

THEMES AND CHARACTERS OF  
R. K. NARAYAN'S NOVEL  
—A CRITICAL STUDY

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P R E F A C E

The present dissertation is an humble attempt at a critical study of the Themes and Characters of R. K. Narayan's Novels. The study of the characters of R. K. Narayan's Novels has not been done quite arbitrarily. It has been done in thematic perspective. Moreover, the observations on them have been derived from an analysis of his novels. The dissertation is written with full awareness that no last word can ever be said about a writer with such vast range of perception and profound understanding of life. It can at best claim to be an effort at realizing that range and depth.

R. K. Narayan may be called a native-talent because though he was inspired by the wealth of western literature and Philosophy that came to him by the medium of the English language, his root was deep in Indian tradition and Indian culture. As an Indian Novelist writing in English, R. K. Narayan may be said to have achieved greater success. He never deliberately attempts to be an Indian, but because he deals with convincing human beings in authentic situations and records their responses honestly and because these human beings happen to be Indians, he succeeds in achieving that difficult task. His style is direct and characterised by an economy of expression and vocabulary adequate to deal with the range of subject matter and Indian sensibilities. He believes that the task of a novelist in modern India is to deal with the real India with all her problems and features and not the India which has been a mere literary region of the Maharajas and mystery.

The disruption of the traditional joint family disturbs the individual in most of Narayan's novels. He has shown that this domestic dislocation comes not out of personal animosity or bitter relationship but because of the centrifugal impact of the new socio-economic changes in the country. He has noted that the impact of industrialisation and increasing urbanisation naturally tell upon the traditional culture.

The theme of conflict between tradition and modernity has always assumed a vital significance for him. It is more than a manifestation of his constant awareness of the changing circumstances in the social and political spheres of the country. The theme appears to the novelist as an attitude, as an idea or as a set of values. The changes which are taking place in the country transformed the modern concept of his writing in their <sup>e</sup> technique and style.

Gandhian impact on contemporary Indian literature has brought about results at various level - particularly in the realm of style and theme. Narayan is explicit in his imaginative interpretation of the national ideology, embedded in Gandhian Philosophy. The Gandhian myth has been the inescapable substance of his works in which Gandhi appears as a Pervasive influence on the social and political scene.

R. K. Narayan has used myths as structural parallels where a mythical situation underlines the part of a novel. His mystical structural pattern is only partly a self conscious device. He uses the same archetypal pattern in his novels. Besides he clearly explains asceticism as a stage of spiritual uplift. Renunciation or non-attachment is not the result of the acceptance of dogmas or his-

toric events. It is our experience that kindles the flame of the spirit in every individual soul and affects our entire being, cessates us from actions which are prompted by worldly desires and end our disquittitude and anguish, the sense of aimlessness of our fragile and fugitive existence. This dissertation also aims at stydying the themes and characters of Narayan's novels from the stand point of Reality, Comic Vision and Ironic Perspective. It explores the immense possibilities of the comic in the common place world of Malgudi. Comedy here is not only confined to physical details; it also embodies the Philosophic awareness of life which integrates man into his society and reconciles him with his gods. Narayan's 'Realism' and 'Comic Vision' have their anchroage in his strong Indian sensibility. The ironic dimension which some critics find to be Narayan's sole rhetoric mode and vision is, in fact, an integral part of his comic vision.

My principal obligation, a considerable one is to my supervisor Late Dr. G. S. Banerjee, and I gratefully acknowledge it here.

I record my gratitude to my examiner who has kindly allowed me to revise the entire thesis while incorporating his earlier suggestions in the body of this present dissertation.

For my use of quotations and References from various sources. I am perpetually in debt of the authors and publishers and I should also express my heartfelt thanks to the staff of the Library of the University of North Bengal who have all along shown lively interest in my humble but sincere tribute to R. K. Narayan.

# I N T R O D U C T I O N

India is a country of many languages and literature. English, though basically a foreign language, has, by force of circumstances, come to occupy a place with the native languages of the country. It continues to be treated as a second language in the country even today, but the literature that it possesses is richer than those of many other native languages. It has obvious advantages over the Indian languages. Like the native Indian languages, it also developed in India through Indian writers. The Indian writers who wrote in English had, generally, a wider acquaintance with the literatures of the west. This ensured for the writer a wider market. English being the language of the rulers of the country possessed a respectability which the native languages did not enjoy, and this proved to be another source of encouragement for the writers who patronized it.

The cultural renaissance which took place in India in the second half of the 19th century encouraged the growth of Indo-English literature no less than that of the native languages. The Indo-English writers wrote in all genres, but initially poetry received the greatest emphasis. Generally fiction outstripped the other genres as it has happened in the case of most literature of both the east and the west, and today a large number of writers in Indo-English literature consists of those who worship the Goddess of fiction.

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The story of Indo-English fiction is the story of yesterday and today. In the 19th century a few Indian writers dared try their hand at writing fiction in English. This diffidence was caused by the fact that writers in Indo-English literature could not overcome the inferiority complex which centuries of foreign rule had instilled into them. The Indian writers were handicapped in expressing their ideas in a foreign language which many of them had learnt only through books.

The novel at last appeared in the field of Indian-English literature. Smt. Raj Laxmi Devi, Kshetrapal Chakroverty, A. Madhaviah, S. B. Banerjee, S. M. Mitra, Sardar Jogindar Singh, Bal Krishna, Sorabji Cornelia, S. K. Ghosh, T. Ramkrishna, K. S. Venkatramani appeared with their novels. These writers were experimenting with this technique to make it effective as well as impressive. In spite of hurdles at the initial stage the progress was satisfactory. These writers gave us social, historical and detective novels but historical romance was very much popular. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan Raja Rao, Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, Shasthi Brata, R. P. Jhabwala, Narantara Sehgal and a host of others are writers of today.

Indian-English fiction is written in a language which is not the mother-tongue of many India writers nor is it mother



tongue of the people about whom the novels are written. This involves double complications but it also helps to make Indo-English literature a part of world literature. The description of various aspects of Indian life through a language which is not of Indian origin, the novelists are confronted with a number of problems but the one advantage of writing in Indo-English is to get a wider readership and better prospects of recognition.

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The period between 1900 - 1950 was dominated by novels with Socio-political themes. But during the period 1950 - 1980 the acknowledged master like R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and others continued their art of fiction writing. The fiction of Mulk Raj Anand on social criticism and political emancipation produced great effects. He dedicated his art of fiction to India's struggle for freedom from imperialism. However, we can not ignore the social tensions depicted in Modern Indian novels. The presentation of religious and mythical traditions has been very successful in the novels of R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. The novelists Like R. K. Narayan, Santha Rama Rao, R. P. Jhabwala and Nayantara Sehgal take their characters and subjects from urban middle class life. They expose the vanity, sentimentality and hypocrisy in course of probing the depth of love, passion and power.

// From the study of R. K. Narayan's novels we form an

idea of the author as a shy and highly sensitive person but it remains to be verified from his personal contact. His mother tongue is Tamil. He has settled down in Mysore where the regional language is Kannada and he writes in English. His locale is invariably 'Malgudi', an imaginary town, in the Taluk in which he was born and brought up. In some respect he follows the foot-prints of Henry James. His concern is not the fate of the community and even of an individual but the change that a contact with the world brings about in the character of the individual. Therefore, the subject matter is confined only to life and activities of the middle class people of the country, but in the later novels a greater depth is attained.

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✓ As a writer of social novels, Narayan has a light approach to life, and as such he stirs no deep human emotions. He is generally realistic and photographic. The details are accurate but there is also an explanation of the souls of his characters, who mainly consist of College boys, teachers, School-masters, merchants, municipal members, tourists -- guides and taxi-drivers -- most of them from lower, middle and poor classes of Malgudi. His perception of the conflict between the present and the past is more detached and impersonal than that in most other novelists. He has tried to bridge the gulf between the two. Mulk Raj Anand rightly remarks:

R. K. Narayan is meticulous craftsman.

He interprets the mood of his characters.

He determines the pattern without overt intervention.

And thus he achieves organic composition as on canvas where comparisons and contrasts bring out the internal crisis of the human personality. <sup>(1)</sup>

R. K. Narayan has not only attracted a large number of readers, writers and reviewers but has also received critical acclaim from Indian and foreign critics. He has received excellent response from E. M. Forster, Graham Greene, William Walsh, and McCathion. Most of the universities in India have provided for the study of Narayan at the graduate and post-graduate levels. He has been drawing the attention of the research scholars on different aspects of his novels. The present study of R. K. Narayan's novels is an humble attempt to assign the novelist his due place among Indo-English novelists.

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It is against this background that one can understand and appreciate the contributions of R. K. Narayan to the realm of Indo-English fiction. Narayan surpassed them not only in sheer volume but also in the size of canvas and the variety and complexity of characters he has created. The small town of Malgudi is the epitome of the whole of the Indian nation and the inhabitants of the town

emerge as the representatives of the whole of India and also of mankind itself. Perhaps he has no compeer in Indo-English fiction in this respect.

// It is the fate of man that his desires are never fulfilled, but it is also his glory for in the effort to obtain fulfilment he changes and improves. Narayan reveals the individual and his personal hopes, hungers, loves jealousies and ambitions in the context of the social background. His final result arises from the individual conflicts of his characters and the manifold conditions of human life. A great work of art expresses the pattern of life itself. R. K. Narayan gives to the creative art the key to reality when he shows the pattern and the place which each individual occupies in it. The whole procession of creation is the agony of the artist in his conflict with reality in his effort to fashion a truthful picture of the society and the world around him. Narayan does it carefully and skilfully.

In Narayan form and content are not separate and passive entities. Form is produced by content. It is identical and never remains passive. It is his outlook on life, his touchstone for reality. It is true that novel-writing is a philosophical occupation in so far as the novelist has to have a philosophical attitude to life. Narayan poses no philosophical attitudes; he is rather pre-occupied with the philosophy of social reality which is expressed through the characters and the story. In his critical appreciation

of Narayan William Walsh points out :

Narayan has depicted in his novels the life in a hypothetical town of Malgudi, its mediocrity, its pathos and its comedy with a rare irony and compassion ... Narayan, in his Malgudi novels presents members of the Indian middle class as engaged in a struggle 'to extricate themselves from the automation of the past.'<sup>(2)</sup>

Narayan writes with complete objectivity, a strange mixture of humour and irony and an underlying of beauty and sadness. He tries to project the true image of India through his meticulous portrayal of Indian life, landscape and characters. His recreation is artistic and also convincing.

An artist is required to make an interesting story out of an ordinary incident of day-to-day life. We see Narayan starting with an idea and the story finds logical development out <sup>of</sup> the idea. He presents most realistic pictures though they belong to a world of fantasy. His angle of approach is entirely intellectual with the result that he is an analyst of actions and motives. This intellectual humour runs through the pages of his novels. R. K. Narayan has a gift of a serious artist. K. R. Srinivas Iyengar correctly remarks about his artistic excellence.

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 can not possibly lower himself. (3)

// His observation of human oddities, eccentricities angularities, hopes and frustrations is always with tolerance and a quizzical grin. He applies humour and irony with control and understanding tenderness. As a true artist, he does not stand between the reader and the story which is allowed to take its natural course, shape and identity. He is never anxious to give his readers a knowing look. He carries no message, no doctrine. Though he is a writer with a philosophy he does not allow the philosophy to overshadow the story or the characters.

The Indian reality, which finds expression in his novels, is an image of a venerable, wise, but unsophisticated India. Ours is a land of contrasts, Paradoxes, ambiguities and of contradiction between the old and the new. It is a land of poverty and the parade of riches, of caste, which divide and also unite innumerable festivals, and of complicated rituals of birth, marriage and cremation. It is a land of confusion and mystery, and, at times, of religious frenzy which is akin to madness. Yet there is reality in this image of India which R. K. Narayan projects in superb prose.

Like other Indo-English fiction writers, Narayan has the advantage of a traditional frame of reference and concepts like 'Maya', 'Karma' 'Dharma' and 'Moksha' having their full meaning for his characters. The acceptance of past traditions and indirect treatment of socio-

political issues gives Narayan a central place in Indo-English fiction. His presentation of the Indian scene is strictly in accordance with his innate sense of art, subtle economy of his comic technique and simplicity of language.

Narayan is the novelist of middle class people and his greatest charm lies in portraying Malgudi and its people and making them real to us. He depicts places, situations, but succeeds in making them uncommon by attributing universality to them. There<sup>is</sup> nothing heroic about his heroes. He himself admits:

"I have no heroes, only non-heroes".<sup>(4)</sup> His heroes are naive and always involved in one crisis or another. In this respect all his novels follow the same pattern. They are sometimes pitted against unsympathetic conditions. Most of them believe that everything on this earth is pre-destined and managed by some super power. Narayan's common themes are Indian beliefs and superstitions. He also deals with human relationship. Family is his immediate concern.

Narayan seldom goes into higher religious and philosophical questions which interest novelists who intend to cash in on the religious and philosophical heritage of India. But he emphasises like Shakespeare, the basic virtues of life which dispel the darkness of ugliness and make life worth living. He does not value success in the sense in which it means the attainment of power and pelf; he has, in fact, an anti-money attitude towards life as most of his goal characters enjoy temporarily and return to tolerant poverty and

simplicity in the end.

For him real success is the attainment of goodness which is the real source of happiness for both the individual and the community.

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CHAPTER - II

The Social Backdrop of the Themes.

[ 1 ]

Malgudi is the fictional setting of R. K. Narayan's novels and stories. It is as remarkable a place in literature as 'border countries' of Sir Walter Scott, 'Lake District' of Wordsworth. 'The Wessex' of Thomas Hardy or 'The Five Towns' of Arnold Bennet. Malgudi is an imaginary South Indian town round which Narayan has woven the complex pattern of the lives of his characters. He takes us to Malgudi to laugh, Sympathise, and share the vicissitudes of its inhabitants.

Malgudi came to Narayan's mind all ready-made ; I remember waking up with the name Malgudi on Vijayadashami, the day on which the goddess of learning is celebrated. Malgudi was an earth-shaking discovery for me, because I had no mind for facts and things like that which would be necessary in writing about Malgudi or any real place. I first pictured not my town but just the railway station, which was a small platform with a banayan tree, a station master, and two trains a day, one coming and one going. On Vijayadashami, I sat down and wrote the

first sentence about my town : 'The train had just arrived at Malgudi Station. (1)

Malgudi does not exist on any map of India. It is Lalgudi in Trichinapoly District, fringing the River Cavery which can be taken for the original Malgudi. It is neither a village nor a city, but a town of modest size. It lives in the imagination more distinctly than any other region described by any Indian writer.

Narayan's Malgudi is a reality charged with all that is intimate and poignant in human life. It is linked again and again with the rise and fall of heroes and heroines and the place Malgudi is everywhere

it is the 'Surroundings' of Narayan's novels and hundred and fifty one short stories. (2) R. K. Narayan, while introducing the serial Malgudi Days over T. V. on 5th Nov. 1986, admits that Malgudi is, no doubt, an imaginary town, yet the people living here can exist every-where, the atmosphere that influences this city lies every

where. The situation of this utopia resembles the suburbs of New York city of U. S. A. The idea of the place struck his mind when he was staying there. The nature and surroundings of Malgudi is quite universal. These recent revelations of Narayan gives strength to the location of Malgudi and we have clear vision of the place as it stands in our imagination. K. R. S. Iyengar points out :

With each new novel we advance in time (a few years at a step) and Malgudi grows in importance and gains in

definition. The major land marks, however, remain. The River Sarayu flows by its side. Fringing Malgudi or just beyond it are Nallappa's mango Grove and the Mempi Forest, reaches by the <sup>n</sup>Gove street and the Forest Road respectively. There is a Trunk Road to Trichinopoly. One can board the train for Madras at the Malgudi Station.<sup>(3)</sup>

Narayan's first novel Swami and Friends introduces us to this town called Malgudi on the boarder of the Status of Mysore and Madras. Malgudi has a Municipality, a Town Hall, a club and two schools. The Albert Mission School and the Board High School even in the early thirties. We hear of Motor cars in which Swami rides to the club. Even in 1935 Malgudi had a 'Threatre - The Palace Talkies' :

Malgudi in 1935 suddenly came into line with the modern age by building a well-equipped threatre -- the Palace talkies -- which simply brushed aside the old corrugated-sheet-roofed variety Hall, which from time immemorial had entertained the citizens of Malgudi with tattered silent film.<sup>(4)</sup>

The principal land marks of Malgudi - Malgudi Station, the central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank. The Bombay Anand Bhavan, Kabir Street, Lawley Extension, the Regal Hair-cutting Saloon, the statue of Sir Frederick Lawley. The Office of 'The Banner, The Sarayu River, Nallappa's Groves, Mempi Hills, hotels, Cinemas, Colleges -- all these make a strong social frame-work within which

'the juxtaposition of the age-old conventions and the modern characters provides much of comedy as pointed out by Graham Greene in his fine critical appreciation of Narayan.

From Swami and Friends to A Tiger for Malgudi, Malgudi has to adopt many changes. Though the characters belong to Malgudi but they pass through various stages of development. In Swami and Friends Malgudi is neither a village nor a city, but a town of small size, but in each successive novel there is a gradual expansion which becomes obvious in the following lines :

It has grown from a small sized agricultural town to semi-industrialised city. The Malgudi of Swami and Friends is not the same as the Malgudi of The Vendor of Sweets. Even in the same novel, for instances; in The Guide we see it passing through various phases of developments. Speaking from the topographical point of view, the Albert Mission College, headed by principal Brown, the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank with its imposing structure, the newly-built bungalows in the Lawley Extensions, Englandia Banking Corporation The Sunrise Pictures, all speak emphatically of the story of the growth of the town. (5)

Malgudi is of all-absorbing interest to the readers of R.K. Narayan. It is not a mere geographical expression, it has a distinct personality of its own. We always feel the touch of Malgudi as it appears as familiar as our home town:

It is Narayan's triumph as an artist that makes us have complete faith in the reality of Malgudi. It is so strongly implanted in our imagination that we wonder whom we are going to meet in this town ..... The streets and lanes appear to be as familiar as one's home town. (6)

In Narayan's novels of Malgudi we do not find whether it is a compound of Mysore and Lalgudi as he paints his quiet little town of Malgudi on the banks of river Sarayu. But one could perhaps take it as a symbol of contemporary India. Malgudi, the small town with its high school, cricket ground, temple and market place, very soon changes with the advancement of time as it acquires a film studio, a road bridge on the river, a college and other amenities of modern civilization. The School boy, Swami and his Friends, the Bachelor of Arts, Krishnan, who becomes an English Teacher, Mr. Sampath, The Printer of Malgudi, Margayya, the Financial Expert, Raju the Railway porter, petty vendor transformed into a 'Sanyasi' are all living personalities from the changing and complex milieu that is our India. The especial feature of the fictional setting of Malgudi locale is its gradual changes. Life here moves at slow pace. It is completely undisturbed by the outside world. Here are the people who believe in deeply rooted traditions and age-old customs. This makes them to look upon any new idea with suspicion and distrust. Srinivas, the editor of 'The Banner' and the scriptwriter of the

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film 'The Burning of Kama' speaks about this never-changing aspect of Malgudi.' I might be in the twentieth century B.C. for all it matters or 4000 B.C. (7)

Even in 1956 Malgudi showed the signs of a semi-agricultural town. The changes were over-night "Plenty of labour from other districts had been brought in because the District Board and the Municipality had launched a feverish scheme of road development and tank building, and three or four cotton Mills had suddenly sprang into existence. (8) In spite of every sign of an industrialised town Malgudi maintains its peculiarity which is most typical of it. The setting of Malgudi is quite distinctive and most part of it is descriptive. The places of Malgudi are not overshadowed by the people who inhabit it. There are characters who give meaning to the places of Malgudi and make them real and life-like. The sense of familiarity of the streets and lanes of Malgudi is home-bred. It helps the readers to be intimate. It creates a deeper and better understanding of its people and places. There will be no separate identity of Malgudi without 'its financial expert', Maragayya, its printer, Sampath, its editor, Srinivas, its holy man, Raju, its Journalist author-sociologist Dr. Pal and its dandy Sriram. (9)

Malgudi is the projection of Narayan's comic vision. This has been deployed against cheats, bohemians, bossy wives and indulgent grand parents. Malgudi is full of buffoons, ecentrics, kanves, prostitutes, lechers, adulterers, money-grabbers, drunkards, 'Sanyasi'

and would be gangsters. Conflicts of Malgudi belong to a remote past-of the period of the Ramayan and the Mahabharata. There are children revolting against parents and the old ways of life. Husbands are betrayed by their wives. Men are captivated by the beauty of actresses and the female-sex. Malgudi like other places of India is a town where castes and occupation are stable. Marriages are arranged. Astrology is generally accepted, though it not always practised. Malgudi is related to each and every one. Since long with minor changes here and there.

The greatest charm of Narayan lies in making Malgudi its people and their values real for the readers. His most serviceable tools in establishing the intimate sense of reality are keen observation, sympathy, unflinching humour and gentle satire. Still we live in the same familiar surroundings of Malgudi. In Graham Greene's words :

I wait to go out of my door into those loved and shabby streets and see with excitement and a certainty of pleasure, a stranger approaching past the bank, the cinema, the hair-cutting saloon, a stranger who will greet me I know with some unexpected and revealing phrase that will open a door on to yet another human existence. <sup>(10)</sup>

There are familiar faces and places. 'Market Road' is the life like of Malgudi, Anderson Lane, Kabir Lane, Albert Mission School, Lawley Extension. The Central Co-operative Land Mortgage

Bank, Englandia Banking Corporation and The Sunrise Pictures give the town a distinct personality, and peculiarity. The word of Malgudi is warm and intimate. It is life-like and interesting with smells, sights, sounds, and flavours of its own.

Malgudi is a place where people are not heroic. They do not have any control over the events although it seems as if they control everything. They are helpless creatures torn by desire and tossed this way or that way by the caprice of fate. Chandran of The Bachelor of Arts (who is intensely in love with Malathi) at last runs away from home. Mr. Sampath is impelled by fortune and at last leaves Malgudi for ever. The English Teacher finds happiness in the world of spirits after the death of his wife. The Guide dies as a ruined man not because he wants to embrace death but because circumstances compel him to do so. It is thus clear that the people of Malgudi are puppets in the hands of fate.

Narayan underlines the eternal quality of Malgudi inspite of changes that occur with the march of time. Malgudi has traditional history of its own. Ram may have passed through this place on his journey to Lanka. Its streets may have been touched by the feet of Lord Buddha. Its past is connected with the past of India. Its legends carry the historical activities of Rama and Sita, gods and goddesses, demons, Sri Shankara and the Buddha, Sir Fredrick Lawley and Mahatma Gandhi.

Narayan's craftsmanship lies not only in the conventional life of Malgudi but in the loving attention he devotes<sup>e</sup> to building up



a real picture of Malgudi and its inhabitants. Malgudi is his greatest character with its Mempi Hills, tiger-haunted jungles, Nataraj Printing shop, Jagan's sweet emporium, Jonsonian characters (adjournment lawyer), twentieth century demon, Vasu and Characters Like Mr. Sampath and Nataraj. Narayan finds plenty of comedy in the normal life of Malgudi. His attitude towards Malgudi remains lovingly sympathetic. He loves to depict the traditional life of Malgudi with all its backwardness and peculiarities. But he treats it with gentle-teasing and deep understanding.

The procession of extra-ordinary character that marches through Malgudi consists of animal stuffer, crooked politicians, the adjournment lawyer, film-producers, village idiots and the temple prostitutes. Malgudi is lively with its collection of printing shops, schools, temples, hotels and Mempi hills. It has usual beggars, spongers, tricksters, bohemians and orthodox community. Malgudi is less tolerant of the modernisers. Government planners, and men of violence. So Malgudi takes on a character of its own. The themes, characters and dialogues echo the sound of Malgudi.

Narayan is a realist and thus presents details which he intimately knows. He does not pretend to comprehend the whole of reality. Mature as he is, he is fully aware of his limitations. As such he is rather more concerned with selection of factual materials. The reality of Malgudi has got to be appreciated because of the relevance to the subject has discussed. It is realistic, ironic, pathetic and yet comic. Some of the incidents are dramatic, and moralising. The common factor in most of his novels is that the

main character grows from an average to an influential human being and then comes back to his normal status. The end is always seclusion which is due to his dissatisfaction either with one's own self or with the world around him. This is the case with Raju of The Guide, Sampath of Mr. Sampath, Margayya of The Financial Expert, Swami of Swami and Friends, Natraj of The Man Eater of Malgudi Ramani of The Dark Room and Raman of The Painter of Signs.

Narayan is at his best giving his Malgudi a reality of its own. His energy has been spent over the details of characters and the manners of the people moving over the canvas of Malgudi. Their individual traits and habits have been depicted with relevant details. His Marco of The Guide is interested in his own researches. He is also equally particular about the vouchers. Raju's father takes keen interest in talks regarding litigation. The manners of Raju from tourist guide to the holy man change according to exigencies of situations but his personality remains almost the same throughout. In this way the reality of Malgudi is the reality of manners of characters, their gestures, their attitudes, their tastes and the poise of their personalities. It is usually built round Indian beliefs and superstitions. The smells, sights, sounds and flavours from the parts of the experience of Malgudi. They are conveyed to us with simplicity and vividness.

Narayan has powers of acquiring informations. He has ability to cohere and analyse the whole pattern of Malgudi society.

He has a strong sense of dramatic situations and propensities of characters. He is very informative about the characters and places. This is the reason that his Malgudi has become a sort of legend in Indo-English fiction. Every detail regarding Malgudi and its significant situation and places fit in with perfect relevance. The unwanted facts have been ignored by Narayan. He is interested in social problems and repercussions of the violated morals and in depicting such problems he does not lack the analytical faculty over the details regarding Malgudi society.

He polishes his realism so as to give a brilliance to it. He rejects the clumsy facts and seeks realistic description for the setting. Thus the reality of Malgudi is smooth, and polished. He attempts to paint life as it is by mixing romance, fantasy, sentimentality, social conflicts, follies and foibles of life. Here is, of course, reality as it is, but there is also a conscious attempt not to deviate from the traditional form of realism. At times fantasy is, of course, beyond the art and scope of R. K. Narayan. Even in The Guide a little of fantasy exists in the gullibility of the village folks when they impose the greatness of a recluse on exconvict, Raju.

The reality of Malgudi does not depend on the thoughts of the vagaries of nature. The factual material is not rejected simply on the ground of a moral consideration. Narayan carefully arranges the locale of Malgudi. It is very close to the reality of

human life. There are snap-shots of realistic pictures of nature as well as of human oddities. He describes a particular scene of Malgudi and gets into its details. He convinces his readers with the reality of the situation and the scene. He describes even childhood, middle-age and old-age of a man with a realistic touch.

Narayan knows well that the greater the realism, the better the image. In such cases neither the land scapes nor the social pictures are left without realistic touches. They cover up possible details about them. He has the ability to evoke reality in the minds of his readers. He is also endowed with a wonderful power to give a local habitation and name of any thing. However, it is not done with a microscopic accuracy. It is this realistic narrative which presents the various phases of life against the typical Indian background. The conflict between the old and the new Indian values is presented with precision. The aspirations of individuals naturally differ in accordance with their belief and superstitions. In Malgudi there are people who believe in oriental values whereas there are some who are influenced by western ideas and culture. The purpose of the artist in presenting this conflict is to create a sense of awareness that salvation lies in harmony between the two values.

