION OF A PAPER IN A NATIONAL SEMINAR

UGC SPONSORED

National Seminar

On

The Role of English In The Era of Globalization

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I N D E X

1. **Civil Society Movement Against Corruption in India :
With Special Reference to Anna Hazare**1
- Dr. (Mrs.) Meena Bardia
2. **A Critical Study of Prepregnancy Obesity and It's
Impact on The Obstetrics Outcomes of Urban Middle
Class Women of Jodhpur**13
- Prof Kunjan Trivedi, Priscilla Scariah
3. **Futuristic Orientation of Adolescent Girls in Relation
to The Role of Family in Muslim Community of
Jodhpur City**20
- Prof. Kunjan Trivedi, Hyyam
4. **Knowledge Gain in Rural Women of Jodhpur District
through Educational Programme**25
- Dr. Kumkum Rankawat and Dr. Raka Srivastava
5. **Razzle Dazzle of Hindi Cinema in Shashi Tharoor's
Show Business**31
- Dr. Rashmi Bhatnagar & Ritu Sharma
6. **Environmental Accounting and Reporting
Methodologies : An Empirical Assessment of
Automobile and IT Industries in India.....**37
- Naveen Kumar Sharma
- ✓7. **R.K. Narayan's 'The Guide' as a picaresque novel**51
- Sanjay Kumar

R.K. Narayan's 'The Guide' as a picaresque novel

Sanjay Kumar (M.A, M.Phil, PhD pursuing)



R.K. Narayan has a prominent place among regional novelists in English. His novels are placed in an imaginary town, "Malgudi" where his characters operate. The present research paper undertakes to examine Narayan's novel 'The Guide' as a picaresque novel.

A picaresque novel is a novel which deals with the adventures of rogues and villains. The word 'picaresque' comes from the Spanish word 'pícaro' which means a rogue or a villain. The rogue or pícaro is the central figure in a picaresque novel and he plays many roles and wears many masques.

Raju is the central figure in R.K. Narayan's novel, 'The Guide'. He is a rogue and he plays different roles in the novel till he finally comes to be regarded as a Mahatma in the village Mangal. Towards the end of his life he sacrificed his life for the villagers and appears to be a true Mahatma. In his childhood he spent most of his time performing a number of pranks and antics. He used to loaf around aimlessly. He plays with the village boys and acquires dirty habits of all sorts. He does not like to go school, wastes his time there when he is forced to go, and learns just reading and writing. His father has a poor opinion of him, and his mother regards him as a loafer. When the railways come to Malgudi, his father takes a stall on the station and leaves the shop in his charge. The father soon dies leaving Raju to look after the stall, the house, as well as his mother. The disciplining influence of the father is thus removed early in his life and Raju is left free to sow his wild oats.

From a stall-keeper, Raju soon turns into a tourist guide. He is shrewd, intelligent and observant. He soon acquires little bits of knowledge by reading the old magazines and books which he stocks, and by talking to the passengers who came to his stall. He helps the tourists in various ways, tells them as much about Malgudi as he can and he also learns as he earns. He is a

fraud who does not know much about Malgudi and its environs, but he pretends to know everything. He would never say 'no' to any customer. He is able to size up his clients at first sight, and modifies his talk accordingly. The result is that his fame as a guide spreads and he comes to be known as 'Railway Raju'. He never worries about the many distortions in which he has indulged and the untruths he had told. He deceives lies and adopts crooked ways to fleece the tourists.

Raju betrays those who confide in him. He seduces Rosie the wife of Marco who has great faith in him. Marco leaves Raju to look after his wife as he pursues his archeological studies but he does not hesitate to ruin the domestic life and happiness of a man, who has confided in him, paid him handsomely and has treated him as a family member. He is a lady-killer, who takes Rosie by storm. It is his confidence, his non-chalance which enables to win Rosie so very easily. When Marco permits him to go and persuade Rosie to come out and go with them to Mempi hills, "he has the audacity to tell her to come out as she was, without changing her dress saying who would decorate a rainbow"? He makes further advances to her, continues to play bold and flattering compliments, and thus is able to seduce her.

Raju is thoroughly unprincipled and immoral. He is a self-seeker who seeks to achieve his goal by hook or by crook. When Rosie comes to live with him in his house he takes her in without caring for the sentiments of his mother. Rosie practices in their home, the environment echoes with the sound of her dancing. The neighbors and the poor old widowed mother are annoyed. Raju has no thought or care for them. Due to his insolence and arrogance, his mother leaves him and goes away with her brother.

In due course of time Raju becomes theatre manager or impresario. It is all due to Raju's effort and enterprise that Rosie is launched as a dancer and soon they are able to earn fabulous amounts of money. But Raju squanders away all his wealth. Like the picaro, he indulges in gambling and drinking, and lives in a lavish, extravagant style. He keeps Rosie under his thumb, and does not allow anyone to meet her directly. He forges her signatures to get a box of jewellery lying with Marco. It is a criminal act and he ultimately lands up in jail.

When released from jail, we find Raju playing the role of a Swami or Mahatma. He plays this role to perfection, for basically there is not much difference between the role of a railway guide and that of a spiritual guide. He is a fraud and a rogue in reality, but he appears every inch a Mahatma.

However, the very ingenuity of the rogue of the rogue turned Swami, lands Raju in trouble. As a Mahatma, he is called upon to undertake a twelve day fast so that there may be rain and the starving villagers of Mangal may be saved. As a last resort, he narrates the story of his past, the whole story of his villainy, to Velan. Raju is thus compelled to undertake the fast. When he finds there is no escape, he decides to do it thoroughly.

“for the first time in his life he was making a personal effort; for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. He felt a new strength to go through the ordeal.”

Raju is thus spiritually regenerated. He is a changed man by the end of the novel. The fraud or picaro is thus changed into a saint or Mahatma.

Conclusion:

The novel traces the career of rogue who, despite all his self-seeking and self-indulgence, has some good in him, and who is ultimately regenerated. The Guide has an element of picaresque, but it is not a picaresque novel in which there is no such transformation and spiritual rebirth. Raju is redeemed by falling a martyr for the sake of others; there is, no such redemption in the case of the picaro in a picaresque novel.

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