People of Malgudi are representative of all that is good and bad in Indian society. They have faith in evil spirits. They are equally superstitious. They can believe in the miracles

of pseudosaints. Narayan's awareness of the rural life of Malgudi is superb and he has done full justice to it. It seems that he has observed Malgudian life in its minutest details. Malgudians are typical Indians. They are simple and gullible. They can be easily duped by self-styled saints, printers, publishers, financiers and birth-control workers. The businessmen, the middle class persons and the rural folks are typical of Malgudi. They have their own ideas and ideals. They are unaffected by the west-oriented culture. Malgudi has typical schools and school teachers, specimens of which are most convincingly drawn. The snake charmer, the temple the holy men and the worshippers are as real as Malgudi itself. The holy men are really so-called holymen about whom there is hardly any holiness. Narayan has exposed such pretenders more effectively. The typicalities of Malgudi are its realities. The novelist has an eye even for the trivialities of human life. He is interested in the spirit of persons and objects. In this way Malgudi is not a sage of ideas and Narayan is not a propagandist, he is a realist of reputation. He shows the temper of the time. He limits it to the social conditions and for which he has Malgudi as interpretative medium. He maintains the social climate throughout. It is a sort of historical record for him.

Narayan's India is the real India and his Malgudi is a living creation. The characters, scenes, situations, habits and customs are all real and authentic. His Krishnan and Shushila, the Headmaster and his wife are all real and convincing. So is the old

woman, the perfect stranger, on hearing that Krishnan is a widower, insists on getting him married at once :

A man must marry within fifteen days of losing his wife, Otherwise he will be ruined. I was the fourth wife to my husband and he always married with<sup>in</sup> three weeks. All the fourteen children are happy, What is wrong. (11)

Malgudi has its own doctor, who, on the basis of imagination and without bothering to see the patient, finds out the disease and treats accordingly. He seems no difference between malaria and typhoid. As real is the Malgudi Doctor, so realistic is the description of the disease like Malaria and the Typhoid :

Malaria : The Doctor said, " I was only dreading lest it should be Malaria -- The most erratic and temperamental thing on earth. I would trust it. But typhoid is the king among fevers -- it is an aristocrat who observes the rules of the game I'd rather trust a cobra than a green snake, you can depend upon the cobra to go its way if you understand its habits and moods." (12)

At the time of 'Quit India Movement' Malgudi maintains its reality. Its youths actively participate, Malgudi has patriot-like Sriram and terroriost like Jagdish. They are inspired by GandhiJee. They help boycott of foreign goods. Sriram also pickets a Malgudian shop :

Sriram still lay on his belly and raised his head and said 'It is for people like you that Mahatma Gandhi has been fighting'. (13)

The Co-operative Movement widely spread up throughout India has also its impact of Malgudi. The middle -- aged money lender, Margayya sits under the Banyan tree just in front of the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank with an old tin bag. He is always busy with his subtle financial transactions with the village folk. Like other places Malgudi has the branch of the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank which has completely failed to provide financial assistance to the villagers. The middle man gets its upper hand defeating the sole purpose of the development of Malgudi. Margayya succeeds in his venture to acquire the reputation of a wealthy man whereas the interest of common man is neglected.

It left him admiring the power and dynamism of money, its capacity to make people, do strange deeds. (14)

Malgudi is certainly little, but by no means miserable as Vasu of The Man Eater of Malgudi calls it "a miserable little place". It is so just because it is little. Here every one knows every one else. The happenings of the Temple or the Temple-elephant become matters of common concern. Here is no violence, no confrontation and no hostility. Even the Man-Eater at large is incapable

of being hostile to anybody.

"I could never be a successful enemy to any one. Any enmity worried me day and night. As a school boy I persistently shadowed around the one person with whom I was supposed to be on terms of hate and hostility. I feel actually uneasy as long as an enmity lasted ..... It bothered me like a toothache." (15)

Malgudi has its common tea-stall, the Muthu's tea-stall, which sells tea in unwashed tumblers. It does not refuse any of its customers. The adjournment lawyer has an outstanding credit with his Printers client, Natraj, but wants his own fee in cash everytime to move the court on his client's behalf. His office is not less realistic. It consists of just a chair for himself, a table and a shelf of law books. He used to have an asthmatic attack for a week after a legal consultation.

In Malgudi there is the forest officer with his collection of Golden Thoughts from The Bhagwad Geeta, The Upanishades, William Shakespeare, Mahatma Gandhi, The Bible, Emerson, Lord Avebury and Confusius. There are charitable people who suspect ill-motive of the tailor and his hand in Vasu's attempt to poison the elephant. There is Rangli, the temple dancer, who is black, most ugly and rugged but still seductive. The Veterinary Surgeon, Dr. Joshi has the same prescription for all the diseases of men or animals simply with the variation of dosages. Malgudi has its own trials and tribulations. The Malgudi Police Inspector does not pay



the bus fare to any bus conductor of Mempi Bus Transport Corporation. If he finds a seat no vacated for him, there is threat to the bus to be impounded at the next bus stop on the ground of over-crowding. The Sanitary Inspector is also a typical Malgudian.

His main business was to keep the city clean, a hard job for a man in a place like Malgudi where the individual jealously guarded his right to independent action.<sup>(16)</sup>

Malgudi also shows breaches in the joint family system, Natraj admits himself :

All the four brothers of my father with their wives and children, numbering fifteen, had lived under the same roof for many years. It was my father's old mother who had kept them together, acting as a cohesive element among the members of the family.<sup>(17)</sup>

Jagan is the sweets vendor of Malgudi. He is a genuine Gandhite. He plies Charkha every day even in his old age. Like Gandhijee he is dedicated to truth and non-violence. He believes in the ancient Indian culture. He is a believer in naturopathy. He is dead against hoarding black money. He believes in earning money by fair means. He is neither a cheat nor an adulterer in his business of sweets. If money is the root of all evils he finds the only way to deal with the evil to go to the root and he presents a solution to this problem by bringing down the price of sweets considerably. This Malgudia of Narayan has also generation gap which is sad and poignant. This wider gap of generation has the impact of the west

which is bound to separate the father and the son. But Jagan is completely free whereas Mali is the victim. In spite of hard striving for an understanding with Mali, Jagan manages to break away from the chains of paternal love and he is left to the abiding reality of Malgudi. Thus, Malgudi with its people, its climate and its value is real. Narayan establishes the intimate sense of reality in his saga of Malgudi. His chief concern is man and man's relationship in the society, a normal and uniform life. He makes us believe in the reality of Malgudi and to get into our imagination, we remember its existence for ever.

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[ 2 ]

R. K. Narayan's view of social reality is essentially Indian. He does not allow any political ideology to colour his vision of life. It finds expression through his characters, the plot of his novels, and their settings. The social, religious, and political ideas are important issues in the nineteenth century. The writers of the period could not ignore such vital problems. Reform in every social institution is essential so as to liberate people from the curses of ignorance and superstition. The artists endeavour to achieve this result through different mediums.

Indian society is divided into several sets of life and it is guided by 'Varnasramdharma' (a man's role and duties

according to his place in a scheme of castes and stages of life). Karma (the principle of deeds) is worked out both in this life and in successive births until the ultimate release from the cycles of rebirth. The hierarchy of values is classified as dharma (right action). Artha (worldly interest) and Kama (Human love). The fourth is Mokasha - which is salvation where this stage is reached a person does not have to undergo the travails of life and death.

All Hindus do not hold these beliefs in their scriptural form to the same extent. They also do not apply them to all situations, still these are always referred to and also taken for granted in institutions and rituals. The ideal division of man's life is; childhood, studenthood, the status of a house-holder and renunciation of the world. The every period is equally important. The happiness of life depends on the best use of all the periods. there are a few persons who renounce the world at the appointed time. As such the ideal of renunciation has a strong hold on the Hindu imagination.

'Varanasrama' (The idealised stages of life) viz. student, house-holder, pre-sanyasi and Sanyasi finds reference in Narayan. He gives psychological insights in describing these idealised role. In his maturer novels, we get a harper conflict of roles arising out of opposite values. Maragyya has to act as head of the family and as a financier. As the head of the family he maintains his respectability and as a financier he gets success through ignoble means. Rosie, in The Guide, is an example of fixed

roles. Vasu has taken an oath of smashing weak people. Mr. Sampath also follows the same pattern, his position from the average to the most distinguished brings him to the original position.

Generally, in an orthodox Hindu family, free communication between a girl and a boy before marriage is not allowed. These two never meet or talk before marriage their only contact is by way of optical communication. Narayan maintains this by giving the girl an imaginary name, an imaginary life and imaginary virtues :

"He wondered next what her name might be. She looked like one with the name of Lakshmi. Quite a beautiful name, the name of the goddess of wealth, the spouse of god Vishnu, who was the protector of creature".<sup>(18)</sup>

Marriage, is a social institution. It is in its ideal form, a unification of two souls into one. Narayan feels that caste, sects, sub-castes and communal divisions must go:

"If India was to attain salvation these water-tight division must go community, caste, sects, sub-sects, and still further division".<sup>(19)</sup>

Inspired by this ideal of marriage his Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts rises above such petty things and thinks of marrying Malathi whatever might be her caste.

Narayan exposes narrowness, conservatism, debauchery and fraud of the society which are the evils responsible for the

suffering of mankind. But he is always free from preaching and moralising. His middle-aged alcoholic and lecher Kailash in The Bachelor of Arts gets no sympathy from the readers. But his very presence in society tempts Chandran's involvement for the worst evil, prostitution. The tyranny of family life and arranged marriages is narrated with certain aims and objects. Here Narayan appears to defend the traditional class divisions.

Narayan expresses deep concern at the destruction of the sanctity of a marriage life and scandalous love affairs of a husband in The Dark Room.

His view of society is not based on illusions. It rather stands on the sound pillars of reality. His heroes are aware of social and political changes. His Savitri in The Dark Room does not spare her husband for his moral turpitudes:

"I am a human being. You men will never grant that. For you we are play things 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."<sup>(20)</sup>

She revolts against the ways of her husband. She says :

"You are dirty, you are impure. Even if I burn my skin I cannot cleanse myself of the impurity of your touch". For the sake of her self-respect she can starve to death, but she cannot live with an impure husband:

She fears society. She voices concern at her performance. Whatever she is doing for her self-respect is not in accordance with the Hindu religion and tradition. She fears her position in her next birth. Her progressive idea of living under the 'open sky' comes to an end because she is a believer in religion and tradition. She is defeated :

"What despicable creatures of God are we that we can't exist without a support. I am like a bamboo pole which cannot stand without a wall to support."  
(22)

Malgudi experiences fast changes. Its simple economy is progressively replaced by complex economy with banks and business concerns. The second world war has also affected the economy of Malgudi. In such a situation the role of a financial expert can never be ignored.

Narayan handles such social economic problems as catastrophe. Margayya, the Financial Expert, is tempted to accumulate wealth with a view to providing a bright future to his son, Balu. His financial acumen and dubious methods that he adopts for accumulating money simply demonstrate that he never cares for the society.

The Financial Expert records the changes in Malgudi life in terms of Margayya's phenomenal rise from a small financial adviser working under the Banyan tree to a financial wizard of ample means. Margayya's adventures are of course,

comic, for his downfall restores him back to the reality of his position in a hierarchical social order.

Through Margayya Narayan has represented the dishonest money-lenders and crafty people of the society; but we have his deeper view of social realism also.

Prostitution causes moral turpitude. It is even nasty to think about other women. Vasu, in The Man Eater of Malgudi, finds it necessary to satisfy his sexual appetites with the help of prostitutes and other degraded women of Malgudi. This adversely affects the social life of Malgudi. Narayan writes :

Sometimes a slim girl went by, sometimes a fair one, sometimes in between type, sometimes a fashionable one who had taken the trouble to tidy herself up a bit before coming out ... I had no notion that our town possessed such a varied supply of women. (23)

Quite in violation of the social codes, Vasu's ~~egoism~~ and / sadism disturb the serenity of Malgudi existence. The entire Malgudi community including Vasu's mistress is morally against him. As A. N. Kaul has pointed out that in the midst of this solid reality, Vasu becomes not impotent, but unreal. The unreal has no place in Malgudi, which always stands for the real. After the clouds have gone, Malgudi is once again its old

self. Vasu, the domonic preserce that has threatened the peace loving orthodox community of Malgudi meets his ordained end. But during this brief period of Malgudi's life Narayan has carved out a brilliant human comedy out of the fear and faith of an innocent people nurtured on the hoary traditions of India.

The Man Eater of Malgudi offers a panorama of the Ancient and the Modern juxtaposed together. Once again we are in that placid atmosphere of the small town Malgudi. There are discussions on Nehru's Third Five Year Plan and other harmless political and social topics.

Narayan's treatment of the social aspect of Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets is to depict the traditional life of an Indian, who at last leaves his life as householder and businessman to save his soul from social degradation and mockery. Narayan favours Jagan's actions and advocates for a traditional way of life. He is also instrumental in changing eccentricity into genuine renunciation. In both The Financial Expert and The Vendor of Sweets there is a complete breakdown of communication between two generations, represented by conflict between the father and the son.

Narayan presents in The Guide the complex and tragic figure of society suffering to purify the sins of others. In the end his tragic hero, Raju, becomes the reality. The metamorphosis



of Raju from a petty vendor to a tourist-guide, from a fateful lover to a desperate prisoner, and from a 'Sanyasi' (Saint) to a martyr is a kind of escapism from society.

Raju, reared in the ancient Indian tradition is lured by the glamour of the new way of living. His degeneration accompanies his defiance of Malgudi's time-honoured social codes. Whether any tangible result has been achieved or not by the penance of Raju, is immaterial. More important is that the individual has sought his salvation according to the great Indian tradition.

Raju's metamorphosis is suggestive of Narayan's affirmation in the old values. The changes in Malgudi and also in the characters are confined to the surface and at bottom it is only the age-old spirit of India that sustains their existence, restoring to them the vital life force even on the brink of their destruction.

Narayan probes the attitudes of both on the sound footings of social obligations and gives the readers an understanding that matrimonial advertisement of the newspaper cannot prove healthy for marriages in Indian Society. Such marriages are rather disastrous and never fruitful. In our society our age-long customs and rituals of marriage can bring hopes and happiness for the married couple. Here the Westernised marriage system has been ridiculed. Narayan believes that Indian institution of marriage is superior to that of the West. Rosie reacts and confesses to Raju "I would have preferred any kind of mother-in-law, if it has meant one real, live husband."

Narayan treats forgery as the most sinister thing in society. It can solve the social hurdle and can enhance the economic position but the result is disastrous and catastrophic.

Narayan portrays the helplessness of women in society. Rosie of The Guide has been denied the privilege to grow into a perfect womanhood. When she gets it at the hand of Raju she is once again deceived.

Narayan is traditional in his approach and whatever falls short of it is not approved of by him. But he is always detached and never preaching. As a conscientious artist he soon resumes the narrative with usual gusto without any suggestion for improvement anywhere. Over propaganda is none of the concern of the novelist. He only conceives the social values.

He portrays domestic life, morality and commercialism. He is not satisfied with the mental make-up of the people in general. He points out that commercial instinct ruins the moral of a man. He deals with this question in most of his novels. He is aware of the social and individual taints. There are also small issues of social nature in his novels. The changing social life is a sort of historical document. He socialises human emotions and he does it on two counts - socialisation and moralisation, but views them from a distance quite dispassionately. His social problems are ever engaging. His social anxiety remains largely aesthetic in his approach to the material he deals with. His treatment of economic

and commercial motives has subsidiary importance. He has an eye on 'Sadhus' (Saints) cheating the people in the country. A holy man in the country is not always holy. India is flooded with the so-called holymen. Narayan has spot-lighted this social evil. We realise that the man is greater still for man does not hide even the ugly facts of his life. The confession of guilt and proper penance to undo this can make the life of a man nobler.

The social evil rises to heights but speeds down very soon. This sudden change of social evil is the result of social consciousness of our Indian culture which is superior to the other cultures of the world. Narayan feels that a simple life free from the greed of money can be much happier than that of a person infested with it. False glamour and cheap popularity is not permanent and it leads to ruin. The shallow social values are responsible for the fall of a man. He keeps on scrutinising the social temper of the time while working as an artist. The behaviour of the community receives his full attention but it never hampers the art impulse. His subjectivity does not interfere with his objectivity. He nowhere peeps from behind the curtain while describing social problems. He watches the series of events passionately. An image is not allowed to intervene his creative effort to paint the social milieu. He casts numerous shades on the social aspect of Malgudi and its people. He has also control over the situations. He does not let any one of them go without proper description of treatment. They remain firmly within his grasp. They act in the way the novelist wills them to act. For

For social values, he enters the skins of his character and gives them individuality and brushes aside the public opinion with courage. For other writers, it would have taken a lot of courage to execute such a thing. In the very start of his novels he conceals the social motive and the purposes with an admirable wearing of mask on his face. It is very rarely that he is tempted to peep through the pages. His own view of society does not matter much and the emotions also do not explode anywhere. He has hardly anything to preach. He works out the details -- the workings of society or the social conditions in the form of art pattern. This is simply his art impulse and not his social philosophy.

Narayan is simply an analyst of individual feelings, emotions and actions and an explorer of human conflicts. He keeps very close to surface reality and his aim of writing is to give a picture of society that strikes him as typical of everyday reality. It is, of course, true that the aim of art is an understanding which comprehends all forms and creeds. Narayan feels that understanding cannot be gained by blindly accepting all or a section of existing forms and creeds.

Narayan's novels are the expression of various problems of middle class society in which he has been all absorbed. The balance between his characters and society is well maintained. They are more the pictures of a society than simple characters in which an individual does not feel himself in opposition to the collective responsibility of the society. The novelist himself is an integral part of it. But he never puts himself in conflict with his characters. His

characters are types. They symbolise wisdom, courage, loyalty, and treachery. They deal with the weal and woe of the individuals in their private life.

Sometimes there is struggle of the individuals against society, against nature and the social way of life. But they cannot live without society in which myth and reality are indistinguishable and the time is without terror. Narayan has seen people and society in their true colour. He is critical and ironical. He analyses them like a scientist. It shows that his characters and their problems are incapable of solution within their society, but they surrender to their respective lot.

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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. Malgudi emerges as a comic amalgamation of the old and the new, of ancient temples and modern hotels and becomes an image of the incongruities involved. "Malgudi is an Indian small town and 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". Behind the fact of this comedy, Narayan presents the poetry of the life of an entire community.

Into this small South Indian town with its orthodox values, the modern civilization comes in all its manifestations raising a flutter here and there, disturbing the quiet waters of Malgudi life. Malgudi gives Narayan the comedy of deviation and disturbance of the normal .... the comedy in the novels after 1946 depends very much on the abnormal outside influence with the placidity of the town. Even under colonial subjugation, the Malgudi of earlier years has not woken up to the sinful living of the modern civilization and like Swami, Malgudi is still in its adolescence. The smugglers' arcade that we notice down the Market Road in The Painter of Signs is not there in Swami and Friends. In the 1930s Malgudi has not registered these drastic changes and except the peculiarities of the teachers, the funs and quarrels among children, the car ride and the cricket club, Malgudi presents no other visible features of Western influence.

As years advance, Swami tells his grandmother about cricket and Tate. This mutual reciprocity between two generations marks an unadulterated Malgudi existence. But with the growth of years, there develops, gradually, a gulf between these two generations.

Malgudi awakening to the excitement of the new civilization. In such a context, there are the history association and the endless debates of the college union, Gajapathy's distaste for post-Eighteenth century literature and his dismissal of Shaw, Wells and Galworthy, Brown's humour and the English club, the second show cinema with coffee and cigarettes. Malgudi is suddenly lifted from the docility of a conventional life to the excitement of a new living.

Malgudi stands for the Real. Any deviation from it only results in a comic scene, and characters, ordinary as they are, are bound to come back to the folds of Reality, that is Malgudi. The illusions of the modern the West, no more exist and Malgudi alone appears Real with its traditional way of living. The movement from Swami and Friends to The English Teacher is a progress from the innocent pleasures of childhood to the wisdom of a mature adult. The comic note that is perceived in the Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts is markedly absent in The English Teacher. The Indian background in this novel is envisaged in terms of the grave and serious Hindu metaphysics. The novel confines itself to domestic and then later to a metaphysical plane, as a result of which the trivialities that go to make up the boisterous Malgudi life in all other novels, are conspicuously absent here.

The idea of The Age of Reason that Raman advances in The Painter of Signs seems hardly tenable in the context of our awareness of the ancient beliefs and practices. In The English Teacher, one, of course, misses the fun and laughter typical of Narayan's fiction. The

economic progress and the various expansions and advancements of Malgudi in The Dark Room result in a corresponding erosion in traditional values and a fast adoption of the new style of living. From the quiet small town of Swami and Friends or of the childhood years of Raju in The Guide, Malgudi swiftly changes into a commercial centre. The transformation of a semi-agricultural town to a semi-industrial town, the emergence of 'The Banner' and The Sunrise Studio and various other things speak of an awakening in the economic and cultural areas of the Malgudi existence. The entire Malgudi has been caught up in a frenzy in response to such awakening. But despite all this, the old ways continue to affect the life of Malgudi.

A political theme blended with a romantic one characterizes Waiting for the Mahatma. Malgudi is caught in the political current of the country; but what we find here is very much a tame Malgudi with its usual fervour and gaiety conspicuously absent. The novel operates on two planes - the political and the romantic. Malgudi, as our experience has proved it, is no field for any of these passions. That is why, the action instead of confining itself to Malgudi alone, stretches far beyond to the villages and to Delhi. The Sriram-Bharati romance cannot function in the normal course of even partly because of the orthodox barriers of Malgudi and partly because the 'ideals' dominate the character of Bharati, as in the case of Daisy in The Painter of Signs. For such romance to fruition, the sanction of the Mahatma is needed, who embodies the grand Indian



tradition.

In the interaction of various forces, Malgudi positively has lost much of its virginity. A backward glance over the years enables us to see an innocent, idyllic Malgudi in the childhood years of Raju. The details of this memorable past and of the successive changes are transparently true to life. By means of these details Narayan weaves a cultural, social, economic and emotional complex from which the individual emerges with his dreams and aspirations only his way to salvation. The focus is on the individual as well as on the milieu from which he comes, thus leading to a total impression.

A chronological study of R. K. Narayan's novels helps us to realize the temporal changes that have come over Malgudi over the years and the eternal spirit that has withstood all such changes. Amidst all the manifestations of change, there is somewhere an ancient home or temple, a grandmother or an aunt. In the Malgudi of Swami and Friends the anxieties and tensions of the modern changes are not prominent. Yet afterwards, "the comparative calm of the thirties is gone, or is going : we are heading towards the war and the post-war years of hectic striving, chronic uncertainty, expense of spirit and lust in action". In this twilight world of Malgudi, old values still persist, old customs are still observed in all their religious details. In the outskirts or Malgudi, the villages with their ancient way of living are

viewed as the repository of the orthodox traditions and they are closely interwoven with the Malgudi existence. Though Malgudi has come under the blandishments of the new civilization, the silent, hidden self of Malgudi still holds dear the traditional values of life.

Malgudi is an intimate part of Narayan's experience. The disintegration of joint family, the emergence of a middle class, the rise of economic individualism are some of the accompanying factors of the modern civilization that Narayan himself has experienced. These are vividly portrayed in his autobiographical works. Narayan's concern is with the middle class and it is this class which oscillates between the Old and the New. The middle class hero loses the illusory to gain the real. Raju, Balu, Mali, all middle class youths, in their attempts to gain independence (which is feature of the modern age of democracy and individualism), economic as well as social, get isolated from everything. As years pass by, changes are bound to occur. These changes reflected in the Malgudi milieu are noted in minute details and the unique human responses to such changes have been sympathetically viewed in all these novels. Compared to Swami and Friends, the Malgudi of The Painter of Signs or A Tiger for Malgudi, is much altered; its virginity and intimacy have given place to a shocking impersonality. Yet the statue of Sir Frederick Lawley who has built this town years ago still remains. The Sarayu river still flows on as

it has been doing since time immemorial. On her sand Swami played; Gandhiji spoke to the people of Malgudi; Krishnan buried his wife, and Raman now paints his signboards.

CHAPTER - II

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CHAPTER - III

Themes of R. K. Narayan's Novels

The word theme refers to the subject of a work or the central of dominating idea in a literary work. It may be the general topic of discussion, the subject of the discourse and the thesis in non-fiction prose. It is the abstract concept which is made concrete through its representation in person, action and image in poetry, fiction and drama. Theme is stated directly. It may be abstracted from the work, when not given specifically. Keats' Ode on a Grecian Urn for example, contains the themes of the permanent of art and the transitoriness of life. When applied with reference to a novel, the word theme refers to or indicates the central thought or the idea on which the plot or story of the novel is built. The Indo-anglian novelists in general, and R. K. Narayan in particular, are concerned with a number such central thoughts, and objective ideas that form the base on which the plot of the whole novel is built. So far as Narayan is concerned, he handles a number of such core thoughts which can be called to have formed the themes of his writings. Such themes can be mentioned as being the chiaroscuro of light and shade in the life of common middle class people, the conflict between old order and new, the cultural conflict between tradition and modernity, asceticism and renunciation, nationalism and Gandhian struggle -- all of which form in combination <sup>with</sup> the essential Indianness of his fictions.

The creation of an Indian consciousness in Indo-Anglian novels is a new experience and the process by which it has been

done is one of progressive self-discovery for the nation. This creation of a distinctly Indian consciousness and its appropriate expression in art distinguishes Indian fiction from that of another nation. In fact, some of the best works in Indo-Anglian fiction successfully achieve a universal vision through the representation of a real slice of Indian life. Nothing could be more provincial and localised than the life of Malgudi town, yet R. K. Narayan, for instance, puts his experiences into art and achieves a broader vision through them.

Indian novel reveals the Indian character and Indian life.

The writer and his audience share a similar background and common experiences because the cultural units in Indian tend to be aligned on linguistic lines. The English language cuts across diverse ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds and this gives the novelist a wider audience in India<sup>and</sup> abroad. Still Indian novel in English has developed differently from its Western counterpart. There are three important reasons for this ; (1) Certain Hindu Common places of thought which are limiting and defining condition, for example, in the conception of plot and character; (2) the social, religious and political ideas which were important issues in the Nineteenth Century and which forced the novelist into a particular moral stand; (3) lastly the development of prose style which made certain techniques possible, particularly in the use of myth.

Some beliefs which are common places of Indian thought

and which most closely affect the novelist in his interpretation of human character and human action are Varnashrama dharma or a man's role and duties according to his place in a scheme of castes and also according to his stage of life; 'Karma' or the principle of deeds and consequences which is worked out both in this life and in successive births until the ultimate release; a hierarchy of values, generally classified as 'dharma' or right action, 'artha' or worldly interest and 'Karma' or human love; and a cyclically ordered time and universe which encompasses these values. Not all Hindus would hold these beliefs in their scriptural form to the same extent; nor would they apply them to all situations, yet they are constantly referred to and they are taken for granted in many Hindu institutions and rituals.

Thus, there are many possible attitudes to 'Varna'<sup>division</sup> and to caste. In modern India it may be replaced variously by a man's professional pride and responsibility towards his occupation; by a stress on class rather than caste; or caste may be rejected outright as valueless. 'Ashrama' ideally divides a man's life into studenthood or apprenticeship, the status of a householder and finally renunciation of the world, with a shadowy intermediary stage of withdrawal before the last. In practice the chief place belongs to the householder and youth is a training and preparation for it, nevertheless there is a vague but strongly felt ideal of falling away from the married state towards non-attachment in old age. Few men renounce the world in the classical style at the appointed time, yet the ideal of renunciation has a strong hold on the Hindu imagination.



'Karma' activity is sometimes no more than a speculative possibility, an explanation of the way good and evil operate; more often it provides the basis of moral action, since man's present situation is evidence of his success or failure in conforming to 'Dharma'. Everywhere in Indian literature fate means writing on the forehead. In its more popular form, 'Karma' is confused with fate; thus a man's responsibility for his situation is partly or totally denied.

'Moksha' meaning release is a value which is often added to this scheme of 'Dharma', 'Artha' and 'Kama' but it is really different from the three worldly value being optional where the others are compulsory. However, 'Tirukkural', the Tamil ethical treatise, divides 'aram-(corresponding to Dharma) into 'Illaram' (domestic virtue) and 'Turavaram' (ascetic virtue).

In Hindu mythology, time is conceived of in a series of cycles. The largest of these cycles is the 'Kalpa', which is also a single day in 'Brahma's reckoning. Each 'Kalpa' begins with the creation of universe, out of Brahma and ends with the dissolution of the universe, when all things are merged into Brahma. After this another 'Kalpa' begins. Each 'Kalpa' is made up of a thousand 'mahayugas' and each 'mahayuga' is made up of a series of four 'yugas' or ages. In popular imagination it is the 'mahayuga', the simpler cycle of four ages, that counts, as well as the belief that the current age is 'Kaliyuga', the fourth and worst in the series. The implication of eternal, repetitive, deterministic time is that :

the short-lived individual, in the round of his transmigrations, remains involved, some how, some where, under one mask or another, throughout the whole course of the protracted span. (1)

This leads to some perennial problems of Hindu thought : how to account of individual experience; how to account for human action.

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India in spite of her variety and complexity is a cultural unit; she has an image of her own culture. When we talk about the portrayal of the image of India we really mean the revelation of the image of her culture and its rich heritage. Culture is an exploratory term which means the sum-total of all that is reflected in the mode of life of people-their thought processes and outlook on life, social structure, values and customs, their need, aims, aspirations and national commitment and then this is best expressed through the arts and letters of country. The best way to measure the culture of a nation is her literature. It is the literature that adequately comprehends and represents the inner and outer life of a nation. It will be a significant and highly developed literature, adequately commensurate to this great of projecting the culture. In other words, it may be said that the literature of a great epoch in the past that represents adequately the spectacle

of the cultural life of that age, is sure to be of interest to a later age reflecting an equally complex pattern of life. Literature is 'an expression of society'. The novelist in modern India whether he is writing in English or in any regional languages is so much a part of his own cultural pattern that he cannot but reflect her image. If by the term 'Indian consciousness' we mean the awareness that India historically has her own cultural identity, then to project the image of India not only means to transmit her own cultural identity but also create an awareness of this identity in the minds of her own people and the rest of the world. This awareness of the lasting heritage of our people also implies the consciousness of history; because the quest for meaning in human experience has always been related to the historical perspective of man's environment or more specifically, to man's awareness of a process in time and his sense of belonging to society. India has undergone profound changes throughout the ages and simultaneously formed and preserved a senses of identity. The dynamics of her contemporary evolution as well as her traditions, and the realities of her modern life naturally are reflected in the novels written in modern India. As a result, the Indian novelist along with the hard task of portraying the perennial problems of Hindu thought and culture, faces the fresh problem of giving artistic expression to the effect of economic changes and industrialisation on the community, the class structure, the racial relationship and above all on the family relationships. This is an area of concern neither limited in scope nor marginal in impact. As a matter of fact, this is the

most significant layer of Indian experience and therefore essential material for the Indian novelist.

The changes that came under the wave of western cultural influences in family relationship and community bonds have been felt everywhere in every sphere of life. Take for example the theme of social change; the disintegration of the old hierarchical and agrarian society or the breakdown of the large joint family. This is a change that is taking place all over the country and whether Attia Hosain in 'SUNLIGHT ON A BROKEN COLUMN' writes about a Muslim household in Lucknow or Mulk Raj Anand writes about a peasant family in Punjab (THE SWORD AND THE SICKLE) or R. K. Narayan writes about the disintegration father-son relationships in 'THE SWEET VENDOR', and husband wife relationships in 'THE DARK ROOM', the underlying situation is real to all Indians and lies very close to their immediate experience.

Besides, National Movements, industrial growth and social reform as well as political ideologies are directly dealt with or indirectly suggested or reflected in Indo-Anglian fiction. The novels laid in the nineteen thirties and forties invariably touch upon these aspects.

The domestic dislocation comes not out of personal animosity, but because of the centrifugal impact of the new socio-economic changes in the country. The impact of industrialisation and increasing urbanisation naturally tells upon the traditional culture. R.K. Narayan's novels such as 'THE ENGLISH TEACHER', 'MR. SAMPATH', 'THE

'FINANCIAL EXPERT' and 'THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI' are the most illustrative of this modern phenomenon disturbing the traditional structure of the society while in 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS' and 'THE ENGLISH TEACHER' the division is due to social reasons, in 'THE FINANCIAL EXPERT' it is owing to mutual jealousies and discriminations among the members of the family that the Hindu joint family is broken. Similarly, in 'THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI' Nataraja's joint family is disrupted after his grandmother's death and similar incident takes place in the family of Jagan after his son's comeback from America with a foreign mistress.

The question of faith, ritual and superstition is a variation of the question raised in R. K. Narayan's 'THE GUIDE' where also the climax hinges on a ritual for bringing down the rain (fasting, in this case). While in Sudhin Ghosh's novel there is a considerable intermixture of fantasy and reality which makes miracles probable, it is more difficult in Narayan's world with its realistic tone and ironic understatements. But even in 'THE GUIDE' there is a faint suggestion, though a very ambiguous one, that the rains do come, that is the miracle does happen at the end. The faith of hundreds of people has a certain strength in itself, that can transform even a shady character like Raju into an agent of divine grace. Perhaps this interpretation oversimplifies the elusive quality of Narayan's novel, but it should be noted that both Raju and Balaram are at first reluctant instruments, who are later changed through the power of the collective conviction of the people in general. The details of the rituals and customs and the practices of the people show that literature reflects the culture of the

people and the aspirations people live by; idealism has always been part of a literary tradition in India. The description of the legends and customs strengthens the illusion of reality not merely through their correspondence to actuality but through their relation to the whole vision the novelist is trying to communicate.

However, it is assumed that a novel in English by an Indian author can be justified if it is Indian in some peculiar and essential fashion. Thus novels come to be valued not so much upon their power as fiction, as upon their content of the national quintessence. We say this because inspite of the tradition of Indianness in Indo-Anglian novel<sup>it</sup> does not cease to become a dominant literary form. Here the novelist's tradition does not consist of rules, but rather of certain assumptions about the handling of imagined and observed reality. The novel provides a matchless illusion of reality, a sense both of the moment and of time passing, and a compelling vividness as of shared experience. It is the art of life. India had many of the cultural conditions favourable to the novel. Now she has social forces actively favourable to the production of fiction; a large audience, an educated class, a new questioning of age-old socio-religious dogma, and a consuming urge for knowledge and interpretation of society. The Indian novelist has an extraordinary cultural multiplicity to contemplate embracing differences of age, caste, religion, wealth and politics.

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The efforts of Westernised Indian intellectuals like Nirad Chaudhuri inevitably provoked a counter-reaction amongst other members of the elite. They organised in protest. :

... to devise adaptive strategies more congruent with the self-respect of the community.<sup>(2)</sup>

Against the Western image of India's future was set an autochthonous image which highlighted the achievements of traditional Indian culture. In the words of John Friedmann:

A young nation will seek to explain itself in terms of a self-image which is capable of forging a link with the past and of revealing the true genius of its people.<sup>(3)</sup>

This reassertion of identity appears to be a universal second step in all acculturative processes. Says David C. Gordon :

In the second stage, the colonized begins to resent his inferior economic and social status; he rejects the colonizer's myths and he counters them with his own myths. He seeks to resume contact with his pre-historical continuum and he tends to emphasize the uniqueness and superiority of his cultural heritage.<sup>(4)</sup>

The buttressing of the collective image is required, quite obviously, because the adoption of the alien image places the collec-

identity  
tive/in jeopardy. In the language of Berger and Luckmann :

Specific reality maintaining procedures may be established to cope with the foreigners and their potential threat to the official reality. (5)

Necessarily, this phase will reinvigorate the supine culture with creativity as it is forced to form some conception of the alien image into which it may evaporate. Von Grunebaum, for instance, sees a first stage where cultural integrity is preserved by means of an appropriate historiography. Then :

A self-image that is more carefully reasoned emerges through the emergence of an articulate image of the West and its civilization. It is based on selective experience and is perhaps not so obviously programmatic as was the self-portrayal by means of history. (6)

Importantly, he adds that now indigenous writing :

... begins to describe or dramatize the culture conflict to which the authors or their fathers have been exposed. (7)

In India today, the most gifted and prolific illustrator of this vision is R. K. Narayan. He is the torch-bearer of that more complimentary image of India first seen by certain sympathetic Orientalist scholars and take over by patriotic Indians in the 19th century. Ultimately, as well, he is in a direct line of descent



from men like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, a novelist who, Nandy says, was :

... trying to lay the foundations of an Indian

self-image that would not humiliate .. (Indians).<sup>(8)</sup>

If Chaudhuri's attitudes signify the loss of Indian self, Narayan's efforts have been instrumental in its recovery. Today, the element of Indianness "plays an important role in the elite's self identity and it is in no small measure, thanks to men like Narayan that this should be so."<sup>(9)</sup>

Yet, the reasons for this are not those that might be expected, for in terms of sheer numbers Narayan's public is probably more foreign than Indian. The image of India which he projects in his novels finds its most avid audience in the west where he is praised for the universality of his vision. The Times Literary Supplement, for instance, commended. :

What is true in Malgudi is true in the whole world.<sup>(10)</sup>

Remarked William Walsh :

Malgudi is an image of India and a metaphor of everywhere else.<sup>(11)</sup>

Similarly, an Australian enthusiast of Narayan's fiction, Cynthia Vanden Driesen, commented :

Despite the Indian colouring of Narayan's novels ... we become aware of universal human nature.<sup>(12)</sup>

In spite of the fact that, according to Narayan, only ten percent of the Indian population is fluent in English, the prestige conferred on his work by the "centre" makes his portrait of India and Indians worthy of emulation at the periphery. Encomiums in Narayan's honour from far-flung corners, even Indians must recognize, are validation that a great artist is in their midst. By recognition at home and abroad, Narayan works towards the fulfilment of one of the intellectual's primary responsibilities -- the establishment of a truly universal culture. Through the depiction of the values of the Indian heritage he offers an "alternative (13) universality" to standards and values that emanate in the West.

Yet, Narayan seems to have earned this universal acclaim for all the wrong reasons, for his image of India does not dwell upon the garish and bizarre feature on which Naipaul and Chaudhury seem to thrive. The Times Literary Supplement applauded Narayan's low-key approach. :

Absent is the Oriental kitsch which has in the past vulgarized to the point of unconscious parody, the work of those English writers vaguely attracted to the mysterious East. (14)

Said Anthony Thawaite in that same review some months later :

He succeeds without trading on the doggedly exotic or making anthropological points. Malgudi is a world as richly human and volatile as that of Dickens but never caricatured.

He surprises not so much by his revelation of strangeness so much as by his pictures of the commonplaces of Oriental life. (15)

Cynthia Vanden Driesen has remarked in a similar fashion :

In Narayan's novels, the possible exotic appeal of material unfamiliar to the Western reader, which a lesser writer could well exploit for superficial excitement is reduced to a minimum. India is no vast unknown quantity, a nebulous and vaguely menacing landscape. The extreme simplicity of his Indian scene appears, in fact, occasionally to restrict the appeal of his novels for some Westerners. (16)

Narayan, like no other, proves him wrong on this score. On the contrary, Narayan's readers accept his portrayal of India because it resonates with the clarity of authenticity. The Times Literary Supplement, once more, lauded Narayan's fiction, because :

To read his books is to understand the comparatively superficial nature of much of even the better European novels about India. (17)

Edwin Gerow had similar praise :

Narayan's characters behave in ways that are recognised as Indian by every foreigner who has ever visited there. (18)

Indeed, it is true that the figures that people Narayan's novels and

the situations in which they become involved are different, but the difference is not capitalised on or played up to. Despite the unfamiliarity of the territory and the quirkiness of the circumstances, we feel that we are witnessing an everyday milieu that has not been translated to cater to our expectations and we are appreciative and more attentive to nuances as a result. Said Ved

Mehta :

" His books have the ring of the true India in them." (19)

Now, all this is the case because Narayan perceives India, unlike Chaudhuri, from the vantage of interiority. Observes Naipaul :

" He operates from deep within his society. The India (20) of Narayan's novels is not the India the visitor sees".

Anthony Thwaite, writing in The Times Literary Supplement, offered a similar laudation:

" Unlike E. M. Forster's India (Narayan's) is seen from the (21) inside.

Contrasting Narayan with a number of other Indian writers, Gerow (22) concludes that, unlike them, Narayan "is not a foreigner at home". Amongst all the critical voices, Molly M. Mahood has arrived at the heart of the matter, "Narayan", she says, "is a happy novelist". (23) He does not seem to suffer the deep hurt and isolation that the Westernized Chaudhuri does. Still, though we may wish him well in his equable adjustment to his surroundings, Narayan's situation

should give us cause for more earnest meditations. It is commonly thought, for instance, that the very use of the English medium confines the Indian intellectual to isolation and solitude :

"In his adoption of standard English the Third World writer is again setting himself off from the society he depicts."<sup>(24)</sup>

Akhileswar Jha has doubts concerning the use of English as a medium of expression in India and maintains that it is an "inadequate means of apprehending the social reality"<sup>(25)</sup>. Yet, others have praised Narayan's ability in overcoming this potential pitfall :

"He manages to make his people speak ... as they would speak if English were their language."<sup>(26)</sup>

There is then, a dual aspect to Narayan's work : the portrayal of genuinely Indian themes in a foreign medium. This is carried off with a deftness of touch and adroitness that is rarely seen. In short, Narayan seems to be possessed of a type of cultural ambidexterity which gives him access to two worlds. Gerow has neatly summed it up :

Narayan is not the usual kind of neocolonial literary phenomena, the writer adept at Westernizing his own aesthetic heritage at all costs. His art expresses a formal as well as contextual continuity with the best efforts of Indian classical literature. Yet, he is so expressive to Western literary tastes. <sup>(27)</sup>

As will be demonstrated, this social amphibiousness is one of the most remarkable attributes of India's march toward modernity.

Though Narayan's English is not so uncompromising in its concessions to the sensibilities of Western readers as works such as Raja Rao's Kanthapura, we nonetheless feel that in Narayan's hands it is a vehicle perfectly suited to convey the oddities of Malgudi life. As well, there are features of Narayan's Malgudi epic, one that continually unfolds and grows richer before our eyes, that draw attention to the essential interiority of his perspective. While Chaudhury so often seems to exhibit a consuming fascination with events that originate in the high culture of the West, Narayan's image of what is of significance to India is limited to the narrow horizons that befit the traditional point of view. As Friedmann points out, modernists often overtly display a manifest preoccupation with perceiving events at the metropolitan centre. (28) On the other hand traditionalists "look inward on their community". Malgudi is the epitome of this lack of peripheral vision. As Narayan tells us of Sriram in Waiting for the Mahatma.

"(He) had been born and bred in the township of Malgudi. And even there his idea of the bounds of the universe was confined to Kabir Street." (29)

And the moral is unavoidable that, backwater as it may be, the denizens of Malgudi are happier and more well adjusted as a result. Vasu, the image of turbulent modernity that rampages through the events of The Man Eater of Malgudi, reminding us of Chaudhury in

many ways :

" Finds himself alienated from the harmonious  
relationships of an ordered society. " (30)

But he is the exception rather than the rule. The social milieu of Malgudi illustrates well a maxim that Mannoni believes characterizes many traditional environments :

"Abandonment is inconceivable. The social  
structure affords everyone a place. " (31)

Still, the warning is loud and clear that those who transgress these nurturing structures may not find reintegration so easy. Not unlike the Westernizing intellectual who succumbs to the tantalizing allure of the image of the West and finds himself adrift between two worlds as a consequence. Mali, the son of Jagan in The Sweet Vendor, returns to Malgudi after a less than successful sojourn in America only to find that he is at loose ends with himself. Unable to find willing investors for his story writing machine, Jagan (32) notices "dark rings under his eyes" and a general listlessness". In contrast, it is suggested that those who are content to remain satisfied with India's own image of itself reap the rewards of a social matrix that affords security and contentment. While the exterior perspective causes Chaudhuri to perceive Hindu family life as vicious and strife-ridden, one Narayan critic has remarked upon the :

" ... permeating warmth and tenderness he brings  
to his family scenes. " (33)

Similarly, Narayan offers us glimpses of the sanctuary afforded by the intricate web of social relationship that pervade this small South Indian town. That ingratiating individual who never fails to include a sociable interlude at Jagan's sweet shop is described as :

" ... a cousin, though how he came to be called so could not be explained, since he claimed cousinhood with many others in the town. " (34)

Narayan is very much at home in his own society. Narayan, not infrequently, displays a compassionate absorption in the lives of typical Indians.

Narayan's Indian microcosm of Malgudi mirrors the life of that portion of the subcontinent in all its diversity.

But this last feature is not one we should automatically expect as a matter of course if we remember that Narayan's antecedents are those of a high-caste Brahmin. His readiness to make the low-born suitable subjects for fictional representation points to the fact that Narayan's novels, despite appearances to the contrary, have consequences that reinforce the cohesion of the Indian nation at large. Not only does Narayan deem the low-born appropriate subjects for inclusion in his novels, but the plight and vicissitudes of women are also often included. This can only aid the growth of a sense of civil affinity. What the Rudolphs have termed the "growth of fellow feeling",<sup>(35)</sup> which is the necessary precursor to the establishment of a homogeneous Indian nation. Though the



thought of Narayan is ostensibly a political, this is not always entirely the case. The nationalist hagiography of Waiting for the Mahatma is a case in point. At the same time, that novel serves a double function since its most ardent nationalist is a woman : Bharati (lit. "the daughter of India").<sup>(36)</sup> We will have occasion to observe that Narayan is not as much the "dyed-in-the-wool" traditionalist as he seems at first glance. But the few features of modernity that are included in Narayan's image of India lend support to a statement from Lucian W. Pye :

"The novel is not only a modern form of communication; it has also been, in many transitional societies, one of the most effective means for giving an understanding of modern life and of new values and concepts."<sup>(37)</sup>

From the appearance of Narayan's first novel, The Dark Room (1938), to the most recent, A Tiger for Malgudi (1963), we are made aware of the steady encroachment of modernity into Malgudi life :

"Narayan observes a deeply traditional society gradually becoming aware of change (and) of the flux of modern Western nations."<sup>(38)</sup>

"Over the forty-year span of his writing career, his novels have subtly mirrored the changing social, political and cultural influences animating Indian life."<sup>(39)</sup>

To be sure, the changes are slow and gradual. They would escape the detection of foreign observers like Chaudhuri, who condone nothing else than the rapid paced development of the West. But, because Narayan's perceptions are those of the insider, his ear is finely attuned to the natural pace of evolution taking place about him. ( We notice, for instance, the progression from the admiration of things, English in the early novels to its replacement with an abiding concern for the cultural creations of America.) Ramani, the protagonist of The Dark Room works for the Engladia Insurance Company and enjoys tennis at the club, while Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts seriously considers higher education in England. Yet, by the time of The Sweet Vendor, published some thirty years later, Mali considers the United States as the only suitable place to pursue further study. The Guide chronicles the arrival of the railway in Malgudi. Here, we witness Raju's adeptness at :

"Participating in the busy rivalry of the new world created with the arrival of the first train."<sup>(40)</sup>

Similarly, it is not uncommon for many of Narayan's characters to enjoy a night out at such theatres as "The Palace" where films featuring Dictrich, Garbo and Laurel and Hardy are regularly screened. The liberalisation of the joint family and the increasing complexity of life are other features of modernity not omitted from Narayan's Malgudi annals.

All this notwithstanding, it would be a grievous mistake to label Narayan as a social historian whose main concern lies in

registering traditional India's various accommodations to modernity. While he is not unaware of these changes there is some unmistakable quality in his writing which says otherwise and to fully appreciate this we must reiterate our earlier remarks on what we have defined as the traditional mode of Indian perception. What cannot fail to strike the uninitiated Narayan reader is the almost evanescent quality of his prose. Absent are the psychological nooks and crannies of the angstridden Western author which provides sinecures for an even greater host of Western critics. One feels certain that Narayan would agree with Tagore's characterization of the Western-style novel:

" Only one turn of the screw after another,  
analysis piled on analysis, attempts to draw  
out ever new theories and moral lessons by  
wringing, squeezing, buckling and crumpling  
forcibly twisting human nature." (41)

Instead, Narayan's novels display a unity that seems hewn from a single piece and as a result they often prove themselves unamenable to the canons of Western literary criticism whose analysis requires an opening in which to insert itself. Several critics have encountered this difficulty in dealing with Narayan's work. William Walsh, for one, notes "a strange degree of translucence" to his prose. Mahood identifies it as a type of "luminosity" and remarks (43) on a narrative tone in Narayan's work that is as "pellucid as glass". Similarly, The Times Literary Supplement alluded to the integral cohesiveness of the Narayan style :

" His humour is woven into the texture of his prose. It never erupts in a detachable epigram or joke." (44)

Western cognitive structures suffer from a similar consternation when they try to appraise themselves of the meaning of Narayan's work. Naipaul, for instance, declaimed.

" (Narayan) seems forever headed for that aimlessness of Indian fiction." (45)

Mahood cites another Narayan detractor who sees in his work:

" The somewhat unnerving spectacle of an obviously gifted novelist writing about nothing." (46)

The Times Literary Supplement offered the following rebuke :

" Mr. Narayan writes charmingly, artlessly, but not very pointedly." (47)

Lastly, William Walsh chimed in with his own reproof. Narayan, he says confidently, "has no message or doctrine". (48)

From a Western perspective, these recriminations may be valied, but that does not remove the fact that they are ethnocentric and make little attempt to perceive India as an Indian author might do. Shils has maintained that the novel in non-Western countries is often deficient because there is a corresponding sense of deficiency in the sense of "concrete everyday reality". (49) It is true that not a lot seems to happen in the typical Narayan novel. As Haydn Moore Williams has written : Narayan "tends to write the same book over

(50)  
and over". But this is explicable if it is remembered that in traditional India the significant reality is internal. In the Narayan novel, plot is often amorphous. Accordingly Walsh discerns "a certain formlessness of characters" in his work. (51)

Likewise, Gerow declares that the actual events in the novels are meaningless in themselves and only serve to focus underlying philosophical themes. (52) There is, it seems, an almost featureless and impenetrable unity to his works which make it difficult for the Western reader to become absorbed in particular details and circumstances.

Much of this is attributable to Narayan's creative methodology which verges on a meditative exercise. Narayan reportedly "writes rapidly and revises very little-" That is to say, that the writing of fiction for Narayan is almost a type of devotional exercise which relies heavily on uncontrived and unconscious spontaneity for its effectiveness. He has admitted that his working routine regularly consists of meditation on the Puranas or the Indian classics and recitation of the 'Gayatri mantra'. It is perhaps this that has caused Mahood to detect in his writing what she calls "an air of receiving his music from unheard dictation." (54) In the auto-biographical My Days, he recounts how the vision of Malgudi came to him :

" When sitting down to write a novel one day, Malgudi with its little railway station swam into view all readymade." (55)

The communion with higher powers that seems to fertilize literary creativity, recalls that of Srinivas, the editor of "The Banner" in Mr. Sampath :

" He picked up his pen; the sentence shaping so very delicately; he felt he had to wait upon it carefully and tenderly lest it should elude him once again. " (56)

It may well be true that the "greatness" of all great literature lies in author's ability not to obtrude himself into the events he depicts, but there are undoubtedly characteristics of Narayan's prose that set it apart from its Western counterparts and distinguish it as the product of a truly Indian way of regarding the outside world.

We have already noted that a clearly defined plot where action follows action with definite consequences does not appear to be a particular strength of Narayan's writing. A number of critics have discerned a pattern in this and have offered a rationale that is typically Indian. What really is of significance in the Narayan novel, according to Mahood, is the progression "from order to disorder and back again." <sup>(57)</sup> Edwin Gerow sees it, too.

" The story accomplishes no more than the re-establishment of the very same state as at the beginning. " (58)

He explains, too, why the convolutions and permutations of worldly human actions and events are discounted.

" The settled order of the cosmos is, in the Indian view, the fundamental ontological fact. In this view what is important is the reintegration of an original state ....."<sup>(59)</sup>

In other words, since everyday reality has only a contingent being, the various distinctions that characterize empirical reality are not clearly drawn and distinguished. The impulse is rather toward the minimization of particularities; that typically Indian proclivity which the modernist consciousness of Chaudhuri found so repugnant.

A number of particular instances in the novels of Narayan are indicative of the traditional Indian way of seeing things. The portrayal of strongly individualistic personalities is not one of them. Gerow, for instance, remarks that, with the exception of Vasu, the characters that inhabit The Man-eater of Malgudi are not individuals any more than "any other Indian is an individual".<sup>(60)</sup> Indeed, in the whole Narayan corpus it is difficult to recognize personality traits that distinguish one character from another. This may be explained by a contention of Shils who thinks that rigid social segmentation inhibits genuine empathy for others. Most likely, too, since reality is internal and cerebral, a genuine interchange of ideas and beliefs is often lacking. On the contrary, conversation in the novels often assumes the air of superfluous banter. To some degree this supersedes plot development where specific actions and events would provide the focus of interest for the Western reader. Says Gerow:

It is the vignettes of conversation that reflect personal relationships ... that carry (61) the burden of the story.

No doubt, this is an accurate reflection of environment whose focus is primarily social. Still, the dialogue seldom resolves itself into decisive turning-points from which deliberate courses of action follow. Similarly, The Times Literary Supplement in a review of Mr. Sampath noted that there was "not much interplay of characters" in the novel as a whole. (62) Neither do the personalities the regularly congregate at Nataraj's Truth Printing Works in The man-cater of Malgudi seem to arrive at worldshaking conclusions. Rather, conversation is indulged in as a social pleasantry. Unfortunately, it brings to mind Chaudhuri's description of the aimless garrulity that predominated in the addas of his first days in Calcutta. If anything, the action of Narayan's novels is often interior. Take, for instance, the case of Jagan in The Sweet Vendor. Though his relations with his modernizing son are causing him much distress, the issue is never broached. Instead, the reader is offered an interior account and Jagan seems unable to grapple with the problem. In the world beyond his intellect :

Sweetmeat vending, money and his son's problem seemed remote and unrelated to him. The edge of reality was beginning to blur; this man from the previous millennium (his guru) seemed to be the only object worth notice. (63)



The fundamental inferiority<sup>of</sup> Indian cognitive structure is also reflected in Waiting for the Mahatma. Meenakshi Mukherjee, for example, says that the events it describes are viewed "through the consciousness of a rather limited person."<sup>(64)</sup> Consistent, too, with the introspective inclination of the traditional Indian cognitive structure is the virtual lack of extended description of landscape or features of the external environment. And unlike Western novels where events very often follow a sequential progression that seems to mirror a cultural ethos that enshrines progress itself, the chronology of some of Narayan's novels, particularly, The Guide, suffer from a disjointed sense of time. Paul Theroux, in a review of Narayan's My Days, noted a type of ellipsis in the work which he suggests "the incompleteness of the Hindu view of time."<sup>(65)</sup> This is, incidentally, even more evident in works like Raja Rao's Kanthapura where the sense of chronology is ignored to the extent that makes it all but unintelligible to the Western reader. Many Narayan novels exhibit this "run-on" quality which may well reflect the Indian novel's intimate association with a tradition of oral story-telling. Much of Narayan's writing reminds us of what Mukherjee has seen in Kanthapura :

Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop, our breath stops, and we move on to another thought.<sup>(66)</sup>

In short, then, there seems little scope for ratiocinative and analytical thought. The impulse, as Chaudhuri saw, is toward the devaluation of distinction and empirical fact. Again, Shils has noted

these peculiarities with regard to the "factual uninterestedness of Indian journalism."<sup>(67)</sup> This might explain why the novels of Narayan so charm and fascinate the Western reader who has become weary of novels containing murderous plots and scandalous intrigues. The tales of Narayan have, in no pejorative sense, a charming, child-like simplicity (though sophisticated and cerebral in their own Indian fashion). There is one last peculiarity of Narayan's literary style which belies the traditional Indian cognitive style. If, in the traditional world-view, reality is a unity where there is no radical divorce between its component parts, then the most incongruous subjects may become fit material for literary representation. In the India of old, for instance, there was no separation between the world of men and the world of animals (a natural assumption when the doctrine of reincarnation is considered). Accordingly, Narayan has found it appropriate to make the consciousness of a tiger the subject of his latest novel, A Tiger for Malgudi. Similarly, the cerebral processes of canines are featured in an earlier collection of short stories, Lawley Road and Other Stories. He is equally adept at conveying the simple consciousness of children in such books as Swami and Friends. In sum, there are, ~~they~~ aspects of Narayan's writing which display a disinclination to utilise the clearly articulated and inflected prose normally employed by Western authors. This can only be a reflection of the disparities between the two different cognitive structures.

However, nothing could be more misleading than to confine Narayan to the purely Hindu traditionalist mould. For, once the

cultural encounter has taken place, there can be no turning back.

Says Peter Berger :

Almost any contact between different  
cognitive systems leads to mutual contamination.  
(And generally) the traditionalist experiences  
greater pressures to modernise.<sup>(68)</sup>

In a similar vein, Maunier has observed:

Desired or not, intellectual syncretism comes  
to saturate the ruled; all expansion entails  
a mixing of souls, the subjects are inevi-  
tably and compulsorily conditioned to be  
infected by the dreams and hopes of their  
rulers.<sup>(69)</sup>

Narayan is hardly an uncritical advocate of all things Western,  
but the fact remains that even in his detachment he has been  
affected by modernity. Narayan's brand of tradition epitomizes  
a variety outlined by von Grunebaum. Though Narayan sees values  
in the accomplishments of Indian traditional society, his is not  
a "classicism of return" which champions the reversion to the  
older, unconscious forms of yesterday. Rather, as von Grunebaum  
maintains :

Classicism may be experienced as a dynamizing  
concept. Here, the classical model is regarded  
not as a given datum to be repeated, but as an  
ideal whose recapture will transform it into a  
means of advancement.<sup>(70)</sup>

Also, David C. Gordon has offered a valuable synopsis of Narayan's attitude toward tradition and modernity :

"

... realizing the material if not the spiritual inferiority of his culture, he seeks to modernize and in the process of adapting ... he realizes that, willy-nilly, he will, or must adopt certain its values also. He rationalizes this acculturation by seeking antecedents for these modern values in his own past, usually during its "Golden Age" before decline set in. But modernization is, nevertheless, traumatic for him because he feels that his rationalizations are not completely real, his confidence in his own heritage is shaken and he fears that he is losing his cultural rootings and is being drawn into the cultural orbit of the West. (71)

This has been a constant feature in India's acculturation to the West. Even a figure such as Swami Dayanand, who, to all outward appearances, was as orthodox a Hindu as possible, employed printing presses and pamphlets to propagate the philosophy of the Arya Samaj. The task, then which confronts traditionalists like Narayan is to "reformulate tradition in a modern idiom".<sup>(72)</sup> Ironically, a facility in an adaptive strategy of this kind leads to a reinforcement of the traditional cultural image. Singer has noticed that in Narayan's backyard of South India, modern media, such as books and films, have reinforced traditional cultural values and

made them accessible to a wide audience.<sup>(73)</sup> In Narayan's early novel, The Dark Room, Savitri experiences a genuine religious feeling after viewing Kuchela, the story of a boyhood friend of Krishna's.<sup>(74)</sup> Says Kenneth Boulding :

"Increased communication, up to a point, leads to reinforcement of separate (cultural) images rather than destruction."<sup>(75)</sup>

Narayan's brand of traditionalism is not the unself-conscious variety which Chaudhuri despised so much. In fact, both ~~authors~~<sup>authors</sup> were exposed to the cultural creations of the West in their boyhood. Narayan recalls :

"In our home my father's library was crammed with Carlyle, Ruskin ... and double-column, complete works of Wordsworth, Byron, Browning and Shakespeare."<sup>(76)</sup>

Like any good writer, Narayan often includes autobiographical details that betray this growth of fascination with the West. As with Chaudhuri's boyhood admiration of pictures of British soldiers in uniform, Sriram in Waiting for the Mahatma becomes enthralled with a picture of Queen Victoria hanging in the shop of a local merchant.<sup>(77)</sup> Inevitably, Narayan's exposure to the written word of the West forms an image in his mind that recalls the effect Mali's letters from America have upon the venerable Jagan :

"From their study he formed a picture of America and was able to speak with authority on the subject of American landscape, culture and civilization." (78)

Yet, while Chaudhuri's interest in the traditional culture products of his own society seems to have been only casual and desultory. Narayan was rigorously schooled in both classical Tamil and Sanskrit culture. This seems to have been largely responsible for his fluency in the mediums of two cultures and to have invigorated the native one with a dynamic stimulus from abroad. For, if the more stagnant receiving culture is to successfully meet the challenge from overseas, it must demonstrate a real creative responsiveness to the new literary and artistic genres that have become the measuring stick of the truly "civilized". Von Grunebaum has outlined what amounts to no less than the Indianization of foreign cultural forms in which Narayan has been so instrumental:

"... with Westernization partially realized, a recoiling set in from the alien ... and a falling back on the native tradition; this tradition is restyled and in some instances newly created with borrowed techniques of scholarship to give respectability to the results." (80)

Shils has added that "creativity is the cure for provincialism" and :

" that for self-discovery to proceed there is a need for creativity in specifically modern genres." (81)

As well, he has indicated the truth that this effort reveals. That tradition may contain capacities for innovation hitherto unknown. Noteworthy, too, is his observation that the intellectuals of developing societies engage in a dialectic which can result in a self-image, complex and sure enough of <sup>itself</sup> / to match anything in the West:

" The labour of powerful minds and irrepressible individualities working on what has been received from the past modifies the heritage by stematization and adapts it to new tasks and obstacles. In this process of elaboration, divergent potentialities of the system of cultural values are made explicit and conflicting positions are established. Each generation performs this elaborating function for its own and succeeding generations, and particularly for the next succeeding generation." (82)

The passage from Chaudhuri to Narayan marks the evolution of Indian **acculturation** from heterogenetic to **orthogenetic** change ("legitimate growth from native pre-suppositions." (83)) It is only when foreign innovations are legitimized in this manner that they become permanent fixture of the indigenous image of India. This genuine Indian creativity in the cultural forms of the West helps consolidate the sense of self-esteem and self-respect of what it means to be Indian. Though Narayan's genius in this regard may be anomalous compared to the imitative nature of many Indo-Anglian novels, he certainly disproves

Naipaul's assertion that :

" There can be no effective writing. The ritual of life smothers Indian imagination." (84)

Incontestably, Narayan's uniquely Indian talent has proven the truth of a dictum of Shils :

" Some of the intellectuals of these countries have become creative within that tradition so that to that extent it has ceased to be experienced as foreign and although it is .... (it) has in fact become their own." (85)

This general disposition then belies the foreign perception that India is a society weltering in stagnation. It can integrate exiguous elements of change, even if to the Western eye it seems that it traditionalizes and debases them in the process. It is, after all, only incorporating those features of modernity to preserve its national and cultural integrity.

Narayan's writings are a strange amalgam of old forms and new. He not only expostulates on the virtues of tradition via the new form of the novel, but he has also tendered revised editions of the Indian epics, The Ramayana, The Mahabharata, and a miscellany of Epic and Puranic lore entitled Gods, Demons and Others. The stories are the familiar ones and need no elaboration here. But, as we have just seen, Narayan is not just one of those tradition-conserving intellectuals who seek solace in a return to the past. To be sure, the resuscitation of the myths of Rama and Sita



testify to truths that India has long held sacred. They are of eternal value in a changing society. Says Narayan :

" One reads them through all one's life with a fresh understanding at each stage." (86)

Interestingly too, he has indicated that, when he recreates these myths in writing, it is in the mood of an unself-conscious, devotional exercise. (87) Said The Times Literary Supplement for instance :

"When a distinguished author embarks on the retelling of myths and legends, the value of the product largely depends on his success in avoiding self-consciousness." (88)

Yet, Narayan's resuscitation of Rama and Sita and company serves valuable functions in the modern world. Berger, for instance, holds that :

"Mythology represents the most archaic form of universe maintenance." (89)

Since Narayan is in the line of the<sup>s</sup> earlier Hindu revivalists who consciously refashioned the mythology of Hinduism to make it more palatable to its British detractors, his use of myth is not wholly unconscious. It is of different order than the unreflective variety of the 'pundit' untouched by Western education. He says, for instance, that :

"With the impact of modern literature we began to look at our gods, demons, sages and kings, not as some remote concoctions but as types and symbols possessing psychological validity even when seen against the

contemporary background. (90)

One incident which prompted Narayan's reappraisal of the value of the mythic figures of his own culture was the humiliation he endured as a schoolboy when the Hindu gods and goddesses were openly vilified by an English teacher in the classroom. He later ruminated on the incident :

"I was thinking the other day why it is I can't write a novel without Krishna, Ganesa, Hanuman, astrologers, pundits, temples and devadasis. Do you suppose I have been trying to settle my score with the old boy". (91)

The sense of shame he experienced as a youth has found expression in two Narayan novels. In The Guide, Raju's father withdraws his son from the Albert Mission School and sends him to the local pyol, saying :

"I don't want to send my boy there; it seems they try to convert our boys into Christians and are all the time insulting our Hindu gods." (92)

Similarly, the young Swaminathan of Swami and Friends experiences shame and rage when his English-born instructor, Mr. Ebenezer, asks him why he worships 'dirty, lifeless, wooden idols'. (93) Whatever the case, Narayan's reliance on mythology disproves Chaudhuri's contention that it is always blind and unreasoning. It may strengthen and clarify the image of the collectivity and, in the right hands, it need not always be retrograde. And strangely, by conferring a

sense of pride on a historical peoples, it may provide a basis for quality when they encounter the progressive societies of the West.

Even if Narayan is not totally averse to resorting to certain aspects of modernity such as the novel, the image of modernity he presents as a whole does not receive favourable treatment. If, in some sense, he is a blend of the old and the new, his sympathies lie more with the traditional than with the modern. One thing is certain; in the novels of Narayan, modernity is a rash and impulsive force that disturbs the peaceful equilibrium of traditional life. Nowhere is the personification of modernity more perfectly exemplified than in the figure of Vasu in The Man-eater of Malgudi. He conforms perfectly to the way in which the native perceives the modernist :

"He recognises in the white man some force which drives him to seek constant change. To try out novelties, to make incessant demands and to accomplish extra-ordinary things just to show off." (94)

Into the tranquil world of Nataraj's Truth Printing Works barges the irascible Vasu. The opposition between tradition and modernity is clear : Nataraj, (lit. Lord of the Dance, who maintains the stability of the universe) and Vasu (lit. wealth, what the modernist will purchase at any price). The meeting between the cantankerous Vasu and the orderly world of Nataraj is an allegory of the coming of modernity to India. Says Mahood :

"Between them the two characters act out the psychological processes of colonial rule as they have been analysed by Mannoni and others. Twice in earlier novels Narayan has touched upon the tensions of a dependency relationship: in Sriram's encounter with a pleasant English planter in Waiting for the Mahatma and in Srinivas' encounter with an unpleasant English banker in Mr. Sampath,"<sup>(95)</sup>

The image of modernity does not fare well in these or other Narayan novels. Like Mali's preposterous story-writing machine in The Sweet Vendor, Vasu cannot help but upset the tranquil atmosphere of Malgudi as he roars about the town in his jeep. Armed with a small arsenal of shotguns he invades the quiet of the Mempi Hills to "bag" a tiger for his trophy room as he speculates on the profits to be made by the setting up of a logging operation in the forests of Mempi. As Narayan seems to suggest, modernists are not content to live in harmony with the environment, but are out to exploit it for their own advantage. Like Captain in A Tiger for Malgudi, who cages a tiger that had been roaming free in the hills of Mempi the implication is clear that modernists are insensitive to anything that will not yield them a profit. The environment is merely to be exploited and acted upon. Vasu, for instance, represents the demiurge surrogating the Creator through a blatant act of 'himsa'; the killing and stuffing of animals for his own perverse enjoyment. Unable to "bag" the tiger, Vasu's murderous intentions turn themselves to assassinating that most sacred and inviolable of Indian

beasts, the Elephant God, Ganesa. While waiting to draw a bead on the pachyderm as it passes before his window in a religious procession, Vasu expires by his own hand by swatting a mosquito that lands on his forehead. Evidently, modernity contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. The novel, as well, contains facets which seem germane to our earlier discussion of cognition and consciousness. It is obvious that Nataraj does not know quite what to make of the self-assured Vasu who seems to be all the time in total control. The encounter between Nataraj and Vasu, the man of action, reminds us of Jagan's strategy of retreat before the concerted confidence of his America returned son. But passivity, Narayan suggests, is not without its ill effects. As Chaudhuri can only conceive that India might be raised from its lethargy by vigorous social engineering learned abroad, Narayan suggests that solutions of this type are impracticable in the Indian environment. Gerow suggests:

"It is not the plans of Nataraj that stop Vasu, for Narayan's point is partly that plans themselves and the entire rationale of directed activity is ultimately futile and it is because Nataraj's actions are not action-oriented that he finally succeeds." (96)

Explicitly, self-directed activity implies a particular consciousness that is out of context in the Indian environment. In contrast, the action of The Man-eater of Malgudi reveals that events are often fortuitous and the final resolution comes about as a transcendent

act. That, it seems to be suggested, is the result of divine intervention.

The intrusion of modernity into traditional Indian life is a central theme in many of Narayan's other novels. But one critic has ~~been~~ superimposed her own cognitive dualism on Narayan's vision. In his work as a whole :

" India is the scene of a deep conflict between the ancient traditional way of life and the forces set in motion by her contact with modernity. " (97)

But in general, modernity does not get a good press. The film producer, Mr. Sampath, manifests many of the same disturbing influences as does Vasu. Margayya, the traditional money-lender of The Financial Expert, is tempted and tortured by the thought of purchasing a Western automobile. In that same book, and in contrast to Chaudhuri's accusations of Hindu licentiousness, it is the Western educated Dr. Pal who induces Margayya to accept the semi-pornographic Bed Life for publication. Mali, the son of The Sweet Vendor, must go to America to learn the art of writing Western fiction. America, it is suggested, is vastly superior to India, for there at least ten thousand new stories are produced every publishing season. Unfortunately, however, Mali cannot establish his own Indian publishing venture without American support; a veiled allusion to India's regrettable reliance on foreign aid. After his return from abroad, Mali has little patience with his nature. "I have never seen a more wasteful

country than this", he says, Jagan is swift to retort, "we find it adequate for our purpose".<sup>(98)</sup> Similar denigrations of India come from those who can only perceive India through Western eyes.

Shanta Bai, the adulterous heroine of The Dark Room, complains to Ramani :

"A wretched Indian film ! I'd give my life to see a Garbo or a Dietrich." (99)

The purport of all this is clear; the West, enchanting as it may appear, threatens to destroy the stability that gives traditional life its value. The West, Narayan says, is not a model Indians must imitate indiscriminately. This results in disruption rather than contentment. Mali is arrested after being discovered asleep with a bottle of alcohol in his car.

Nowhere are the disturbing effects brought about by the unconscious imitation of things Western more evident than in Narayan's portrait of Hindu family life and the relationship between the sexes. Again,<sup>in</sup> The Sweet Vendor, Mali's illicit liaison with Grace, who is both casteless and Korean, forces Jagan to construct an actual physical partition in their shared house to protect himself from defilement. Raju's mother in The Guide is forced to flee to Benares when Rosie assumes a common-law relationship with her son in the ancestral home. So does Raman's aunt embark ~~for~~ Kashi when Daisy moves in without the benefit of wedlock in The Painter of Signs. Though Narayan is not beyond giving credit to Hindu women as the upholders of the

traditional sacred values - Sriram's grandmother, for instance, in Waiting for the Mahatma - he remarks upon a new generation of West-influenced, independent women. There is, generally, little for this new type of woman and the love relationship in which they become involved seldom conclude on a happy note. Ramani's flirtation with Shanta Bai ends in a renewed appreciation of the felicity of his arranged marriage to Savitri. In The Bachelor of Arts, Chandran comes to realize the futility of his love affairs with Malathi. Instead, he finds connubial bliss after his parents convene a tryst with Sushila, his bride-to-be. There is, Narayan seems to say, something inhumanly defeminizing about women's liberation. Bharati, in Waiting for the Mahatma, appears more concerned with the idealism of Gandhism than with the natural expression of her womanhood, as is Daisy in The Painter of Signs. While this may be painful to the independence of the new Indian woman, it results in a perplexing role confusion for Raman and Sriram. The inference to be drawn is not in doubt. Daisy leaves Raman because she is "not interested in making a home"<sup>(100)</sup>. As Jagan concludes about the liberated relationship of Mali and Grace :

" They come together, live together, and kicked  
" (101)  
away each other when it suited them.

In spite of Daisy's *disinclination* toward matrimonial alliance of any kind, she seems to sum up Narayan's point of view, "love sounds  
(102)  
silly in our society". Rather, Narayan's advocacy is of the traditional arranged marriage, from which, ideally, love follows as a



matter of course.

Despite the appearance of traditionalism, then, Narayan can play the role of social critic. His perceptions of India are not so blind as to cause him to refrain from critical comment.

"Far from condoning the stagnation of traditional life, The Man-eater of Malgudi offers a fable for the developing world. Traditional India, the novel makes plain, needs to be awakened out of its stagnation but not by Vasu's (i.e., the foreign) method nor with Vasu's intentions. Nothing but harm can come of imposing alien political philosophies and economic aims on India; what is required is growth from the grass-roots."<sup>(103)</sup>

Vasu, is, in fact, the perfect allegory of the neo-colonialist who wants to enforce India's subjection. He claims to protect one of India's national symbols, the elephant, but actually he wants to kill it. In the same way, Raman, The Painter of Sign, exposes the folly of American milk powder intended for India's orphans being sold on the black market. As well, Narayan points out the inertia of Indian society that impedes even its own style of development. Both Nataraj the printer and Raman the sign-painter seem to take ages to accomplish their appointed tasks. Of the endless confabulations that predominate in the Truth Printing Works, Narayan remarks :

"In all this demonstration of mutual esteem the purpose of conversation, as usual, was lost."<sup>(104)</sup>

However, although Narayan is not reluctant to level the occasional criticism at the social ills he sees around him, the tone is not as vehement as Chaudhuri's. In the main his perceptions are apolitical. One of Narayan's most avid admirers, Graham Greene, commented upon a "general lack of condemnation" in Narayan's works. Similarly, he often excels at portraying rather rascally characters, but, according to Uma Parameswaram he hardly ever engages in moral condemnation of his roughtes. In part, this penchant for a pose of moral neutrality may be accounted for by what Nandy calls "the separability of statecraft and intellectual activity." Traditionally, the Indian intellectual was more concerned with things of the spirit than in indulging in social or political criticism. Narayan's apparent nonchalance toward Indian social evils may have something to do with a cognitive structure that feels disinclined to focus on the specific injustices that Western observers of India make so much of. We need to restate Naipaul's assertion that "the India of Narayan's novels is not the India the visitor sees". Narayan's, after all, is an essentially happy world and, if we relied on his novels alone, we would have no inkling of the abysmal poverty and filth that prevails in foreign perceptions. Naipaul has, in fact, criticized Narayan for this apparent insouciance. The picture of Malgudi is flawed, he maintains, because :

"... it fails to portray more forcefully the terrible poverty which to ... (Naipaul) appeared as the dominant feature of Indian life." (108)

For Naipaul and Koestler, this is the reason behind the much-touted detachment of Indian spirituality. It is not so much religiousness as it is a self-imposed myopia in the face of perceptions that would otherwise drive one to nervous collapse. Naipaul himself has recorded the growth of this type of cognitive imperviousness :

"In the midst of hysteria there occurred periods of calm in which I found that I had grown to separate myself from what I saw." (109)

From the Western perspective, the reality of India is so appalling that not to wear blinders of some sort is almost to risk one's sanity. This may partially account for a statement from D. P. Mukherjee :

"The intellectuals have not yet accepted their responsibilities. Probably it is too early to expect them to be so highly conscious of their functions." (110)

In other words, even the semi-Westernized Indian intellectual fails to be as effective as he could be because he simply does not perceive the gravity and extent of India's problem in the way the fully Western intellectual does.

It does seem incontrovertible that, while Narayan has integrated some features of modernity, his genuine bias is that of the traditional Indian intellectual. He has accepted just those features which enable him to remain Indian. In contrast to Chaudhuri's belief in the new man, Narayan believes :

" ... that though circumstances and details may vary, it is human personality alone that remains unchanging and makes sense in any idiom whether the setting is 3,000 B.C. or 2,000 A.D. " (111)

Once more, while Chaudhuri seems to take a perverse pride in chronicling the agonies and vicissitudes that have befallen him, Narayan remains self-effacing and private. Says Theroux :

" ... he discloses none of the secret sadness or hardships that he must have endured. " (112)

While Chaudhuri perceives only the bad in India, Narayan leaves room for humour and levity. He is very much a part of his culture but understands also its deeper themes. But to a far lesser degree than in the West these beliefs are not held self-consciously or motivated by the need to impress. They are, instead, facts of Indian life as seen from the inside. In Narayan's hands, for instance, astrology is not so much an incongruity as a therapy that helps cope with the insecurities of an uncertain life. Hinduism and its esoteric practitioners are not the bizarre and supernatural curiosities they frequently seem to be from a far. The theme of renunciation is prominent but its truth is more self-evident than consciously expounded or driven home. The attitude of detachment from the affairs of the world obviates the compulsion to convince: something that seems to much in evidence in Chaudhuri's work. There is, one commentator noted :

" ... an oddly old-fashioned air about his characters as if they were untouched by the stress of modern life." (113)

We notice, too, in Narayan's The Guide that Hinduism is not so much a creed espoused or a belief professed as it is an unreflective way of being :

" What is relevant is how and why one worshipped ... they are purified through their subjective idealization of a man who is a rogue. In Raju (the rustics) see a fulfilment of their need to build up a myth and believe it." (114)

To those that adore Raju the saint :

" He didn't have to say a word to anyone. He just sat there at the same place looking away at the river. They make whatever they want to (of me)." (115)

This, then, is the unconscious, living religiosity that Chaudhuri speaks of. Yet it does not contain a mystery or an answer to life. It is , in fact, merely another mode of consciousness. As the saint, Raju does not perceive himself as a charlatan. Truth is relative. In his earlier career as a guide, he remarks :

" The age I ascribed to any particular place depended upon the type of person I was exhorting." (116)

Therefore, whatever the villagers make of him is valid. As Ananda Ma says to Koestler, "I am what you make me." Likewise Raju tells the California film producer, Malone, who has come to film Raju's fast, all the banalities a Westerner would want to

hear from an Eastern mystic. But Narayan's depiction of Hinduism can disappoint Western expectations because he reveals it as a living creed, no better, no worse than any other. In The Sweet Vendor, when Jagan is asked why he wants to conquer the self, he replies, "I do not know but all our sages advise us so."<sup>(117)</sup>

Needless to say, then, Narayan is an author who is comfortable in his own culture and, if the Western image of Indian development has largely been rejected, the indigenous model offered by Narayan has found wider acceptance. Boulding has suggested a reason for Chaudhury's rejection :

"In a society where the image of (Western) progress does not exist, even if technological improvements are made by the mavericks or eccentrics of the society they will be suppressed ..."<sup>(118)</sup>

On the other hand, Narayan has proved that a native image of Indian progress can transform the nation. In the process, he has revived pride in one's Indianess, and raised the consciousness of what it means to be Indian. Still, the situation would seem to contain an obvious problem. How effectively can Narayan's image of India be transmitted to India at large if he writes in English and is most often published in the West ? While Narayan may depict authentically Indian themes, he is to a degree apparently still removed from the reality of the traditional India of the masses. Yogendra S. Malik has suggested a possible remedy for this in the role of the vernacular-speaking intellectuals. These writers may relay a nativist

image of modernity to a wider public in an Indian idiom.<sup>(119)</sup>

There is one other aspect of Narayan's traditionalizing image of modernity that may account for his relevance to Indian life, and that is the idea to which sociologists have given the name "compartmentalization". Because of the structure of the Indian cognitive style, which finds it difficult to perceive distinctions and contradictions, tradition and modernity can coexist in India in relative harmony. In the first place, we notice Narayan's familiarity with the English language. Gracefully and naturally he employs the medium of modernity to elaborate traditional themes. The Times Literary Supplement said of him:

"He is one of those rare figures, a sophisticated Indian of the 20th century who retains a profound understanding of his country's traditional culture."<sup>(120)</sup>

In fact, this double aspect pervades much of Malgudi life. Place names like Nallappa's Grove and Vinsayak Mudali Street take their place alongside Lawley Extension and the Albert Mission School. In The Guide, Raju and Rosie commute to her performance of Bharat Natyam in a shiny new Plymouth. Recalling the sartorial blend of East and West sported by Professor Godbole in A Passage to India, Railway Raju chaperones his clients about in a 'khakibush' coat and 'dhoti.' Similarly, Raman the sign-painter finds equal intellectual stimulation in reading the Tamil epic, The Kural, or the tomes of Gibbon, while a prominent lawyer-patron of his must consult an astrologer to decide what style of lettering would be most auspicious for his new signboard.

R. K. Narayan treats the villages of India from a different angle. The village in the philosophy of Narayan always symbolises native strength and simplicity. It reinforces the individual pilgrim in quest of truth with the necessary vision. Chandran in THE BACHELOR OF ARTS becomes a wandering Sannyasi through bitterness and not wisdom. The innocent love and respect of the villagers disturbs his pricks of conscience and he abandons his sack cloth, and a less because he is not yet for that finality of life. The village of Sukur in THE DARK ROOM soothes the grief-stricken Savitri while the village in THE ENGLISH TEACHER initiates Krishna into the mystical knowledge of the human psyche. In THE FINANCIAL EXPERT it is the villagers who support Margayya and he is finally obliged to come back to real India which is rural. The sylvan scenery of THE GUIDE not only enhances Raju but also puts him on the right track of salvation. It is the Mampi village that leads to the welcome death of the man-eater, 'the man with the gun'.

Luis Fischer observes :

" From time immemorial, India's Chief Defence against the invader was her villages. Invaded twenty six times and always from the West, India fears the West and enjoys defying and condemning it ..... For an emergency, the Central redoubt, the last fortress, against the armed or unarmed intruder would be the peasantry. Foreigner might conquer and rule in federal and provincial capitals and even districts, but the villages singly unimportant and remote had



their own Gibraltar -- cohesive, popular, internal  
organisation which Gandhi wished to keep intact. <sup>"(121)</sup>

Narayan seems to suggest that the soul of India lives in the serenity and peacefulness of her villages. We never miss the sweet fragrance of the shady villages in any of his novels.

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Closely linked to the themes of poverty, hunger, widespread social evils, tensions and rural life is the theme of conflict between tradition and modernity and examinations of the survivals of the past, exploration of the hybrid culture of the educated Indian middle classes and analysis of the innumerable dislocations and conflicts in a tradition-ridden society under the impact of an incipient, half-hearted industrialisation associated with the theme. These two strands -- the indigenous Indian traditions and the imported European conceptions are prominent in the complex, fabric of contemporary Indian civilisation. Traditional Indian values and resources on the one hand, modern ideas and attitudes on the other -- the confrontation between the two resulting in tension, creative or otherwise appears with greater subtlety in the novels during the Twentieth Century.

The theme of conflict between tradition and modernity has always assumed a vital significances for R. K. Narayan. It is more than a manifestations of his constant awareness of the changing circumstances in the social and political sphere of the country. The theme appears to the novelist as an attitude, as an idea or as a set of values. The changes which are taking place in the country trans-

formed the modern concept of writing in theme, technique and style. Indo-Anglian fiction has attained maturity through the cross-currents. Unlike his predecessors in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, an Indo-Anglian novelist like him does not slavishly imitate British or American novelists; nor does he write in an out-dated rhetorical diction. His main concern is to deal with the changing contemporary situation. His diction is allied to contemporary speech idiom and his style and rhythms are fluent and conversational and his language is both precise and suggestive. His diction marks a definite break with that of his predecessors. This is quite evident in his deliberate choice of a style to keep the eye on the subject, in his imagery, in his selection of themes and above all in his use of modern techniques. R. K. Narayan can reasonably claim that his language is clear and coherent and that his stories describe experiences, make statements of belief, express feelings towards friends, women, work, nature and the cosmos, define attitudes and make commitments to values. Thus his work achieves distinctive Indian quality through modern experimentation. There is too much of an emphasis in describing Indian manners, traditions, the Indian festivals, the seasons the personal relationships and the collision starts when the writer offers subjects and style which interest Westerners, such as bringing in Western attitudes and ways of thinking, by cross culture references, by contrasts, by introducing Western values and evaluating them from the Indian point of view. Indian novelist like R. K. Narayan attempts at portrayal of the cultural identity of modern India, the true 'Indian consciousness',

by dealing with the theme of tradition and modernity.

There is no doubt that R. K. Narayan refers to the fundamental differences between the old and new culture in his novels. But the element of modernity is a fact. The novelist can hardly discard its predominance. As children of environment there has been a gradual secularization in his art and treatment of theme. Like other Indo-Anglian novelist, he could see how the British Government was running the administration in the country and ----

" how the Western ways -- in manners and customs, in dress, in eating, in salutation-became current in the bigger towns and cities." (122)

Distance was being abridged, modern European scientific-techniques were being introduced, and India was being led out from secure and static life to restless, dynamic modernism. English education and English culture were a new force -- injected into Indian life, but the immediate effects were seen only on the surface. The deeper consequences were not felt immediately. The young generation fell madly in love with the new imported ways in life. But the old generation moved still in the grooves of tradition. The infiltration of western culture, the adoption of Western scientific techniques, industrialisation of the villages gave a jolt to India's traditional life. But though they generated a good many wrong movements, nevertheless served us nobly by shocking us into a new awareness, a sense of urgency, a flair for practicality and an alertness in thought and action. A new efilorescence was visible everywhere, and the reawakening Indian spirit went forth to meet the violent challenge of the

values of modern science and the imported civilization. It is obvious that the impact of two contrary cultures might have produced unrest. But it has also sustained and stimulated life.

R. K. Narayan studies the background very carefully. He appreciated the quality of endurance assimilation and transformation but he was also very conscious of the independencies of the foreign rulers amid the authoritarianism of empire. The complete modernisation of the Indian cities and towns with the material amenities were in sharp contrast with the exhausted and almost sapless Indian village. To him the modern culture was ----- "the culture of an aloof and alien race twisted in the process of transplantation from its home land, and so divorced from the people or the country as to be no longer real." (123)

The implied message in the novels written mainly during the Gandhian era is that India would confidently pursue her own path holding fast to her traditional values and using methods appropriate to her culture. It is true that while the novelist recognises the evils and deficiencies in Indian life and society and warns her countrymen against a slavish imitation of the west, he does not offer any ready-made solutions to the many problems facing the country. His emphatic teaching is that against any cultural aggression India should preserve her soul and carve out her own destiny. In religion and culture India should be proud of her great legacy and her constant aim should be the attainment of the purity, equipoise and altruism represented by the noble characters in Narayan's novels. Everywhere in the novels we have noticed that whenever the evil forces of mo-

ernity try to win over and possess India, the real adversary is the spiritual tradition of the land which is powerful enough to resist and defeat any attack against it.

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The name of Forster tends to stray into any discussion of the relationship between the tradition and modernity in fiction but comparison of contrast with him is not very relevant in the present context because what he attempted in his famous novel A PASSAGE TO INDIA was something different from what most Indo-Anglian writers are trying to do. Personal relationship is part of Forster's theme but the Indo-Anglian novelist more often than is not, trying to reconcile within himself two conflicting systems of value. In this tension between the two views of life an easy solution is not possible. Forster's final thesis that the East and the West cannot meet because the forces that pull them apart are too strong is of course similar to the thesis of the Indo-Anglian novelists that the two conflicting systems of value of the old India and the Westernized new India cannot reconcile exactly for the same reason. In R. K. Narayan the conflict between the society and the individual is more complicated and difficult to solve. Narayan, as a novelist of the middle class notes the gradual degradation of the old values of life. A new generation of scooter-riding, alcohol smuggling boys committed to a get-rich-at-all-costs philosophy crowd his canvas. The crux of the stories remains either the problem of the ageing father or the Grand mother or the meek wife and the solution they arrive at finally after

much pain, humiliation and self-searching is not only personal, but peculiarly Indian and traditional

Narayan's novels depict life in the little town called Malgudi -- a symbol of ever changing modern India. Malgudi is a miniature India and Narayan invariably concentrates on this traditional and representative town where the inhabitants are essentially human and hence have the kinship with the changing social and political circumstances of the country. Narayan sees the new Malgudi as a field of unpredictable and uncontrollable forces. The mood of comedy, the sensitivity to atmosphere, the probing of psychological factors, the crisis in the individual soul and its resolution are the necessary ingredients in fiction. His novels represent members of the Indian middle class as engaged in a struggle ---

"to extricate themselves from the automatism of  
the past" (124)

Narayan's novels are not the 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. As William Walsh points out :

"The family is the immediate context in which his sensibility operates, and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which family relationships are treated -- that of son and parents and brother and brother in THE BACHELOR OF ARTS , of husband and wife and father and daughter in THE ENGLISH TEACHER, of father and son in THE FINANCIAL EXPERT and

of Grandmother and Granson in WAITING FOR THE  
(125)  
MAHATMA.

The closeness of relationship between the adults and children and the absence of water tight compartments between the worlds of the two constitute the basis of these novels. But the action is developed on the conflict between the ego-eccentricity of an individual member of the family's claim on him.

In the DARK ROOM the conflict between Ramani and Savitri is in its own terms insoluble. It is a clash of principles and ideology. The entrance of the modern evil in the guise of glamorous Shanta in the domestic world of Ramani and Savitri causes domestic storms. Ramani is slipped away into the arms of Shanta and this incident shows the discordant notes in the domestic orchestra. Ramani's callous behaviour since then is made the cause of a major quarrel and the reconciliation that follows foreshadows the defeat Savitri will suffer at the end -- with Savitri's aborted attempt at suicide and her humiliated return to her old routine. Narayan prepares the ground for both the final rebellion and the final defeat through the novelette. Savitri periodically rebels but Ramani simply looks through her acts of resentment, as he does in the end, neither giving her the satisfaction of upsetting him nor the remorse that a loving reconciliation on his part would have caused. The novel ends, the battle over, with Ramani a tyrant and victor and Savitri, the womanly woman vanquished. Savitri accepts the defeat because our society has not yet been ready to recognise the elementary rights of womanhood. But her utterances echo the revolutionary

voice of the rising woman kind :

"Do you think I am going to stay here ? .... Do you think that I will stay in your house, breathe the air of your property, drink the water here and eat food you buy with your money ? No, I will starve and die in the open, under the sky ... Things ? I 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 father's, her husband's or her son's ... .. yes, you are right. They are yours, absolutely. You paid the mid-wife and the nurse. You pay for their clothes and teachers. You are right. Didn't I say a woman owns  
(126)  
nothing ?"

Like Gouri in Anand's THE OLD MAN AND THE COW Savitri breaks away from the kind of life they have been so long compelled to live under unhappy circumstances. The novel represents the voice of authority and tradition and serves as a microcosm of the hierarchical society which the individual has to rebel against in order to attain her personal identity.

Narayan's novels are the psychological projection of the typical individual in society in the light of the changing pattern of national tradition. It is interesting to trace out the particular pattern which Narayan adopts in exploring the national consciousness



by means of his universal vision. The hero of the novels of Narayan is generally critical of certain traditional rules and customs—though he himself is firmly rooted in the family tradition. The protagonists react to such old social values. He almost rebels but comes back. For example, Chandran in THE BACHELOR OF ARTS renounces the earthly world out of sheer reluctance to its irrational and ridiculous nature of social customs but finally returns to his family, marries in the same old traditional way and settles down in life. Savitri's high caste in THE DARK ROOM creates a deeply psychological barrier between herself and Mari and Ponny of the lower caste—who rescued her from death. In THE FINANCIAL EXPERT caste is of major significance. The role of the priest temple in this respect strikes out anybody's attention. Gandhi's main plank of social amelioration in THE WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA is the eradication of untouchability. Bharati's comment is remarkable:

"Bapuji forbade us to refer to anyone in terms of religion as Muslims, Hindu, or Sikh, but just as  
(127)  
human beings."

When Gandhi speaks on the problems of untouchability and caste, Sriram reflects on the stupidity of segregation of people on the basis of caste superiority or inferiority. Rosie's caste in THE GUIDE is condemned by the public to be that of a 'Public Woman', though Raju tries to convey that Rosie's caste is 'the noblest caste on earth'. Things have changed. There is no caste or class today. Marco is above all these narrow things and marries Rosie. Secondly, William Walsh observes that Narayan's ---

"Pre-occupation is with the middle class, a relatively small part of an agricultural civilization and the most conscious and anxious part of the population". (128)

It is true that all the protagonists in the novels belong to middle class society and are trying to accommodate to the changing conditions of society. Perhaps, this class consciousness is best reflected in THE FINANCIAL EXPERT where Margayya hankers after the goddess of wealth, performing in typical traditional fashion certain 'mantras' and hobnobbing with the pseudo sociologists like Dr. Paul. Similarly, Raju in THE GUIDE is concerned more with money and sex than with Rosie's art. He says without any reservation.

" My philosophy was that while it lasted the maximum money had to be squeezed out." (129)

The upstart has to maintain his status in this way. His cupidity causes his downfall finally. It is to be mentioned in this connection that Indian middle class bears no relation to the Western concept of the bourgeoisie. The middle class as represented by R. K. Narayan is typically intellectual, tradition oriented and in general impecunious. The Indian intellectual's predicament is best represented in Narayan's earlier novels such as THE BACHELOR OF ARTS MR. SAMPTAH and also THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI. The protagonists of the remaining novels, Ramani in THE DARK ROOM, Spiram in WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA, Margayya in THE FINANCIAL EXPERT Jagan in THE SWEET VENDOR and Raju in THE GUIDE, all belong to the middle class but cannot be called intellectuals. Nonetheless, economically the disparity is negligible. Being most familiar with the psychology and background of this section

of the society, Narayan presents several types which develop into archetypes as they grow and mature in time.

Balachandra Rajan's TOO LONG IN THE WEST is probably representative of the alienation of the intellectual which Narayan vaguely hints in THE BACHELOR OF ARTS but develops into an archetype of evil in THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI, in which Vasu, the taxidermist is entirely cut off from the national tradition. Idealism and faith are the two cardinal principles of the national heritage which Vasu violates and in the process he degenerates into a self-destructive mythical monster. His appearance in the form of a half-crazed man-eater betrays the Indian image of goodness and purity of soul and is therefore more disturbing and terrifying phenomenon and it takes death itself and a violent death to save Malgudi and her beloved temple elephant from the depredations of this modern 'rakshasa'.

The disruption of the traditional joint family disturbs the individual in most of Narayan's novels. In THE BACHELOR OF ARTS for example, we notice that the uncle of Chandran lives in Madras while his own father lives at Malgudi. Krishna in THE ENGLISH TEACHER lives with his wife and child at Malgudi away from his parents and relatives at the village. This domestic dislocation comes not out of personal animosity or bitter relationship, but because of the centrifugal impact of the new socio-economic changes in the country. The impact of industrialisation and increasing

urbanisation naturally tells upon the traditional culture, THE ENGLISH TEACHER, MR. SAMPATH, THE FINANCIAL EXPERT and THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI etc. represent this modern phenomenon, disturbing the traditional structure of the Society while in the Bachelor of Arts and the English teacher the disturbance is due to social reasons : in THE FINANCIAL EXPERT, MR. SAMPATH and THE SWEET VENDOR it is owing to mutual misunderstanding and jealousies and discriminations among the members of the family, the existence of Hindu joint family is at stake. Similarly, in THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI, Nataraja's joint family is disrespected after his grandmother's death and the similar incident takes place in the family of Jagan after the return of his son from America with a Korean-American mistress. The most poignant aspect of the problem in THE SWEET VENDOR is revealed through a more or less total break-down of communication between the generations. The nuances of father and son relationship symbolising the clashes between the tradition and modernity are excellently handled in the novel; the inarticulation of a fond father in an undemonstrative family setting is brought out admirably and only rarely does ludicrousness supersede pathos.

The son Mali develops into something of an 'upstart' from his boyhood, from the moment of his mother's death in his early boyhood. Mali's visit to the United States and his sojourn in that country are thus not as decisive as they may seem. In truth he brings back from that culture what he has carried there in the first place, his 'upstartism', now confirmed and exaggerated to grotesque proportions. Where he thought of writing a novel before -- he is now bent on manufacturing and marketing a novel-writing machine.

Where he exploited only his father before going to America, on his return he exploits both his father and his foreign mistress. He perhaps means to carry her, but the moment he discovers her lack of utility in the novel-writing machine enterprise, he loses interest and it is actually the father who has to pay for her return passage. Mali's attitudes are not just his but also in this novel shared by a whole new generation. The crux of the story however, remains the problem of the father and the solution Jagan arrives at finally, after much pain, humiliation and self searching, is not only personal but peculiarly Indian and traditional. The wave of ultra-modern life that has started blowing in his family along with the arrival of his westernised son with a Western mistress appears to be extremely confusing to him. He fails to adjust with their ways of life and we sense from the outset a good deal of emotional sensitivity resulting from his intense loneliness and mal adjustment. It is a clash of trends of good and evil. Jagan is not responsible for the situation. He says:

(130)

"Who are we to get him out or to put him in ?"

In the end when he triumphs over himself by coming to terms with his loneliness, we are not at all surprised. When he says :

"I am going somewhere, not carrying more than what  
my shoulder can bear ..... I am a free man....." (131)

We realise that Jagan ascends to a new level of perception.

Narayan's Malgudi is a compromise between the oriental age-old traditions and the modern occidental civilization. As the western modernity comes to Malgudi in due course of time, its own

indigenous values are corroded; for Malgudi is the symbol of modern India rooted in the ancient tradition.

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With the Gandhian revolution in our national life, there came about also a revolution in our writing. It was a silent but pervasive revolution that dominated Indian literature. Gandhi's thought has its roots in his Hindu background.

The Gandhian impact on contemporary Indian literature is immense. If Gandhi had not written anything in English he would still have had a secure place in Indian writing in English. His influence on the whole field of Indo-Anglian literature is clearly marked. His 'Experiments with Truth' is a milestone of Indo-Anglian prose. The effectless ease and complete candour with which Gandhi wrote make it a most moving personal document of all time. This book has inspired a great bulk of Indian writers writing in various languages. There came a sudden flowering of Indian fiction in English in the 1930's. As regards the choice of theme and the portrayal of characters, the Gandhian influence has been particularly realised. It is possible to see a close connection between this development and the rise of the Indian novel in English. Fiction is most vitally concerned with social conditions and values, and at that time between the two world wars Indian society was galvanised into a new social and political awareness and was bound to seek creative expression for its new consciousness. The novel, of all literary forms has been a creative literary instrument for this purpose in all ages.

One result of the Gandhian influence has been the more or less conscious shift of emphasis from the city to the village, from the urban luxury and sophistication to the rural modes and manners or an implied contrast between the two.

It is true that many novels like those of Mulk Raj Anand, Humayun Kabir, K. S. Venkataramani and other are loaded with some propaganda motives. They plead for the cause of the downtrodden. It may be said that loading a work of art with any extraneous motive tends to reduce its artistic value to that extent. But at a time when the entire nation was locked in a life and death struggle for freedom and for fair play to the underdog, it was impossible for any conscious novelist to shut his eyes to the injustice and misery around him and to put on the mantle of detached objectivity of the dwellers of the ivory tower. No novelist can escape the currents and cross-currents of the social life around him and if as result he raises his voice in protest against such things, his novels gain in force and subjectivity what they lose in balance and art. The bitter consequences of the world wars revolutionised the hungry millions of the country. The struggle for independence thrilled the entire nation to fight against all repressive measures. Civil disobedience, 'Satyagrah' (the Force which is born of Truth, the Fearlessness that is inseparable from truth), poverty and dire misery of the villages shocked the whole nation. Repression run amuck all over the country. Gandhi forged the weapons of Satyagrah and Civil disobedience, 'hartal' and bonfire of foreign cloth. There was stir of expectancy in the air. Millions and millions of people of all ages came out to join the movements. Fear had miraculously left them.

Such was the tumultuous back-ground of Indian writing in English. Mahatma's 'Young India' steadily waxed in power and prestige and by 1922 its weekly sale was nearly 40,000. The speedy circulation of the journal paved the way for the popularity of English language among the Indians. Through speeches and journals English reached the remote villages. Under the influence of Gandhi's examples writing in the various regional languages flourished along with English as never before during the 'twenties and after ~~and~~ acquired a modern incisiveness and force went all out to reach the masses. English writing in India at this stage gained more vigour and force and acquired substantial strength as a popular lingua franca of the country. Gandhi had a thorough knowledge of the old Treatment in English and his style of writing English had accordingly a simplicity, pointedness and clarity which was remarkably absent in the earlier Indian writing.

In his article on THE FICTION WRITER IN INDIA : His tradition and his problems, R. K. Narayan writes :

" .....Between the era of British rule and the present we might note a middle period when subject matter became inescapably political. All of India's energies were directed to the freeing of the country from foreign rule. Under this urgent pressure the mood of the comedy, the sensitivity of atmosphere, the probing of psychological factors, the crisis in the individual soul and its resolution, and above all the detached observation were forced into the background." (132)



But he himself is exceptionally detached in his creative observations while projecting the image of India<sup>in</sup> all his novels including his WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA which has a definite political background. For once, nevertheless, Narayan is explicit in his imaginative interpretation of the national ideology, embedded in the Gandhian Philosophy.

WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA has been called<sup>the</sup> only political novel of R. K. Narayan. The book with its fundamentally serious, heroic theme -- the struggle for freedom and its outcome is Narayan's tribute to Mahatma Gandhi. The Gandhian myth has been the inescapable substance of many contemporary Indo-Anglian novels in which Gandhi appears either as a character or as a pervasive influence on the social and political scene. V. K. Gokak comments:

"The year 1921 saw the declaration of what may be called non-violent war on the British Government in India. Titanic energies were let loose and the modern Indian language seemed to be the tongues destined to express them. But the Indo-Anglian medium was also a ready instrument and it continued to be exploited by the gifted men and women ..... Most of these writers realised that they could reach all India and even  
(133)  
world audience through English."

There is hardly any aspect of Mahatma's life and movement that has not been mirrored faithfully and artistically in English.

But perhaps, for the first time, Narayan has chosen to

undertake the most ambitious task of concretizing a crucial part of the national experience spread over a period of three decades from the end of the first world war till India's attainment of freedom. The Gandhian epoch in the history of modern India is not only the most tumultuous politically, but also the most regenerative culturally. Narayan's task is precise to individualise the national pilgrimage to the Gandhian shrine in the WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA,

Narayan gives the Mahatma a role in the novel, but it is not the principal role. Gandhi is introduced as a character and not as a symbol. Narayan keeps within his artistic range and shows Mahatma Gandhi not in terms of great political events, but in relation to ordinary events while retaining his historical authenticity. Narayan is not concerned with the impact Gandhi made on the millions of India, but rather with how one individual -- very ordinary mentally and morally, with no pretence to any idealism -- reacted to this great man. On all other occasions, Gandhi is seen among the harijans, villagers, children and the volunteers who talks to them about the ordinary affairs of day to day life. Narayan has invested the Mahatma with that characteristic quality of Narayan's world; and amused and tolerant humour. Narayan has tried to keep the Mahatma in the background but make his influence felt like the sandal wood in the novel indirectly. In the novel the theme is actually the romance between Sriram and Bharati. Sriram is down into the Satyagraha movement as a youngman through the influence of the Mahatma and Bharati. The affair of Sriram and Bharati gains a new dimension and significance in the background

through the magic of Gandhi's name and influence.

"I cannot bring myself to see you to-day. It seems degrading to have a meeting under these conditions. Sapu has always said that it is dishonourable to assume subterfuges. In jail we must observe the rules, or change them by 'Satyagraha' openly, if possible. Forgive me".<sup>(134)</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi is therefore not a main character in the novel appearing always in the forefront but a vital force subsumed as a whole.

Sriram, the hero of the novel, is an orphan brought up by his granny in the manner of a minor zaminder. His daily work is quite simple; it is even typical of the class in a transitional period. Immature and slow-witted Sriram becomes the humble adorer of Bharati (symbolically meaning the daughter of India), who is lovely, teasing tender and capable. On one of his market going days, Sriram sees the beautiful Bharati collecting as a Congress volunteer, a fund for the famine-stricken people. It is a revelation to Sriram. Malgudi was about to have the honour of receiving Mahatma Gandhi. Soon the Mahatma arrives, and addresses the people on the banks of the river Sarayu; he declares :

"We, the citizens of this country are all soldiers of a non-violent army ... but we have a system of our own to follow; that is, Ram Dhun, spinning on the charka,<sup>(135)</sup> and the practice of absolute truth and non-violence."

Sriram feels gradually drawn towards the national movement and more significantly towards Bharati as she stands gracefully near the Mahatma on the platform. Sriram is deeply impressed by the public ovation and reverence that Gandhi receives on his arrival.

Gandhi prefers to stay at the Scavengers' Colony outside the town, believing in a life of simplicity and virtue. Sriram succeeds in meeting Bharati at the Congress Camp, longing to become friends, and if possible to marry her. Bharati is courteous to him and promises to arrange an interview with Gandhi before his becoming a volunteer, on the strict understanding that he should speak the truth about himself. Sriram is overcome by the ease and grace with which she moves and masters all situations. He even musters enough courage to say, I like you, and 'I like to be with you'. Bharati is sympathetic, asked him to wait at the Bapuji's hut early morning the next day. Granny, at home, is upset by Sriram's activities.

Next morning, Sriram's meeting with Gandhi is significant and is symbolic of their respective rules :

" The door of Mahatmaji's hut was half open.

Light streamed out throughout the gap. Sriram  
went towards it like a charmed moth." (136)

Gandhi is human and unaffectedly gracious. Sriram tells all about himself and his desire to serve the country though he is not clear still in his mind as to the exact nature of the Gandhian movement. Sriram joins the camp and associates himself with Bharati and Gopad who had lost their fathers in the struggle for freedom. He learns

the first lesson that suffering and self-mortification are the orders of the day in the camp. He wilts under the stern moral order and discipline enjoined by the Mahatma. Having failed to convince his granny of the urgency of his participation in the national movement, Sriram sneaks out of his old house at the dead of night.

Dissemination of the message of the Mahatma is the allotted duty of Sriram. The whole work should be carried out non-violently with the strictest ethical purity and rustic simplicity. When the Mahatma proclaims his famous resolution of August, 1942.

"Britain must quit India", the phrase instantly becomes the national 'mantra' charged with divine potency. Sriram propagates the message among the more apathetic sections of people. But the public apathy towards the struggle for national survival makes him unhappy. In the midst of such work Sriram comes closer, so dangerously closer to Bharati that he tries to 'violently' possess her. But Bharati, the daughter of India that she is, puts sense into his head and after Sriram's repentance and repeated requests she promises to marry him : 'Yes, if I marry at all, and .... if Bapu agrees'. Mahatma in his message to Sriram exhorts him : ' Your work should be a matter of inner faith .... your conscience should be your guide in every action ... You should do your duty because your inner voice drives you to do it.'<sup>(137)</sup>

But Sriram's self-development is not complete. After Bharati's arrest in Madras, Sriram slowly drifts. He frankly refuses to join Bharati:

(138)

"I have a lot of things to do outside".

It becomes more and more obvious that Sriram has not understood what the whole non-violent non-co-operation movement is about, his is an inferior path together ---- the path of blind obedience. The statements that Narayan puts into Sriram's mouth make him a stupid, ignorant youngman rather than the dedicated disciple that he is probably meant to be. The clinching proof of Sriram's moronic incomprehension is the way he is taken in by Jagadish, a terrorist. It is highly interesting that Narayan links up the cult of violence in the 'forties with the expatriate organisation of Subhas Chandra Bose, the Indian National Army for the liberation of the country from foreign domination, Sriram's criminal imprisonment owing to his terrorist activities toughens him and his request for better treatment is rightly turned down ; his release after independence finally completes his pilgrimage to the Gandhian shrine in New Delhi. Bharati has been all along <sup>with</sup> Gandhi, rescuing the refugees and the children from the communal blood both consequent upon the vivisection of India. Bharati says to Sriram : 'Human beings have done impossible things to other human beings'. To Sriram, Bharati seems to be 'too magnificent to be his wife', With all her cultural refinement in the presence of the Mahatma. Amid all the bustling activity, Sriram feels emboldened to say to the Mahatma : 'We are waiting for your blessed permission to marry". The Mahatma approves of the marriage,

but the same evening, the blackest day in the history of modern India, Gandhi instinctively apprehends danger before going out to the prayer meeting. The man with the revolver for the Mahatma to come near the dais:

"As Mahatma approached the dais, the entire assembly stood up .... The man stood before the Mahatma and brought his palms together in a reverential salute. As the Mahatma was about to step on the dais the man took aim and fired. Two more shots rang out. The Mahatma fall on the dais. He was dead in a few seconds." (139)

It is thus the archetypal image of this Universal Man that Narayan seeks to project in his novel; with a rare perspicacity and respect for historical experience. The image remains mainly historical and objective, depriving the novel of its mythical meaning which is so compelling in Raja Rao's KANTHAPURA. The historicity of the Gandhian image in Narayan's WAITING FOR THE MAHATA is certainly unimpeachable, but lacks the religiosity of a literary myth like KANTHAPURA. This artistic desideratum in Narayan's novel does result in a certain diffusiveness and lack of concentration. As Iyengar observes :

"Since the stress is not merely on Gandhi's influence but on Gandhi himself ... the novel develops a duality of interest which is not wholly resolved by the compulsion of art". (140)

Indeed, Narayan's canvas is big; but the image is bigger still, for while the canvas is time, the image is eternity.

So much talk of nationalism and Gandhian philosophy and large scale importation of politics and political figures into a novel cannot succeed unless the writer has the power to transform them into eternal human and spiritual value by his sheer creative technique. Anand's UNTOUCHABLE and COOLIE, Abbas's INQULAB, Venkataramani's KUNDAN THE PATRIOT etc. have too much politics but the human values of those novels far surpass their apparently political behaviour. WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA is more than a mere Political Fiction. It is an ambitious effort both the technique and theme. The theme which gets prominence next to the political theme in the novel is the exploration of relationship between Sriram and Bharati. It is perhaps not in the main story but in the love episode that we can find artistic or literary worth in the novel. It is true that Narayan did not elaborate the obsessive romantic side of this love episode. This is partly because of the role of the Mahatma in novel. Bharati will not marry Sriram unless she gets the Mahatma's permission. The entrance of the Mahatma in the emotional affair of the lovers had imposed certain restrictions to Narayan from making a full romantic novel. Even though the Mahatma appears at the beginning and end of the story, his magic influence



dwarfs the progress of the romance of the young boy and girl. Bharati will not marry Sriram until he has proved worthy by devoting himself body and soul to Gandhi's ideals of truth and non-violence. Sriram does not hesitate to throw himself into the activities of non-violence for the sake of Bharati. She takes the consent of Gandhi to teach Sriram the ideals of the Mahatma.

Sriram's love affair incomplete without the influence of Gandhiji and his nationalistic activities. He comes closer to Bharati through the Mahatma. Narayan shows skill in the technique of blending the elements of love and politics. One helps the other in the development of the plot. The magic image of Gandhi adds fragrance and holiness to the love of Sriram and Bharati. It helps Sriram's evolution into manhood-though the evolution takes place in a strange and bewildering process.

"Sriram carried a change of dress and went down-hill to a brook and bathed. He felt so invigorated after the cold bath that he sang aloud all alone in his wilderness. He went on repeating : 'Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram ... .. ' when he sang it, he had a feeling of being near him and doing something on his order .... Bharati had taught him how to insert the cotton thread, (141) how to turn the wheel, and how to spin."

The relationship of Sriram and Bharati is presented in the light of Gandhian ideals of life. There is therefore no room for colourful thrill and excess of imagination and exaggeration of the conventional

love story in the novel. Bharati is neither aggressive like Savitri, nor frivolous like Shanta Bai nor a soft hearted sweet heart like Sushila. She is the spokeman of idealism. Intellectually she is far superior to Sriram who more a wilful child than an importunate lover. "He rested his head on her bosom and remained silent". In most cases his manners and talks exudes an air of **theatricality** more than a positive and dynamic love he is supposed to feel. Towards the end of the novel, Sriram tells Gandhi :

"Bharati went away to jail and there was no one who  
could tell me what to do." (142)

Such remarks reveal more of Bharati's superiority over Sriram and end with him 'pathetically' blinking and talking 'Childishly'. Bharati belongs to a different world of her own where she practises austerities of life. Re-nunciation and not earthly pleasure dictates the ways of her life. Narayan describes Sriram's roots in Malgudi in particular details but Bharati is given no background. She is an orphan and brought up under the care of the Mahatma. She is a torch bearer of Indian woman hood a glowing light of the heritage of Indian culture.

"I do whatever I am asked to do by the Sevak Sangh.  
Sometimes they ask me to go and teach people spinning  
and tell them about Mahatmaji's ideas" (143)

"Bharati is the daughter of India". (144)

Narayan therefore, did not attempt to make her a romantic heroine. Her deliberate impersonality makes Bharati unreal compared to even

minor characters in the novel such as Kanni, the shop-keeper or Sriram's grandmother. When Sriram puts the question of marriage she hesitates ---

"I won't marry if he (Mahatma) does not sanction it,  
(145)  
I can't do it".

A patient non-violent worker Sriram becomes impatient against the rigid set of rules imposed by Bharati. Her indifference to Sriram's human passions of love benumbs him.

"He touched her arm; the lonely atmosphere was very encouraging, but she pushed his hand down gently, remarking, 'You rest here till I am back with instructions' and he turned and was off down".  
(146)

Such cold and impersonal behaviour revolutionizes Sriram and increases his sufferings:

(147)  
"Why is everyone opposed to my loving you".  
What shall I do without you ....."  
Why should Bapuji not want us to marry ....."  
"don't you feel disappointed we are not married ?" (148)  
"When we meet again after the jail, and wherever we may meet ..... will you not forget me ?" (149)

Bharati's answer to such emotional question are utterly prosaic and humourless :

"Bapu has better things to do than finding a husband for me", 'we shall marry the moment Bapu agree'.  
(150)

Bharati is so straightforward and unequivocal that Sriram feels amazed at the hardihood and calmness of her temperament. Thus their roles are inverted : Bharati is the guru, Sriram the unwilling disciple. There is no real meeting point between these two because of her total commitment to Gandhi's way of life in which personal emotions <sup>are</sup> less important than non-violence, truth and self-discipline. There is little possibility of a subtle study of tension and communication between Sriram and Bharati. Emotionally and psychologically they two seem to be at opposite poles. Sriram is in a full-blooded inward revolt against the extremely gentle and saintly image of Bharati. At every point he encounters idealistic rules. He says for example :

"Everything that she thought or said or expected was set in grooves and hard to practise." (151)

Narayan's material limits him from exploring personal relationship in the novel. He makes it a Gandhian novel and the love episode loses its romantic grandeur and emotional charm because of the predominant influence of Gandhism. Technically Sriram is the hero and Bharati is the heroine of the novel and the plot revolves around them and Narayan examines the motives and justifications of Bharati and Sriram in greater detail :

"but the predominant figure, even though he is seldom on stage, is Gandhi and the theme is Gandhism". (152)

With the historical framework of WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA Narayan sketches the outlines of the love story which is no doubt an ambitious

effort and an impressive feat. But Narayan's art in the novel betrays unsureness and perplexity and the love episode fails to maintain balance with the main story. Not only is the love story weak and unispring but the novel as a whole lacks characterisation, development, meaning, and technique. Narayan is a good story teller. We have got ample evidences of his good story telling in many of his novels. Stories flow out of him and hold his listeners' interest. The love episode in the WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA is objectively but weakly handled. Obviously, it fails to merge with the main strand due to technical defect in handling the theme.

Comparing WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA with Raja Rao's KANTHAPURA Mrs. Meenakshi Mukherjee observes : .....

"These two novels deal basically with same theme the impact of Gandhian thought on an ordinary Indian. In Narayan's novel this impact is felt by an individual; but in Raja Rao's by a community. But in effect these novels have nothing in common and the difference is the result of the choice of two totally different techniques. KANTHAPURA is narrated by an old woman to a hypothetical listener. The listener does not figure anywhere, but his presence is indicated throughout by the use of the second person by the speaker ..... WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA has no narrator as such and the story is related in straightforward third person, seemingly through the point of view of Sriram who, at the beginning, is a shiftless youth spoilt by a huge sum of unearned money and his grandmother's care. Hardly a lovable person, Sriram is conceived in a gentle irony. The author keeps in ironic distance between himself and his central figure through whose consciousness all the events are

presented .... The impact of Gandhi transmitted through Bharati his whole life, brings him out of the smug somnolence of pampered adolescence, just as in KANTHAPURA Gandhi's impact conveyed through Moorthy, transforms the life of an entire community, from the bondage of hide bound orthodoxy to struggle and sacrifice for an ideal. Both novels have somewhat similar techniques; Seeing a great mass movement through the eyes of an individual quite limited in his perception. But WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA is a novel about the 'limited individual's' growth and maturity, while KANTHAPURA is the history of a revolution where the different characters are not important as individuals but as part of a greater whole. The movement destroys their homes and ultimately lands the people of Kanthapura, uprooted and impoverished in an alien village. There is sadness at the end, when Moorthy departs from the Mahatma's path to become a socialist. Yet there is very little lasting regret because people look forward to 'Ram Rajya'. The hope is collective while the loss has been individual. On the other hand, at the end of the WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA there is a loss as the national level in the death of the Mahatma, but there is a sense of fulfilment in Sriram's personal life." (153)

The tone of KANTHAPURA is serious throughout but WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA, like most of his novels has comic overtones. Narayan's virtues as a comic novelist lie in the objective detachment of his comedy. In spite of the darker elements that generate the tone of WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA the common elements of honour, gentle irony, understatement and objectivity of Narayan

are not missing in the novel. Narayan is a realist but his realism nevertheless leads him into the defects of over-writing, hyperbole, caricature and bias. He does not write like M.P. Anand, Dickens, Balzac and Zola under the impulse of political motivation and social pretext. He writes simple social comedies like Austen. The theme of nationalism in the novel is treated in some places with the same comic irony deployed against cheats, bohemians, eccentrics and knaves.

\* \* \*

It has already been pointed out by critics that R. K. Narayan's THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI has a definite sustained mythical structure. It is the method of using myth as a structural parallel which has been consistently applied in this novel. But in case of his other novels this method of the structural parallel has not been thoroughly used but done in fragmentary way, illuminating a character here or enriching a situation there. The materials Narayan works with in THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI is rich in myths and legends and he uses the same old technique more effectively here than he did elsewhere. The relevance of the classical myths and legends to modern life is apparent to a greater or lesser extent in those novels. In THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI his method of mythologising contemporary reality becomes ever more apparent and important. The method of using myth as a structural parallel is consistently used throughout in the novel. In the other novels, even in THE GUIDE the use of myth as a structural parallel is more often

done in a fragmentary way, illuminating character here like Raju who is suddenly raised to a mythic level or enriching a situation there like that of the unexpected catastrophe that results from the deviations of Margayya making him a beggar overnight. In THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI R. K. Narayan has presented a definite sustained mythical structure. Reviewers have read it as an allegory; some have pointed out that the novel closely follows the classical pattern of Sanskrit literature. In his introduction to Gods, Demons and others which followed THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI Narayan explains some of the principle which constitute the classical myths in his novels. They are the inevitable triumph of good and the destruction of evil, the law of 'Karma', the time-scheme of the gods and the specific stylized roles of gods, demons, kings and sages. With the impact of modern literature the Indo-Anglian novelists begin to look at the Gods, demons and sages not as some remote 'Puranic' characters as described in the mythological stories but as types and symbols possessing psychological validity, even when seen against the contemporary background. These characters make a link between normal life as we know and the cyclically ordered universe with which it is continuous.

It is in this novel THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI where the structural unity is wholly based more on a mythical parallel than on a philosophical concept. Just as in a myth some of the chief characters are Gods, and demons and other beings larger in power than humanity, in this story H. Vasu, the power-hungry taxidermist and the dynamic man of action who operates much as Dr. Pal did in THE FINANCIAL EXPERT is presented as a figure much above the common run of



men. He has been ironically described as THE MAN EATER and the 'Rakshasa' as a demoniac creature possessing enormous strength, strange powers and genius far above the ordinary level of humanity. He is designed after the Ravana, the 'Rakshasa' character of Ramayana<sup>1</sup> or the 'Asuras' described in the Indian 'Puranas'. He is portrayed as the incarnation of evil. In the novel Vasu occupies an all-pervasive monster-like position. His demoniac personality raises him to the level of an Asura by identifying his activities with the feats of the classical demon. In his character the writer implies that no one on earth is so powerful as to evade the stern hand of divine justice. The hot-headed and self-willed taxidermist who threatened to defy all the prized human values and compunctions to satisfy his own selfish needs, is ultimately caught in his own trap and dies by his own hands. Here the destruction of the 'Man-eater' offers a parallel to the destruction of the evil-door Ravana in the hands of Rama, the Godman. Sastri's puckish homily to Nataraja, signifies the moral underlying the mythical structure of the novel:

"Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the 'rakshasas' there were ever born. Every demon carries within him, 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" ?

Narayan aptly compares Vasu to the mythological 'Bhasmasura', the unconquerable, who scorched everything he touched, and

finally reduced himself to ashes by placing the tips of his fingers on his own head. By this mythological story he suggests that Vasu too like 'Bhasmasura' met his death by his own hands. This mythical analogy cannot be systematically followed through to find exact points of correspondence but it gives an insight into the innocent mind of the Malgudi people that R. K. Narayan has attempted to present in THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI, the kind of mind in which myth and fact are not clearly distinguishable. Moreover, for such a mind a fact does not become significant until it can be related to a myth. The author seems to suggest that the hard-hearted taxi-driver is given to cannibalism and the annihilation of his own kind. He adheres to the Indian classical tradition by mythicising the central character and gives his hero that unusually 'rakshasa' status.

The myths and legends are part of the characterisation of Vasu and also integral to the progress of events. The central theme of MR SAMPTAH, THE FINANCIAL EXPERT, and THE GUIDE is concerned with the sense of 'matra' (limits) and the transgression of it. The use of myth in those novels is not arbitrary-but done with the definite purpose of delimiting the author's total scope and imposing a deeper pattern on the literal level of his narration. The parallel design is complicated enough to make a sudden recognition of the total design at the end of a gratifying experience. Northrop Frye speaks of two kinds of recognition in fiction as mentioned before. In that connection some of Narayan's novels specially THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI assume a new meaning as soon as

recognition of the identity of the total design has been experienced.

"One is the continuous recognition of credibility, fidelity to experience. The other is the recognition of the identity of the total design, into which we are initiated by the technical recognition of the plot."<sup>(155)</sup>

Narayan is aware of the total design of the plot of the novel. He succeeds in maintaining the integrity of the structure. About the inevitable triumph of virtue over vice in the classical mythology Narayan comments :

'The strong man of evil continues to be reckless until he is destroyed by the tempo of his own misdeeds. Evil has in it, burried subtly, the infallible seeds of its own destruction and however frightening a demon may seem, his doom is implied in his own evil propensities.'<sup>(156)</sup>

Narayan executes this idea of the mythical demon in the novel and describes its relevances to modern times. Thus, Vasu, the outsider is 'typed' fairly early in the novel:

'He shows all the definitions of a 'rakshasa,' persisted Shastri, and went on to define the makeup of a 'Rakshasa' .....He said, "every 'Rakshasa' gets swollen with his own ego. He thinks he is invincible, beyond law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him'.<sup>(157)</sup>

The mock-heroic method as used by Narayan in the story depends on a balance between credibility and irrationality. Once Vasu's image as

a 'raksnasa' is established and his tenacity and aggressiveness are exposed with the fullest measure, all encounters with him take on the character of mock-heroic skirmishes with an invincible demon. Vasu is too confident of himself, too sure of his superiority over other and too quick to challenge the knowledge and authority of others. The following observation of Nataraj on his nature gives a clue to his being called the 'Man-eater'.

'Now it was like having middle-aged man-eater in your office and home, with the same uncertainties, possibilities and potentialities.'<sup>(158)</sup>

Yet all events in the novel remain credible while the final explanation of Vasu's death alone is deliberately absurd. Rangji's explanation of his death tormented by mosquitoes is like this:

'Next minute she heard a sharp noise like a thunder-clap. The man had evidently trapped a couple of mosquitoes which had settled on his forehead by bringing the flat of his palm with all his might on top of them.'<sup>(159)</sup>

Vasu has smashed in his own skull. Such an explanation may sound ridiculous, but that matters little. His death is an established fact which was inevitable in course of time. Like every demon Vasu also carried within him a 'tiny seed of self-destruction' which brought about his end. Shastri returns to Malgudi, having shrewdly absented himself while the police investigation was going on in the press. He offers Nataraj the mixed holy ash of his pilgrimage as if absolving him from his involvement with Vasu. The story that Vasu killed himself is a parody of the well-known myths

about demons such as Ravana and 'Mahisha': Nataraj accepts the parody, recognizing the reference and the assumptions of the myth.

Like the classical authors Narayan employs certain mythical parallels to illuminate certain situations or characters. The reference to the festival procession led by the temple elephant appears to be an incidental reflection but in fact this mythical parallel is linked with the main structure of the novel and an integral part of the same. In addition to that, the reference to the rituals of worship of Krishna and sacrifice also becomes a means of establishing the atmosphere as well as a device for concretizing 'the point of view'. A puja is being offered to Krishna :

"The priest was circling the camphor light before the golden images ..... this God Krishna was really an incarnation of Vishnu, who had saved Gajendra ; he would again come to the rescue of the same animal on whose behalf I was ..... Unknowingly let out a terrific cry which drowned the noise of children, music, and everything 'Oh, Vishnu ! 'I howled'. Save our elephant and save all the innocent men and women who are going to pull the chariot. You must come to our rescue now."<sup>(160)</sup>

The motive or the point of view is now clear from the extract to continue the struggle against the negative forces of life.

The festival has a larger mythical dimension. It is a symbolic reaffirmation of the community itself. It brings Nataraja's talents out into the open for the first time. He organises the stages community festival of great dimensions successfully.

"We were planning an elaborate ritual, procession, and feast for a thousand. A few of the persons we approached asked point-blank why we wanted to do anything at all if we had no money in hand -- a perfect question but we did not contemplate a retreat."<sup>(161)</sup>

The festival is smoothly staged despite the apparent financial crisis. As in the plot development of the classical story it is the nature of such events which reveals or reintegrates the real situation of the characters. The eruption of the hot-headed and self-willed demon who threatens to defy all the prized human values and compunction; to satisfy his own selfish needs can be countered only by the introduction of an equally potent and inexplicable force; the divine (daiva), fate. Hence the utility of the invocation of the spirit of 'Vishnu', the saviour of the universe. Narayan accomplishes his story in the approved manner of the classicists with all his sincerity; the 'rakshasa' over steps his own limits or sense of 'ma-tra' and kills himself. The incident has taken place quite in tune with our traditional beliefs that every demon carries within him a tiny seed or self-destruction, that is, the harmartia which brings down home the worst of catastrophes.

(162)

"Otherwise, what is to happen to humanity".

Actually the festival procession which hastens the death of Vasu. Vasu has threatened to shoot the elephant which is the central feature of the festival procession. Such a decision taken in a fit of passions eventually assures his doom. Nataraj takes

every measure to avert the tragic incident which may cause death of many innocent men and women along with the elephant. Vasu beats up the police Inspector who came to examine the armanent of Vasu. Nataraj tries to postpone the procession and then to change its route away from the window of Vasu anticipating unrest and chaos of larger dimension. But others did not approve his plan. Finally, in desperation the festival having already started, Nataraj in a fit of mental unrest creeps into the room of Vasu and finds him asleep. Nataraj decides to steal his gun; he reaches the gun placed beside the 'sleeping' Vasu. At that moment the procession passes along the road. He glimpses the elephant; will Vasu wake and seize the moment? Nataraj shudders in frantic fear. During this moment of crisis the alarm clock sounds; he drops the gun and leaves the place. But his purpose has already been accomplished. The prodigious task is done by a mosquito, the lowest of God's creatures. The mosquito sits on his forehead and in order to swat it Vasu crushes his own skull and causes self-destruction at the peak point of the story by trying it to the high point of the festival.

The power of the 'Rakshasa' is so great that immediately after his death peace does not return to the world. Nataraj is suspected as a murderer. He has accomplished the feat in order to reintegrate the world of the printshop but that world still appears irretrievable. The spirit of the dead 'Rakshasa' still envelopes the atmosphere Nataraj thinks:

"This was the greatest act of destruction that the Man Eater had performed, destroying my name, my

friendship and my world. This thought was too much for me." (163)

But when he was apprehending grave danger of life, he was in fact saved. As in the classical analogue it is here also goodness and honesty come out rewarded and the evil punished. The story ends with Shastri, the bulwark of the printshop again taking his place by the composing board. He is the man who runs the press and manages all its affairs. Gerow comments :

"..... the essence of his activity, though is continuity, not enterprise. He represents the Indian alternative to Vasu and is in a way the embodiment of the Gitaic doctrine of selfless, necessary action." (164)

Anyway, when he returns to the press after a certain period of absence, the world is re-established. At the end there is a resolution of the dissonance, a reconciliation, a calm cosmos. This is the word which interpretes Shakespeare's last plays -- 'word over all, beautiful as the sky.' The resolution of the discords has ethical and spiritual significance : it is a moral necessity.

Narayan remarks :

"With the impact of modern literature we began to look at our gods, demons and sages, not as some remote concoctions but as types and symbols possessing psychological validity, even when seen against the contemporary background." (165)



The relevance of the classical myths to modern life is apparent in Narayan's most complex novel - THE GUIDE which is also about men of mythical proportions who make a link between normal life as we know it and the cyclically ordered universe with which it is continuous. As in THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI so in THE GUIDE the use of classical myth is structural. It is relevant to the total concept of the plot where the theme of attachment and its inevitable consequence is the focal point towards which all incidents and episodes move. But this theme becomes subsidiary to another theme, the progress towards realising one's true nature. This theme again leads to the idea of release from the wheel of existence and Narayan uses the idealised role of the mythical sage to explore it.

Two cycles of events operate in the story of THE GUIDE. The first one is Raju's rise and fall within the world of normal experience and the other is Raju's life outside the world of normalcy beginning as the unknown prisoner and ending as the unknown Swami where the faith of hundreds of people transformed even a shady character like Raju into an agent of divine grace.

Within the world of normal experience Raju's attachment to Rosie and money sows the seeds of his own destruction. Narayan makes us believe that Raju's fate is inevitable. His passion for Rosie blinds him to the smouldering menace in Marco's character. He elopes with her and spends all his savings on helping her to become a great classical dancer. This 'pygmalion' situation, Raju's transformation of Rosie turns into a reverse when Raju, obsessed and

ultimately ruined by the cold-hearted Rosie, is accused of forgery by Marco, goes to prison deserted by his mistress and despised by his relatives and friends. His ambitious adventures bring out his downfall. It is the inevitable law of life which has been hinted in Narayan's other novels also. It is the bent of Raju's character and Marco and Rosie are only the means by which he proceeds to self-destruction as Dr. Pal with his erotic manuscript 'Bed Life' is the only means of Margayya's tragic fall in THE FINANCIAL EXPERT.

The second cycle of event describes the role of Raju as a convict. Even this role he performed with enthusiasm becoming an ideal prisoner. Raju did not drift into jail; he was taken there for a deliberate act of forgery. This was the one act that he did voluntarily and deliberately. But he was surprised to see that such a trivial action should bring down such dreadful consequences on his head. Again out jail he retires to an old temple by the river where he comes to be revered as a holy man. Thus his life is a series of improvisations. His quick adjustment to the role of a saint falls in line with similar improvisations done throughout his life. His life is thus a long story of errors and self-deception. Raju accepts the role of 'Sannyasi' for the very reasons that Chandran in THE BACHELOR OF ARTS rejects it. It provides him with an adequate living for which he doles out a counterfeit form of spiritual guidance. But while Raju's intentions of utilising the role are perfectly clear, the role itself has a certain power. He is 'hypnotised by his own voice' impressed by his own grandeur' and he imagines himself 'growing in stature'. Part of his success so long was his ability to identify

himself completely with whatever role he is playing. But now in his part of a saint he has at last reached a stage when the situation is no longer familiar. When the shadow of famine stalks the countryside and people come to him for help. Raju for the first time in his life confronts a situation in which he does not know how to act:

"Something was happening on a different level over which he had no control or choice and where a philosophical attitude made no difference".  
(166)

His confession to Velan:

(167)  
'I am no saint'

reveals his helplessness and conscience of guilt.

The theme of release is also used with irony.

Raju sacrifices his life in the river believing that draught is over and rains have come. The miracle that happens is not that the rains have come but that the bogus holy man changes into a dying god by sacrificing himself for his own people. The qualities that he always recognised as his nature -- to be involved with people, to anticipate their needs and to provide for them -- are heightened to a mythic level. Identifying with his true role, Raju also releases himself from it and from the wheel of existence. Though upto a certain point Raju was at par with Vasu in THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI, Margayya in TIE FINANCIAL EXPERT, Mr. Srinivasa in MR. SAMPATH; that he like many of them crossed the limits of life by drifting himself into the ambitious abnormal adventures of life and tasted bitter fruits of life as inevitable consequences of 'Karma', but he

raises himself far above the other people by releasing himself eternally from the bond of life and from the wheel of existence.

The entire structure of the novel THE GUIDE is on a mythical level. It does not have the limited aim of the exposure of comic absurdity in the lives of the characters. It seems to aim much higher to deal with a moral dilemma in the life of its protagonist -- a dilemma which illustrates the all-pervading irony of life itself, by raising overwhelming questions about all human motives and thereby highlighting the essential ambiguities of the human condition. For Raju sainthood is the final and irrevocable destiny for which his entire career seems to have been a long preparation. The sainthood motif is thematically not peripheral in THE GUIDE Raju felt within himself :

"..... for the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full of 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 a new strength to go through with the ordeal. The fourth day of his fast found him quite springtly. He went down to the river, stood facing up stream with his eyes shut, and repeated the litany. It was no more than a supplication to the heavens to send down rain and save humanity. It was set in a certain rhythmic chant, which lulled his senses and awareness, so that as he went on saying it over and over

again, world around him became blank. He nearly  
(168)  
lost all sensation.

It sums up in one word the tremendous significance of the strange transformation of the hero from a hypocrite to a Swami. The transformation is presented as a highly complex process. As a tourist guide it had been Raju's business to solve the problems of his clients:

It was his nature to get involved in other people's  
interests and activities. (169)

By sheer force of habit, Raju agrees to advise Velan and when the later gratefully tries to touch his feet, the author's comment underscores the ironic import of this development.

(170)

"He felt he was attaining the stature of a saint". From this point onwards, in keeping with the logic of irony, nothing that Raju does becomes futile. Every action of his furthers the grand design which is finally complete only when he is compelled to attain a saint's martyrdom. For example, he starts pontificially telling Velan an ancient religious tale but suddenly he realises that he does not remember -----

(171)

"Either its course or its purport" and suddenly stops telling the story. But this does not upset Velan at all. Again, as he sits deeply thinking as to where he should go next and what should be his next venture, the villagers think that Swamy is lost in deep meditation. In the Primary state, Raju is transformed into a holyman without any conscious effort on his part. The irony here reveals in a flash the deep seated complexities of human nature.

Raju had to pay heavy penalty for this. He takes the full advantage of the innocence of the villagers. Their devotion is so pronounced that the unsuspecting Raju, swept off his feet, feels that his.

"personality radiated a glory" (172)

and

"he had created a giant with his puny self". (173)

The baffling complexity of human motives is revealed in Raju's reactions to his plight. He is afraid of getting exposed but he cannot escape from the present situation. He is not even conscious that he has transgressed the limits of 'matra'. The central theme is thus concerned with the sense of 'matra' and man's transgression of it. People gather round Raju for 'darshan', and brought him food and their heart-felt reverence. This game of deception went for long. When the villagers talk about the crocodile in the river, Raju says in an air of wisdom welling from the depths of his being:

"What can a crocodile do if your mind is clear and your conscience is untroubled." (174)

Narayan has shown himself to be a master of the device of verbal irony to highlight comic absurdity but in this novel he sub-ordinates sporadic verbal irony to the complex and deep-seated irony inherent in the theme of enforced sainthood. By far the most memorable of Narayan's ironic externalisations in THE GUIDE is couched not in words but in the memorable symbol -- the crocodile which infests the river by the side of Raju's sanctuary. The crocodile, an archetypal symbol of hypocrisy provides an apt parallel to the fake saint.

Appropriately enough, on one in the village seems to have actually seen the crocodile, though they all know it is there. It is a myth, which even like Raju's sainthood becomes a reality only in death, for it is seen for the first time when the draught, which is to kill Raju, also kills it. Further more, in its death it enriches the villagers, who find quite a treasure in its belly, just as Raju's death brings fame and perhaps rain too in the village.

Anyway, Raju's mystifying utterances of the crocodile and series of improvisations bring about his own destruction, Sainthood has become prison from which there is no escape for the victim. It is at this point that the penance of purification through fasting was thrust upon him. Raju now realises that he has worked himself into a position from which he cannot get out. In their zeal, the disciples of Raju kept a twenty four hour vigil with their famished Swamy. It is irony of fate how the man of earthly passions was transformed into a Swamy against his will because he had forgotten his 'matra'.

Among the various shuttlings back and forth in time, and among the numerous episodes, the story that emerges in the novel is that of Raju who is too confident of himself, too sure of his superiority over others and too quick to befool other people. He gets into trouble by trying to do things beyond his power and eliminate his life. According to Indian tradition men who transgress their natural limits are punished for it. // Ravana overstepped his 'matra' in THE RAMAYANA by stealing away Sita. He was punished and destroyed. There are innumerable examples in the classical stories

which appear to have contained this common underlying pattern. The use of myth in R. K. Narayan is not arbitrary but done with the definite purpose of delimiting his total scope and imposing a deeper concern on the literal level of his narration.

In this connection the role of Nemesis, a goddess of retribution deserves mention. Raju's tragedy is not circumstantial. It happens not because of some divine agency or the utter vagary of the providence, but as a logical result of deviation from the moral duty. First, he violates the social behest and commits adultery while getting involved with the wife of another person. He is fated to be lost because he deviates from the moral. But here is a point to ponder over, the fact is that the nemesis falls on him not because he is immoral from the sexual point of view but because he is immoral from the point of view of avarice. He may be a moral wreck, but no one bothers about it, but he has a tendency to stick to material values of life. At first he grabs the wife of another person, and then he grabs the money, the first unsettles him socially, and the second sees him clapped into prison. His overemphasis on the material values is the cause of the stirring of fate. Raju is not a victim of an implacable destiny. His doom is not decreed before hand. He brings his fate down on himself by some error of his own arising from an inherent flaw in his nature. He embarks upon a course by which his ruin is eventually assured. Whatever he does in the novel is the part of his own will, and not that of the providence. Hence fate stands within the confines of his own doing and will.



But fate baffles Raju. It comes to him as nemesis but it has a different form. It's activity begins with the coming of the half-wit who informs the villagers of Mangal that he would not eat till things were properly mended. Fate manipulates the arrival of the victim to a predestined spot as it happens in MACBETH. Shakespeare brings Duncan to the house of Macbeth where he is killed by him. Here Raju settles down as an ex-convict in a sanctuary where the villagers would out of sheer ignorance of course put him in a mortally serious situation. So fate lurks about the hero as something sinister behind the life of Raju in THE GUIDE. Nataraj in THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI is conscious of the sinister element before hand. He is overwhelmed by the unexpected turn of events which demands an effective response :

"A new set of circumstances seemed to approach me in an enveloping movement ..... What a mighty problem (175) was coming unto me ! The enormity of it oppressed me".

Nataraj is unable like Raju to extricate himself from involvement. Raju is destined to meet his end like the tragic mythical heroes. Narayan does not differ from the classical authors in revealing his mythical purpose at the very end. The narrative sequence is important not only because it brings into relief the gap in Narayan between action and consequence but, more to the literary point, because it illustrates the extent of divergence between the involvement of the characters and the development of the story.

It is almost in the denouement that Narayan's notions of

characterisation and plot are brought clearly into focus. The conflict between Raju and Rosie as considered from the 'puranic' point of view is insoluble. Raju's values are just external; serious thought and ethical morality do not modify this evil whereas Rosie upholds a strongly moralistic stand in her prospective dancing career. The clash of ideology between Raju and Marco in the beginning and between Raju and Rosie in the end may be considered as a parable, the character as types. But the incompatibility of the two persons, Raju and Rosie is as much a function of ancient Indian ideas of reality; different level of existence imply different aims, modalities, conditions of existence; the reconciliation of levels must come about as a transcendent act, an unexpected infusion of events with a new or renewed sense of relevance and coherence. Raju, the transformed Swami finds coherence and relevance in his act of self-immolation. What he has done to release himself from the wheels of existence has been very appropriate to the norms of ancient Indian tradition which seems always unattainable in the logic of actions.

In the novel WAITING FOR THE MAHATAMA, Narayan attempted to show the epic order represented by Gandhi and his associates impinging on the normal order of life in malgudi. The Gandhian myth has been the inescapable substance of many contemporary Indo-Anglian novels in which Gandhi appears either as a character or as pervasive influence on the social and political scene. The Gandhian epoch in the history of modern India is not only the most tumultuous politically, but also the most regenerative culturally. Narayan's task is precisely to individualize the national pilgrimage to the Gandhian

shrine in THE WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA.

The moment is the eve of the world war with a tremendous destructive potentiality; the milieu is the placid Malgudi society; the nation at large is seething with discontent and frustration. Such is the stuff waiting for the magical touch of the Mahatma, whose only means are spiritual --- truth and non-violence. Within the historical framework of the novel Narayan suggests a certain inevitability. Gandhi's ideals inevitably take him to martyrdom. Bharati, his true disciple and 'satyagrahi' is honourably imprisoned, then she works in a riot area, and finally makes her home among refugee children. This is fitting. Bharati herself has known no home apart from the Sevak Sangh. The cycle of Sriram's activities ought to end in Malgudi when he comes out of prison. This is suggested when he walks past Kabir lane :

"He was himself, grand-son of a grand old lady, with no worries in life, shutting between a free reading room, the market place and Kanni's shop, living in a world with well defined boundaries, with set activities, no surprises or worries, everything calculable and capable of anticipation". (176)

But this is a momentary illusion. Sriram is propelled forward again to a war of life whose grandeur he sees but is not fitted to. When he rejoins Bharati, he reflects, 'My jail seems on my back the whole time.' This is vividly put. Sriram ought to be a tragic character, caught between the epic order and normal life, but in the novel he is too naive, too much lacking in self-awareness

to bring out the implications of this theme.

It is the archetypal image of the Mahatma, the universal man that Narayan seriously projects in this novel, with a rare perspicacity and respect for historical experience. The image remains mainly historical and objective, depriving the novel of its mythical meaning which is so compelling in Raja Rao's KANTHAPURA is the history of a revolution where the different characters are not important as individuals but as parts of a greater whole. The movement destroys their homes and ultimately the Kanthapura, the up-rooted and impoverished in an alien village. There is sadness at the end, when Moorthy departs from the Mahatma's path to become a socialist. Yet there is very little lasting regret because people look forward to the 'Ram Rajya', modelled on the kingdoms of Ramchandra as narrated in THE RAMYANA, the Indian epic. The hope is collective while the loss has been individual. On the other hand, at the end of THE WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA, there is loss at the national level in the death of the Mahatma, but there is a sense of fulfilment in Sriram's personal life.

Again the historicity of the Gandhian image in Narayan's WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA is certainly unimpeachable, but lacks the religiosity of a literary myth like KANTHAPURA. This artistic desideratum in Narayan's novel does result in a certain diffusiveness and lack of concentration. As Srinivasa Iyengar observes :

".....since the stress is not merely on Gandhi's influence but on Gandhi himself ..... the novel develops a duality of interest which is not wholly

resolved by the compulsion of art."

Narayan's canvas is big; but the image is bigger still, for while the canvas is time, the image is eternity.

Narayan insists on a single sustained myth. His novels are constructed on the same pattern of rise and fall in life. It is a pattern of going round and round in a circle like.

(178)

"bulls yoked to an oil-crusher".

Narayan like W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot and James Joyce has thus made myth meaningful in the modern world. Where the stories are more psychological the use of myths suits more the taste and purpose and temperament of the literary artists. The legends and myths to them are not simply part of the characterisation but also integral to the progress of events. Raja Rao's concept of myth is merely philosophical. He fails to accept the all-embracing significance of myth. His myths and legends in THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE are part of the characterisation of Ramaswami and Savitri but not integral to the progress of events as it is in Narayan.

Narayan's comedy is not a mere sprightly allegory any more than it is a mere anthropological anecdote : it is classical art. Narayan's position as an interpreter of the contemporary Indian socio-cultural scene is to be examined and realised in terms of his observation of the ancient Indian cultural values. His art and technique convey a genuine contextual continuity with the contents and themes of classical Indian literature and its myths and legends. Narayan's essential 'Indianness' formulates his art and makes it classical. He speaks, perhaps alone with Tagore, with



standards to the duties and responsibilities of each role including that of the 'Sannyasi'. He tries to escape responsibility by dropping out and becoming a bogus wandering minstrel. Narayan, unlike other novelists, chooses to treat this situation as comedy. Chandran wanders the various parts of South India to seek an escape from the pricking memory of Malati whom he loved at first sight. Owing to a freak of destiny the horoscopes of Chandran and Malati do not tally and the matter is dropped. Chandran is so shocked by the breaking of his engagement that he loses the balance of his mind. In his aimless travels incidentally he sees the magnificent grey spire of Kapaleeswarar temple. The peace and serenity of the temple attracts him and he turns a 'Sannyasi'. He then visits several South Indian districts on foot and lives on alms. After eight months of these purposeless wanderings he, however, gets tired of his new role of an ascetic. He, therefore, renounces his asceticism as easily as he has accepted it and returns to his parents at Malgudi.

Chandran first refuses the social pressures bearing upon him. He feels indignant at the caste restrictions which are the scourge of the Indian society :

"A marriage would not be tolerated even between sub-sects of the same caste. If Indian was to attain salvation these water tight divisions must go -- community, caste, sects, sub-sects and still further divisions. "(180)

Ironically enough, Chandran's first proposal of marriage fails not because of caste consideration, but because of another

convention, that is, the horoscopic agreement. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the problem of developing an integrated personality is real for Chandran, as for the rest of his generation. Ultimately he has to come to terms with them. He never leaves the orbit of social norms; this is why he does not become a true saint. He chooses 'Sannyasa' in preference to the other alternative because of the 'social stigma' attached to suicide. It is not out of sincerity and earnestness that Chandran adopted the ideal of renunciation.

Chandran's impulsive renunciation of the world and the veneration he receives undeservedly from the villagers betrays his imperfect personality, because he was different from the usual "Sannyasi". His renunciation was a revenge on society, circumstances and perhaps too, on destiny. Chandran's final return to Malgudi is symbolic of the strength and sustenance of the traditional family. THE BACHELOR OF ARTS clearly emphasizes the lasting values of the Indian national tradition which contribute to the individual's self-knowledge, as in the words of Anand K. Coomerswami:

"The last achievement of all thought is a recognition of the identity of the spirit and matter, subject and object." (181)

However, it is a temporary attempt to escape from earthly frustration. He returns to the world because he has not earned by virtue of spiritual worth the gifts of food he is given by the simple villagers during the time of his aimless travel. Lakshmi Holmstron has rightly said :

"... he (Chandran) is placed as a conformist and a householder, although a romantic one, and his way



of coming to terms with society is to convince himself that in ordering his life from the role of student to householder, each step is his own considered decision. "(182)

Through the portrayal of Chandran, R. K. Narayan has asserted that the high caste Hindu is traditionally expected to pass through the stages of 'Brahmacharya' (student), householder, and then hermit, before the stage of the 'Sannyasi'. After returning home from the aimless wanderings as an ascetic with a begging bowl, Chandran marries and becomes a responsible householder. Thus each compromise of Chandran is accompanied by some kind of rationalisation. As a student he believes in squeezing the maximum aesthetic delight out of an experience. He returns to Malgudi from his wanderings as 'Sannyasi', deciding that this greatest striving should be for a 'life free of distracting illusions and hysterics'. He marries Sushila convinced of the callous realism of his motives. His all individual schemes in all the stages of life thus become a series of comic illusions.

In R. K. Narayan's novels it is possible to trace the ideal of asceticism unobtrusively behind certain situations and characterisations. In THE BACHELOR OF ARTS the tone of spiritual asceticism does not get prominence.) Narayan has just touched it to treat as comedy. The treatment is kindly but disillusioned. His view seems to be that happiness is elusive as well as illusive. Deep passion is human but destructive and divisive. The best values are ultimately exercised and nurtured in the ideal domestic life at home and not in the hermitage. Hence, Malgudi, inspite of its narrowness and snobbi-

shness is a lesser evil than Madras with its temptation to fraud. Chandran's renouncement of the bogus temptations of fake asceticism and return to Malgudi -- the abode of peace have been true and appropriate in terms with Narayan's Comic Philosophy of life.

But in his novel WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA do we come across someone who has actually succeeded in achieving the ideal of renunciation. The Mahatma himself emerges here as a saint who can sympathise and remonstrate with ordinary men true to the difinition of 'Jivan-Mukta' and at the same time retain and internal calm. The 'Jivan-Mukta state' is that in which a saint has ceased to have any desires. He may be doing all kinds of actions externally, though he remains altogether unaffected by them internally. This definition of 'Jivan-Mukta' in 'Yoga Vasistha' that describes the idea of a man enjoying a higher bliss through non-attachment and renunciation comes very close to the concept of 'Sthita-Projna' in <sup>the</sup> Bhagavad Gita. R. K. Narayan has portrayed Gandhi in his novel as he has seen him in his own life as a perfect saint corresponding to the idea of a Christian Saint in becoming a martyr. Gandhi accepts a cruel death like that of Christ to redeem the sufferings of others. Gandhi is not the central character in the novel but his benevolent influence on Sriram, Bharati and others is magnanimous. Narayan's treatment of Gandhi is conventionalised. Nothing is added to the accepted portraint of 'Bapu'. He has therefore ceased to be a living character. He is rather a living symbol of traditional Indian asceticism.

Though not thoroughly a human figure, Gandhi has been drawn with sure and delicate touches such as can perhaps be found

only in the great Russian novels. We see him as a saintly figure in white, with his watch tucked at his waist into a fold of his 'dehoti' and a smile shining over his face. We know of his strict observance of regularity and punctuality, his rising early at 3 a.m. and going to bed at 7.30 p.m., his spinning, his prayers, his meagre meals consisting of groundnuts, dates and milk, his morning walks, his intense love for children and untouchables, his efforts for Hindu-Muslim harmony, his joviality of nature and unaffected graciousness of tone, his simplicity, austerity, his faith in truth, non-violence, 'Charka' and 'Ram dhun' and his intense humanity. Gandhi is presented as a super-man. We are told how he does several things at the sametime - while his hands are spinning and his eyes perusing a letter held before him by another, he finds it possible to put in a world of welcome to guests as they come to meet him by the front or back door of the hut. He chooses his abode not in a locality where aristocrats live but in one which is inhabited by the scum of the earth :

" The Mahatma entered his earth. This was one of the dozen huts belonging to the city sweepers who lived on the banks of the river. It was probably the worst area in the town, and an exaggeration even to call them huts; they were just hovel, put together with rags, tin-sheets, and shreds of coconut matting, all crowded in any how, with scratelty fowls cackling about and children growing in the street dust.  
" (183)

The ideal of asceticism is the under current force in Gandhi's life. His life and works reflect his great veneration for the high

ideals of renunciation. Like the dedicated saints of the world he tours the villages on foot and talks to the villagers about spinning, war, non-violence and religion. He trudges his way through ploughed fields; he climbs hard rocky places through mud and slush, but always with the happiest look and in the most cheerful mood. During the Hindu-Muslim riots in Calcutta and East Bengal, he walks all through the swamps, floods and fields of that area with bowed head. He walks amidst the angry and aggressive crowds who threaten to murder him but fail at his feet when he approaches them with a message of love and 'Ahimsa'. We know of his humanity that makes him feel quite at home both in the company of a fabulously rich Municipal Chairman and a poor sweeper boy having nothing to cover his body except a cast off knitted vest full of holes; the humanity that makes him attend to the domestic problems of the ordinary people with the same interest with which he attends to the momentous problems upon which revolves the destiny of the nation.

WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA presents not only a brilliant portrait of the Mahatma but also a penetrative analysis of his philosophy and ideas. R. K. Narayan has thoroughly realised the truth and sublimity of his ideas and therefore tried in the novel to express them in a very precise and simple language such as was used by Gandhi in his personal life and character. In his first speech on the soil of Malgudi, Mahatmaji describes the saintly philosophy of his own life :

" But we have a system of our own to follow : that's Ram Dhun; spinning on the Charkha and the practice  
(184)  
of absolute truth and non-violence. "

Gandhi explains to the people his creed of non-violence and how it can

be practised in daily life ....

" It is perfectly simple procedure provided you have faith in it. If you watch yourself you will avoid all actions big or small, and all thoughts, however obscure, which may cause pain to another. If you are watchful, it will come to you naturally. When someone has wronged you or has done something which appears to you to be evil, just pray for the destruction of that evil. Cultivate an extra-affection for the person and you will find that you are able to bring about a change in him. " (185)

It is not the ordinary voice of the mortal being; it is the everkind God that speaks through the Mahatma. Regarding the use of violence the Mahatma says :

" Before you aspire to drive the British from this country, you must drive every vestige of violence from your system. Remember that it is not going to be a fight with sticks and knives or guns but only with love. Until you are sure you have an overpowering love at heart for your enemy, don't think of driving him out. You must gradually forget the term 'Enemy'. " (186)

Before his departure from Malgudi, Gandhi gives advice to Sriram for his self-development;

" Spin and read Bhagavad Gita, and utter 'Ram Nam' continuously, and then you will know what to do in life. " (187)

Gandhi's faith in the unerring guidance of conscience is expressed in his letter to Sriram :

"Your work should be a matter of inner faith. It cannot depend upon what you see or understand. Your conscience should be your guide in every action. Consult it and you won't do wrong. (188)

Bharati tells us about his faith in humanism above the narrow distinction of caste, creed or religion:

"Bapuji forbade us to refer to anyone in terms of religion as Muslims, Hindu, or Sikhs, but just as human beings. " (189)

The great popularity which Gandhiji enjoyed in this country is a unique phenomenon. No other political or religious leader in any part of the world has ever made so much place for himself in the hearts of the people around him. The novel gives us a glimpse of this wide popularity of Mahatmaji. We are told how the huge crowds gather to listen to him or to see him passing through the road :

" Through archways and ringing cries of 'Gandhi Ki Jai', Gandhi drove in the huge Bentley which the Chairman had left at his disposal. People sat on trees and house tops all along the way and cheered Gandhiji as he passed .... All shops had been closed and all schools, and the whole town was celebrating. School children felt delighted at the thought of Gandhi, Office-goers were happy, and

even banks were closed. They waited in the sun for hours, saw him pass in his Bentley, a white-clad figure, fair skinned and radiant with his palms pressed together in a salute." (190)

He is loved and respected by all irrespective of their caste, creed and position. His presence works miracles in the sweepers' colony. It ~~transmutes~~ the whole atmosphere of that place;

"The men of the colony tied round their heads, their whitest turbans and the women wore their best saris, dragged their children to the river and scrubbed them till they yelled and decorated them coiffures with yellow chrysanthemum flowers. The men left off fighting, did their best to keep way from the drink shops, and even the few confirmed toppers had their drinks on the sly, and suppressed their impulse to beat their wives or break their household pots. The whole place looked bright with lamps and green mango leaves tied across lamp posts and tree-branches." (191)

R. K. Narayan's portrayal of Gandhi retains all through an air of spiritual serenity. He is presented as a perfect holyman with great endeavoured seriousness. He is held in such a high reverence by his country-men and possesses such a magic charm that even the angry, excited and violent mobs bow down before him like dumb sheep and begin to follow 'Ahimsa' in their lives. Even the great criminals utter his name with great piety. One of the hardened criminals says to Sriram :

" Don't drag his name in here; that great saint." (192)

with

" WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA / its fundamentally serious, heroic theme -- the freedom struggle, and its outcome -- is Narayan's tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, both eulogy and elegy." (193) says Haydn Moore Williams.

The Mahatma appears only twice in the novels at the beginning when he and Bharati change the direction of Sriram's life to make him a 'Satyagrahi', and at the end when he sanctions Sriram's marriage; but his shadow lies large over the story and the characters. In the novel actually the Bharati - Sriram romance gains a new dimension in the background of their common allegiance to the Mahatma. Remaining in the background the holyman has spread the sweet perfumes of renunciation and non-violence. It is his credit that Narayan has not made the Mahatma a dull figure. His appearance has generated enthusiasm and liveliness, honour and respect. He is not a preacher in the novel, he is a 'wandering minstrel' with special spiritual powers to the people of Malgudi. In the words of Louis Fischer :

" His legacy is courage, his lesson truth, his weapon love. His life is his monument." (194)

In the hands of R. K. Narayan, Chandran or Gandhi has not played the central role as Sannyasi or holyman. In the construction of theme and technique of the novels their role as saints is subordinate and a portion of the main stream of actions.

The problem of Savitri in THE DARK ROOM is similar to that of Chandran in THE BACHELOR OF ARTS. Her temporary renunciation of the worldly relationships in protest against her husband's immoral



involvement with another ultra-modern lady and finally Savitri's return to the disciplines and support of her family are treated by Narayan in tragic terms. In utter grief and pain Savitri leaves her dear children and immoral husband and attempts to commit suicide. But she is saved. She finds employment at the Murugan temple in Sukkur village cleaning the temple and tending the garden. The 'Pujari' insists that she should sleep in the dark room of the temple and not under the open sky.

Savitri soon realises that even the God's abode is no safe for a lonely woman. The mother in her prayers for her children at the shrine night and day. The simple prayer no longer satisfies her motherly love; for them she would even live in dark room for all time to come :

This is defeat, I accept it. I am no good for this fight, I am a bamboo pole .....Perhaps Sumati and Kamala have not had their hair combed for ages  
(195)  
now.

Savitri's defiance, and defeat and even the detestable dark room seem to be trivial in the light of her motherly fulfilment. Ramani's libertine uncouthness may be there to drive her again to the dark room but the supreme gratitude of a mother illumines the darkest of the dark rooms.

In THE BACHELOR OF ARTS Chandran is allowed the comic illusion that within the limits of a fixed fate he is free to choose his life; Savitri knows that she is defeated once and for all. She does not have the necessary strength of non-attachment to live by

herself. She fails because however much she desires her individuality, her emotional attachments in the world are too great to follow it. She must either live within society by accepting its norms, or live outside it entirely on her own inner resources. In the novel, Narayan dramatises the psychological tragedy of a conventional life, whose redemption is achieved, not through her husband's love but through the affirmation of her own motherhood.

Eternity, not temporarility, is the central chord of the Indian spiritual consciousness to which THE ENGLISH TEACHER bears a convincing testimony.

In contrast with Ramani and Savitri in THE DARK ROOM Krishna and Sushila in THE ENGLISH TEACHER symbolise the spiritual significance of the Indian system of marriage. Krishna in this novel begins where Chandran in THE BACHELOR OF ARTS ends; the youthful Chandran stands on the threshold of wedded life while Krishna is already mature in the happy alliance of marriage and life in general.

In the portrait of Sushila, Narayan presents the ideal type of a Hindu wife, steeped in the cultural traditions of the country. Krishna's attachment to her is not merely physical. As Coomarswami explains :

" In India, the conditions of human love ..... have seemed spiritually significant ... physical union has seemed to present a self-evident image of spiritual unity. " (196)

Spiritual identification is the ultimate end of marriage according to the time-honoured tradition of India. The Hindu rituals of marriage symbolically suggest the indivisible union of husband and

wife; on the occasion of the marriage, the husband leads his wife around the holy fire, uttering the verse from the 'Atharva Veda:'

" He am I, she thou, chant am I, verse thou, heaven  
I, earth thou, let us (two) come together here. " (197)

That Krishna and Sushila ideally represent this type of Indian spiritual tradition is evident from the mystical experience of Krishna after the death of his wife. Their conjugal happiness is the theme of the first part of the novel. In developing this motif, Narayan typifies Sushila as the traditional wife devoted to and identified with her husband.

The last journey of Sushila to the funeral ground and the religious rituals practised before cremating the deceased, Narayan vividly narrates, introducing, like Rja Rao in THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE Krishna's diary notes :

" Sushila lies there under the window, laid out on the floor .... The corpse-bearers, grim and sub-human have arrived with their equipment - bamboo and coir-ropes. Near the front step they raise a small fire with cinders and faggots - this is the fire which is to follow us to the cremation ground ..... The bearers, after brief and curt preliminaries, walk in, lift her casually ... lay her on the stretcher and tie her up with the ropes. Here face looks up at the sky, bright with the saffron touched on her face, and the vermillion on the forehead and a string of jasmine somewhere about her head .... They shoulder the stretcher. " (198)

" "Presently they reach the cremation ground a sort of cloak room, a place where you leave your body behind' and the priests minister the last rites. At last, they build up a pyre, place her on it, cover her up with layers of fuel ... leaving only the face and a part of her chest out, four layers deep down. I pour ghee on and drop the fire. " (199)

This ritualistic disposal of the dead is based on the basic belief in the immortality of the soul and its ultimate merger with the Divine Spirit. The 'mantras' are the auditory symbols of Deity, the chanting of which transports the spirit into Heaven. This the obvious in Narayan's novel conceals the profound metaphysical truths of 'Vedanta' as can be perceived by Krishna's psychic development in the second part of the novel.

Philosophically, THE ENGLISH TEACHER postulates few interesting posers in contrast to Raja Rao's THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE. Raja Rao asserts : 'Duality is Anti-Indian; the non-dual affirms the truth'. That is, in other words, the monistic philosophy of 'Advaita', propounded by Shankara. In the highest realms of the 'Vedantic' thought, the world of spirits as distinct from God cannot possibly exist. But Krishna's psychic perception of Sushila's spirit finds favour with the traditional belief of the 'Visistha-Advaita', the monotheistic creed of Ramanuja, which recognises, like other Indian systems, the individual salvation as freedom from this mundane existence, but with a difference as Hiriyanna explains:

“ Over and above this is the idea here of reaching a supramundane sphere and those enjoying in the presence of God the highest bliss. The imperfect 'prakritic' body of the 'jiva' is then replaced by perfect one, so that release does not mean hear a disembodied state ... It is this ideal world - 'the Highland of the blest' - that is constituted out of Suddha -- Sativa .... It is a place of absolute peace and perfection.”\*(200)

This qualified dualistic exegesis is corroborated by Krishna's intensely esoteric experience. The band of spirits that inhabit the supramundane world of bliss and perfection strive to help the imperfect souls of this world by removing the barrier of death, not in the physical sense, but in the transcendental sense of supramental development. The spirits communicate through a medium to Krishna, vouchsafing a vision of peace and understanding :

“ Please understand that this work may revolutionise human ideas, and that you are playing a vital part in it. This is an attempt to turn the other side of the medal of existence, which is called, Death.” (201)

Krishna is sceptical, to begin with. But the spirits explain the difficult process of communication through a medium and one must seek to express oneself directly through a devotional concentration and mental relaxation. Communication and even in a vision of the spirit are possible only when the subjective consciousness merges with the pure objective consciousness. Gradually, Sushila instructs Krishna in his psychic perception of 'the radiant presence'

in the surrounding atmosphere. She assures him that she is always watching him from a higher region. She explains her own being:

"Time in your sense does not exist for us. Our life is one of thought and experience ... A considerable portion of our state is taken up in meditation and our greatest ecstasy is in feeling the Divine light flooding us ... We have no physical bodies ... Music is ever with us here and it transports us to higher planes ... And a song or melody can establish a link between our minds." (202)

Sushila's teaching is representatively the path of devotion in the mystical tradition of 'Vaishnavism' with one fundamental difference. Krishna's goal is only a psychic union with the spirit of his wife, while the 'Bhakta' or Devotee of Lord Vishnu aims at becoming one with the supreme.

In THE ENGLISH TEACHER Krishna looks for a stabilising factor in life, an unchanging value, a knowledge of the self. After his wife's untimely death he seeks emotional solace in complete renunciation. Krishna looks for a 'harmonious existence' such as he sees in the nursery school:

"When I sat at the threshold of his hut and watched the children, all sense of loneliness ceased to oppress, and I felt a deep joy and contentment stirring within me. I felt there was nothing more for me to demand of life." (203)

But like Chandran and Savitri, the role of Krishna as Headmaster is also a joke in the Institution of 'Sannyasa':

" He uses the role as a label; as a Sanyasi he is given licence to follow his idealistic mode of life which for a householder was considered eccentric and irresponsible." (204)

Savitri and Chandran consider suicide as the only other logical alternative to Sanyasa. It is not self-renunciation which they planned. Even the Headmaster in THE ENGLISH TEACHER says that the false prediction of death in his horoscope can be taken <sup>to</sup> mean 'Sanyasa Ashrama,' that is, the last of the four stages of life.

In Mr. SAMPATH the novelist's sensibility operates in a double focus which invests the novel with its characteristic charm and grace. It is in the first place a novel of education, embodying the traditional spiritual images; and secondly a picaresque story of a scoundrel typical of a war-torn world with its floundering values even in such a quiet town as Malgudi. The complete urbanisation of an essentially rural town is portentous; 'Over-night, as it were, Malgudi passed from a semi-agricultural town to a semi-industrial town with a sudden influx of population of all sorts. The protagonist of the novel, Srinivas, is a journalist seeking self-knowledge through the instrument of his weekly, 'The Banner'. When the second world war was imminent 'The Banner' had proclaimed that it is only concerned with war that is always going on - between man's inside and outside. And a happy resolution of this spiritual problem is the policy of 'The Banner', and the mission of Srinivas.

His existential involvement in the worldly affairs reveals to Srinivas that 'man has no significance except as a wage-

earner, as an economic unit, as a receptacle of responsibilities'. His casual encounter with Mr. Sampath, a resourceful and effusive printer results in a long association that helps him understand the ways of the world and finally fulfils his quest. He realises later:

" I don't know whether I am helping Sampath or Sampath is helping me - the whole position is vague and obscure. The clear-cut lines of life are visible only when I am at my table and turning out 'The Banner.'" (205)

The Banner's immediate concern is to attack the high headedness of the municipality and Prod humanity to live life more seriously. This odd mixture of the inanition of the materialistic world and the spiritual quest for lasting peace and harmony makes his journal unique. Srinivas is convinced that this world helps him in his search for the 'unknown stabilizing factor' that restores man's faith and his essential peace in life. Nor is the Banner his only means, for, he has his own traditional religious images which elevate his personality. Thus, for example, he never starts his day without first invoking the blessings of the Godhead in the image of Nataraja, his grandmother's gift, decades ago. This is the divine symbol that finally enlightens Srinivas. The deeper significance of the image of Nataraja, that forms such an inalienable and invisible part of his consciousness, is well-explained by the famous congnoscente of Indian traditional Art, Anand K. Coomerswamy :

He wraps about Him, as a garment, the tiger-fury of human passion; the guile and malice of



mankind. He wears as a 'necklace', and beneath His feet is forever crushed the embodiment of evil." (206)

The garment is the tiger skin; the necklace is the snake; and the embodiment of evil is the demon on whom God Shiva dances. It is noteworthy that this image of Lord Shiva as the destroyer of the evil and the base in the universe recurs again and again in the novel.

Piqued by Sampath's middlelesome egoism, Srinivas recalls the mystery of the Chidambaram temple:

"At Chidambaram temple there was a grand secret, beyond the semi-dark holy of holies, beyond the twinkling lights of the inner shrine. He had always wondered what it might be; but those who attempted to probe it too deliberately lost their lives ... it seemed to be expressive of existence itself." (207)

The sanctity of the human heart is inviolable. Symbolically, Chidambaram, the centre of the universe where Shiva dances, is situated within the human consciousness. Hence, transgression at Chidambaram is dangerous to man.

In THE SWEET VENDOR Narayan explores the similar compromises between the householder and the 'Sannyasi'. The story shows Jagan's inability to achieve the possible compromise within the world, or renunciation of the fruits of action. Jagan has released

himself from the bond of worldly desires such as marriage and money. Like Margayya in THE FINANCIAL EXPERT he does not keep himself actively engaged in making illegal money and immoral comforts. Yet his economical life within the world fails to bring him 'tranquility of mind', the ideal taught by the Bhagavad Gita.

Jagan is different from Margayya, Margayya has craze for money but "his mind gloated over visions of his son. <sup>u(108)</sup> He becomes too absorbed in making easy money to bother about his son and not about himself. Simple are his ways of life. When his ill-gained money is lost and he becomes poorer than when he started, the incident hardly disturbs his peace of mind. But his is self-imposed discipline. He has not learnt anything from the several experiences of his life. His self-imposed discipline of worship does not improve him any, because it was not discipline at all but merely ritual; the rise to wealth does not affect him. Money can bring him nothing because he does not know how to use money; he still lives in his bare, old fashioned little house with its single file of four rooms and the small room he builds upstairs stores dust and currency notes. Except for a new umbrella:

" he gave no outward sign of his affluence ... He walked to his office everyday. His coat was of spun silk, but he chose a shade that approximated to the one he had worn for years so that no one might notice the difference. " (209)

He does not even buy an oil lamp for his office. Later the only comfort he indulges in is a car, and that is more in self-

deience than for comfort. He learns nothing from Balu's flight, supposed death, and return. This is utter callousness and miserliness. This is not renunciation. Simplicity of Margayya's ways of life is good but his miserliness and callous indifference to life is disgusting. He is neither aware of values nor human hearts nor human suffering. And therefore, he does not reach the higher spiritual plane. He works out his own ruin but he does not bring it about for any moral principles. He does not find the true meaning of life nor does he attempt to find it.

But Jagan finds himself. Unlike Margayya he finishes on a higher plane, but his discoveries of the truth of life are sudden in perception and slow in realisation. Narayan's growing artistic maturity has realised this and contributes to making THE SWEET VENDOR his best novel to date.

Apparently the resemblances between Margayya and Jagan are numerous. Both are typically misers - both have acquired a huge amount of money and do not wish to spend a penny of it. For both, their only child is a child of many prayers. Both have high hopes for their son. Both are ruined by the son they have spoilt. Both men are themselves the product of fundamental change in the traditional family pattern; the joint family system so basic to the Hindu way of life has been broken in their youth and each lives in a relatively isolated domestic world. Jagan claims to be a Gandhian in his ways of life. He is genuinely loyal to Gandhi. He has been spinning Khadi for his own clothes and wearing only acceptable Gandhian footwear and has been using unadulterated foodstuffs in his

shop. That Jagan is not as obsessed with money as Margayya is also unquestionable. He loves money but he is liberal with his son's lunch allowances and he does not mind if Mali, his son steals away ten thousand rupees from his hidden treasure. Jagan is less concerned about money than about his child. Even when asked to shell out fifty thousand dollars, he is more concerned only about his son's rashness than about the money. And ultimately when the walls of difference between him and his son become clear and his mental peace is entirely lost, he leaves his entire fortune without a backward look. He does this because of his new awareness that his own peace of mind is more important than anything else. He wanted to educate himself in the school of life and now he is truly educated. This is the 'awareness' that Jagan attains -- the transmutation of self. This is the philosophy of the novel embodies -- let each man work for his own salvation and that to reach the stage of salvation man requires self-effacement by complete surrender at the feet of the all-powerful God by renunciation of work, knowledge and duty or religion -- and that nothing remains for him at this stage except that of being an instrument of the divine will. Jagan reaches this stage of mind and he passes through several stages of perception before he finds the proper focus for the good life. At the initial stage his focus is on his son and on his sweet shop. Then the son moves out of focus when he is slipped away from Albert Mission College. Jagan brings him back in focus through a subjective process. When Mali goes to America and stays there for study Jagan tries to keep him in focus with the help of letters. After his return from America with a foreign mistress, Jagan realises his first ever shock in life. He

realises that the lens of communication is completely fogged over as he tries to clear it through Grace, the supposed wife of Mali. But things grow more complicated. He feels he has completely lost his focus forever and he concentrates on his business though Mali and Grace still form part of the composition - blurred and more indistinct. He becomes sick of his nagging child and completely detaches himself from his evil company. He looks at life in a new direction and suddenly sees a whole new *Viota*. This is his realisation. He attains penance of mind embodying calmness of mind, gentleness, control of speech, self-control and honesty of purpose. He is on the way to attain 'Sativic austerity' as described in the Bhagavad Gita. This is the point at which he deserts his dear shop and departs to the forest to adopt the state of 'Vanaprasthya.'

At the foot of the lawley statue he looks back at the ~~Past~~ scenes of life and considers his present state as the output of 'Karma; that is, as he sowed so he now reaps -- the essence of all teachings of life. The sower and the seed were two different units. Jagan is now responsible only for himself and Mali for Mali :

" Who are we to get him out or to put him in ? I am going somewhere ... I am a freeman. " (210)

With this realisation Jagan ascends to a new level of perception.

Jagan leaves the world and comes to the forest but there he does not take up the uncompromising role of 'Sannyasi', but rather the intermediary state of 'Vanaprasthya' or retreat to the forest.

In THE GUIDE R. K. Narayan for the first time makes a 'Sannyasi' appear prominently as the central point of interest. Chan-

dran, THE BACHELOR OF ARTS, leaves Malgudi in despair and becomes a bogus 'Sannyasi.' This is something like Raju's fate in THE GUIDE when after his tragic obsession with Rosie he is sent to jail and immediately after his release from the prison he takes refuge in a temple by the river where he comes to be known as a sant.

The story of Raju's transformation into a holyman is similar to that of Kalo in Bhabani Bhattacharya's HE WHO RIDES A TIGER. The heroes of both the novels deceive society suddenly by taking the role of saints. Both of them are carried away by the stream of deceptive activities and both of them come to a point when it is impossible to throw away the mask and go back where they began. But these resemblances are only apparent. There is a very fundamental difference between the consequences of the activities of Raju and Kalo. Both of them wear a mask of fake 'Sadhu' in order to meet foul means of depriving people. But in HE WHO RIDES A TIGER the mischievous holyman throws away the mask at the end of the novel quite unexpectedly and makes a clean breast of his deception to a large crowd that has gathered near the temple. He and his daughter leave the temple built on an enormous lie and take the dusty road together. Kalo threw away the saffron robe as easily as he wore it. But the matter is entirely different with Raju. He finds it more difficult to disclose its identity once he wore the saffron robe deliberately to pass himself off for a 'Sadhu.' But towards the end Raju loses the feeling of an actor performing an act. The act becomes the reality and the mask becomes the man. Raju can no longer throw away his mask and go back where he began. The Guide really turns into a 'Guru.' Kalo in

Bhattacharya's novel turns into a Sadhu deliberately to take revenge against society. The initial inspiration of his deception comes out of his anger against the high brows of the society. He wants these people to bow to him. This is his revenge. But Raju had no such evil intention. He becomes an ascetic without any previous plan. He took such a role simply because it gave him unconditional and free supply of food and that is all.

Raju has always been whimsical in his life. It is the general pattern of his life. His sudden drifting into the role of a 'Sannyasi' in the temple of Mangala village, therefore, is quite in keeping with this pattern. The author says :

" Raju soon realised that his spiritual status would be enhanced if he grew a beard and long hair to fall on his nape. A clean-shaven close-haired saint was an anomaly. He bore the various stages of his make-up with fortitude, not minding the prickly phase he had to pass through before a well-authenticated bearded could cover his face and come down his chest. By the time he arrived at the stage of stroking his beard thoughtfully, his prestige had grown beyond his wildest dreams. " (211)

This drifting into the role of a Sadhu and paying too much attention to his appearance, his beard, his fluency in uttering mystifying words to convince people suit Raju's system of life wonderfully. Raju says to Velan emphatically that he never did anything; things always happened to him and that he has always tried to

utilise those things just for a change willy-nilly in life. He started his career as an owner of the sweetmeat stall on the platform of Malgudi Railway Station;

" 'I came to be called Railway Raju' -- he says. Tourists happened to ask him about the important historical spots around Malgudi. Raju pretended to be very wise and learned and exaggerated to them about the great beauty and importance of the spots though he was quite ignorant about them. He says : 'This sort of enquiry soon led me to think that I had not given sufficient thought to the subject. I never said, 'I don't know, 'Not in my nature, I suppose. If I had had the inclination to say, ' I don't know what you are talking about, 'my life would have taken a different turn. Instead, I said, 'Oh, yes, a fascinating place, Haven't you seen it ? You must find the time to visit it, otherwise your whole trip there would be a waste. 'I am sorry I said it, an utter piece of falsehood. It was not because I wanted to utter a falsehood, but only because I wanted to be pleasant. " (212)

Thus 'Railway Raju' turned quite by accident into a full-fledged tourist guide.

In the second phase of his life the tourist guide drifted into the role of a lover. He was thrown into the dangerous, passionate relationship with Rosie, the mistress of a rich tourist he calls 'Marco', Raju's passion for Rosie makes him restless and almost



a mad. He elopes with her and spends all his hard-earned savings to make Roise a great classical dancer. He becomes her business manager and publicity agent without making any conscious plans about it. It is characteristic of Raju that once cast in a particular part he performs it with gusto, partly for the sake of self-preservation, partly because it suits his temperament wonderfully.

In the third phase of his life he becomes a convict. Obsessed and ultimately ruined by the strange, cold-hearted Rosie, Raju is accused of forgery by Marco. He goes to prison, deserted by his mistress, despised by his family and friends. This act of forgery was the only one done by him deliberately. But Raju could not imagine that his act of forgery should bring him such a disaster. Even this role of the convict in the jail was performed with joy and inspiration :

(213)

"I was considered a model prisoner, he says."

After the expiry of his term of imprisonment, he takes refuge in an old temple by a river. While sitting on the steps of the temple one evening and reflecting on the future course of his life, he is taken for a holy saint by a peasant called Velan who seeks his advice on his domestic problems. By uttering a few platitudes, he helps the peasant to find a solution for his problems and soon acquires a reputation as a holy-man. The convict thus drifts into the role of a Swami (Saint). People come to him to seek his advice in domestic problems. Raju does not disappoint them. He utters mystifying statements to them with characteristic dignity. He knows

" the essence of sainthood seemed to lie in one's

" (214)

ability to utter mystifying statements.

But very soon Raju realises that he is playing with fire. When a draught comes to the district and the crops are scorched and the cattle begin to die for want of grass and water, the peasants turn to him for help and pray to him for performing a penance to propitiate the Rain-God. Raju finds himself caught in his own trap. Finding no way out of this critical situation he wants to tell the villagers the story of his past sinful life so that he can be saved from this dangerous ordeal. But he cannot escape his destiny. In his role of Sannyasi forced on him he reluctantly agrees to undertake a fast to end the draught which gets world wide publicity and finally kills him.

Raju's entire life is a game of deception. He is always dynamic and hence the most moving of all Narayan's heroes. He has always been in the habit of surprising himself with his own excellent performance. Years ago when he entirely dedicated himself to the task of making Rosie a classical dancer he was impressed by his own oratory :

" Heaven knows where I had found all this eloquence. " (215)

Or

" I never know I could speak so fluently on cultural matters. I had picked up a little terminology from Rosie and put it to the best use. I described 'The Dancing Feet' and explained its significance word by word and almost performed the dancing act myself. " (216)

Even as a tourist guide he had shown similar success as an eloquent speaker. The secret of Raju's success is this that he had the rare

ability to identify himself completely with whatever role he plays. The same capacity helps him in the final role of his life as an ascetic. His sudden adjustment to the role of a saint does not surprise us. It is entirely in keeping with the similar tricks he has played throughout his life. People come to him to listen to his discourses and story-tellings. He delivers big lectures on the necessity of education and instantly establishes an evening school in the temple in order to eradicate illiteracy of the children. Gradually Raju realises that the essence of sainthood lies in the art of uttering mystical words. He advises the people in his newly acquired self-styled fashion :

"Recollect and reflect upon every word you have uttered since day break. " (217)

To the village teacher he converses with an air of authority :

" I like to see young boys become literate and intelligent .. it's our duty to make everyone happy and wise." (218)

When the villagers talk about a crocodile in the river, Raju says in the same vein :

" What can a crocodile do to you if your mind is clear and your conscience is untroubled. " (219)

Thus the Railway Raju has been going on exceptionally in his new role of a Saint. But at last he reaches a stage when the situation is no longer under his control. People began to come in batches.

"Let us all go and pay our respects to Swami,  
our savior." (220)

Raju now becomes a Saviour and so he is now afraid of some new turn in his life which may be quite unfamiliar to him and may cause his disaster. Very soon these ominous thoughts take shape. The shadow of famine stalks the countryside, the earth was fast drying up and cattle begin to die. People come to their saviour:

"You must show us the way, Swami." (221)

The saviour himself is now in a helpless state of mind. Apparently he looks untroubled and reserved and tells them:

"Be peaceful; everything will be all right; I will fix  
it with the Gods." (222)

But inwardly he has become restless. For the first time he confronts a situation in which he does not know how to act:

"Something was happening on a different level over  
which he had no control or choice and where a phi-  
losophical attitude made no difference." (223)

It is at this stage of the matter that Raju has been compelled to begin the fast. He now realises the hard truth that he cannot get out of this trap. He makes his last effort to convince the people :

"I am prepared to fast for the sake of your people  
and do anything if I can help this country, but it  
is to be done by a saint. I am no saint ... I am  
not a saint. Velan, I am just an ordinary human  
being like anyone else." (224)

This is for the first time Raju makes a frank confession of his real identity by breaking down all barriers or pretension and duplicity. He is in a frantic bid to save himself and therefore discloses at this point the sinful past history of his life to Velan. When he has thus told the whole story before Velan to remove all the layers of disguise from his true self we notice with wonder the beginning of his real growth. He is now a changed man, a transformed personality. This transformation of Raju from the fake saint to a saint discovering his own self is really convincing. Velan's respect for him increases instead of diminishing after hearing about Raju's past. He says :

" I don't know why you tell me all this, Swami, it is very kind of you to address, at such length, your humble servant. " (225)

Raju realises that he has undertaken a destructive risk. He has so far lived a very whimsical life but now this task of fast in order to purify the sins of others by pleasing the God of Rain is beyond his human capacity. He feels sick of the whole thing. Sometimes he feels it powerfully to come out of the temple and cry aloud to the crowd :

" Get out, all of you, and leave me alone, I am not the man to save you. No power on earth can save you if you are doomed. Why do you bother me with all this fasting and austerity. " (226)

But he thinks again:

" It would not help. They might enjoy it as a joke. " (227)

During the early days of the fast he has thought of escaping from the whole matter. But he could not betray the simple faith of the villagers :

" He felt moved by the recollection of the big crowd of women and children touching his feet. He felt moved by the thought of their gratitude. " (228)

The unquestioning faith of the people elated his mind and personality. It transforms Raju from:

" what he really is, into a worthy object of its devotion. Towards the end Raju loses the feeling of an actor performing an act; the act becomes the reality, the mask become the man. " (229)

He now feels that his role itself has a certain power. He is 'hypnotised by his own voice', impressed by his own grandeur, 'he imagines himself' 'growing in stature', (230)

Raju's act of sacrifice transcends his self. This is a moment of illumination, a moment in which an individual acquires the heavenly power to go beyond the barriers of his self:

" 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 with the ordeal. " (231)

Raju, the guide turns into Raju the master, the savioursaint:

" A minor Oedipus, Raju lives on to redeem himself; the bogus holyman changes into a dying God sacrificing himself for the people." (232)

The sainthood motif stands right at the centre and the entire action leads upto it. It sums up in one word the tremendous significance of the strange transformation of the hero from 'Railway Raju' to recluse Raju; from a forger to a fakir; from a picaro to a pilgrim. This strange transformation has been unfolded in different stages of development. In the initial stage Raju is transformed into a 'Swami' without any conscious effort on his part, though the process is actually set in motion by his own eagerness, derived from his days of the tourist guide to interest himself in the problems of others:

" It was his nature to get involved in other people's interests and activities." (233)

Every action of Raju -- even his mistakes and shortcomings furthers the grand design which is finally complete only when he is compelled to attain a saint's martyrdom. There is irony in this phase arising out of the incongruity of a freshly released criminal being mistaken for a holyman.

In the second stage we find Raju playing assiduously the role of the saint thrust upon him. He transfers his seat to the inner hall of the temple \*in order to get a better background. He decides :

" to look as brilliant as he could manage, let drop gems of thought from his lips, assume all the radiance available." (235)

The villagers request him for a discourse perhaps on religious matters. But Raju realises that the only subject on which he could speak with is jail life. Therefore, at the request of the villagers he runs into difficulties. But at the next thought he hits upon a clever solution by asking his disciples to meditate. The irony in this phase stems out of the improvisations practised by Raju in adjusting the mask of the saint to his face.

The third stage is a clear development upon the earlier stages and appears to be more critical and at the same time ironical. The severe draught in the village signals the turning point of his life. The draught disturbs life in the village leading to fracas and violence. Raju is afraid that the police might arrive and expose him. The irony of fate now operates impressively by making the village moron and unconscious instrument of Raju's destruction. But he still plays the role of a saint and sends a message to the villagers through the moron : "unless they are good I'll never eat." But to the villagers the message gets twisted into some-thing like "The Swami won't eat because it won't rain". Raju senses the destructive risk of the situation. He cannot escape and undertake the risk to bring rain. His sainthood has now become prison from which there is no escape for the victim. The Irony here reveals in a flash the deep-seated complexities of human nature. During the last stages of his ordeal he is still alert enough to tell a brazen-faced lie to the American film producer who asks him;

'Have you always been a Yogi ?' to which Raju's  
answer is : 'yes ; more or less.'  
(237)



The ambiguities that operate in the closing pages of the novel question ironically our accepted ideas of human nature and conduct. Ruling out the official message to break the fast Raju goes to the river to pray-an act which hastens his death. Why does he do this? Is it done in a spirit of sheer fatalism? Or has Raju now identified himself with the saint's role so completely that he does not mind losing his life for the greater interest of the masses? The final question also remains unanswered: Why does Raju declare:

"It's raining in the hills, I can feel it coming under my feet, up my legs."<sup>(238)</sup>

Is it that Raju has now attained the great spiritual powers of genuine sainthood? Or is it a miraculous vision of a martyred soul or a pathetic delusion of a dying man? Compared to the eventful life of the mighty Raju this act may not mean harder to him. He has done so many impossible things in his life and this task has also been done in that vigorous spirit of sacrifice. It is an act of dedication of a genuine self. To call his death a pathetic delusion will be wrong judgement of Raju's true sainthood.

The transformation of Raju's life is indeed the spiritual triumph of Narayan's art. For, Raju dies in the true spirit of a saint. Raju's reply to the American correspondent is characteristic of a saint:

"I am only doing what I might have to do; that's all.  
My likes and dislikes do not count."<sup>(239)</sup>

Raju's death at the end is for the Dharma that holds up the suffering humanity.

Narayan's art signifies in THE GUIDE a moral dimension that marks a definite advancement from the representation of mere types. It is indeed rewarding to watch the progress of the typical individual consciousness in THE GUIDE from its narrow ego-eccentricity to the ultimate archetypal awareness of cosmic consciousness. The transformation of the selfish and the lustful Raju into a true Swami. 'Dharmatma' is an artistic triumph.

The events leading up to the death of Raju may sound fantastic to the western reader. But in India whenever there is a draught, 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.

For Narayan theme is supposedly an Indian spirituality founded on the ancient concept of Bhakti. Here we must consider the term as it first appeared in the Bhagavad Gita referring to loving personal devotion to God in his incarnation as Krishna. We might then consider the extension of this devotion to ordinary human beings as exemplified by Kabir and other medieval saints. Finally we must realise that Narayan who is himself an inadvertent spiritualist, never cuts off the term from its religious base and reduces it to something like western humanitarianism as in M.R. Anand.

Thus the spirit of traditional Indian asceticism strikes out the keynote of theme in most Indo-Anglian novels. It is the undercurrent wave that dominates the atmosphere and pervades the background of the literary landscape in India. In whatever amount of contact with the modern western trends does this landscape come,

it cannot and perhaps will not shake off its own roots of spirituality. It is an ingrained quality a deep-seated motive - a long cherished ideal which constitutes the very setting of the form. Any attempt to shake it off or rule out its possibility will be suicidal. Political or social problems of life may take upper hand as theme in the novels but the narrative will be dictated and absorbingly guided by the innermost undercurrent of Indian mysticism or spirituality. The cry for the ultimate, the quest for self-knowledge assumes greater significance in all the Indian literatures. This religious experience or trend helps in maturing the form because an universal experience shared by the people at large becomes the matrix of a society and such novel flourishes best in a society where the traditional values of life are integrated. E. M. Forster sees the portrayal of "life by time" as the special role which the novel has added to literature's more ancient preoccupation with portraying "life by values". The concern of the Indo-Anglian novel to-day is the 'ultra historical' modern man whose individuality and personal life are shaped by factors of traditional spiritual truths. The underlying situation is real to all Indians and lies very close to their immediate experience.

The fulfilment of desires, however, important a target according to the individualistic ideals of western society has always been either neglected or consciously avoided in Indo-Anglian literature. Such thing is foreign to Indian tradition of faith in socio-cultural life and therefore poses to be a great difficulty to the novelists, because they are using the language and form of the English novelist but they have to operate within a totally different

frame of reference. The adherence to the ideals of renunciation and self-sacrifice and simple faith in the superior wisdom of asceticism constitute the fundamental context of Indian literary scene. We have noticed this factor in our study of some prominent novels of R. K. Narayan. In literary practice, numerous characters are found to adhere to classic proto-types-especially the women of fiction such as Savitri, Bharati and Rosie in Narayan's THE BACHELOR OF ARTS, WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA and THE GUIDE respectively re-anact the suffering and sacrificing ideals of ancient Indian womanhood.

CHAPTER - III

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CHAPTER - IV

Realism Comic Vision and Irony in the Themes

A civilized society assures a happy balance between man's elemental nature and his conduct as a social being. Human nature aspires towards the gratification of impulses and instincts which, in reality, are always thwarted. Celebration of the primary impulses is the chief concern of the Comic. As Robert M. Torrance observes, he is:

Comic not primarily because he is laughed at  
but because -- in the root sense of komos - he  
celebrates life, of body and mind. (1)

The comic hero has his own option of find ways for such celebration, independent of any rational or moral consideration. This obviously warrants an encounter with the world or the external reality.

The comic fiction shows the pathetic plight of man who has been put in a system that demands a massive instinctual sacrifice. This sadistic principle is so much entrenched in the fabric of social reality that man with an untameable nature cannot easily reconcile himself to it. To quote Richard Wollheim in this context, "he is placed in the world in such a way that he can experience pain very readily". (2) This fundamental disorder is built into the very pattern of the universe creating a hiatus between the ideal and the actual, between individual and society. The comic hero attempts, to an extent that makes him seem pathetic, to work out his life in a strange, hostile environment, led by unknown, uncontrollable drives

of the self.

There being a fundamental incongruity in the scheme of things, man's existential encounter with reality appears comic. The conventions and customs of a mighty social order are threatened by the fond dreams of the comic hero. In the novels of R. K. Narayan, the accent is always on the ordinary man, with his small ambitions and passions alternating between the constrictions of an orthodox tradition into which he is born and the carnivals of a free world to which he is driven by his primal instincts and urges. Narayan's comic hero embodies a paradox; he has been reared by the religious rituals and beliefs of an age-old tradition, and on the other hand, he has been moulded by the drives of his elemental self. As a result of this paradox the harmony of form in Narayan's novels emerges from an orchestration of two levels of reality -- the social and the individual. The details of nature, of environment, of customs, superstitions and costumes are juxtaposed against the details of the various states of mind -- in varying moods of uncertainty, nostalgia, indignation and self-satisfaction. The individual reality and the social reality interact to form the comic pattern. Dream and fact are set against each other with no intention to proclaim the supremacy of either, but to present a whole picture of life where the validity of each is recognized. The orchestration of realities which forms the comic pattern is embedded in the very process of living. The people in Narayan's world represent varieties of life in all its manner and proportion, facts and fantasies.

From Swami and Friends, to The Painter of Signs, his

latest novel, Narayan depicts life in terms of innumerable aspirations and frustrations, successes and failures, and oddities and idiosyncrasies. He does not exclude any particular age group, and within the bounds of the Comic, every stage of life has got its own chalked out place, reacting to the world outside in its own typical way. All the peculiarities, vagaries and villainies, however, irrational or unwise they may be, are the projections of the inner urges of life and are sincere human attempts to realize life in terms of full pleasures of body and mind which are the basic objectives of the comic.

The Swami and Friends clearly illustrates the boundaries of the comic in Narayan's world of fiction. Swami and his friends in their innocence, transform reality of this world to conform to their childlike fancies and successfully live in their own world of make-believe, much as Don Quizote does. Their participation in the National Movement by burning caps and by breaking glass panes of their schools, their M.C.C. and their serious business letter to Messrs Binns -- all these and many more done in simple earnestness and in obstinate defiance, project an attitude that is essentially comic. Childhood impulses and instincts are juxtaposed in a spirit of Jubilant conciliation against the world of grave business, the spectre of which hangs large in Narayan's other novels. Blissfully oblivious, the innocent children alter the reality of a complex world into their own simple and peculiar terms and strive for a full celebration of their urges.

As the scene changes from an unpretentious childhood to



a shrewd and calculative adulthood, the comic perspective also changes from conciliation to confrontation. The Bachelor of Arts successfully presents this aspect of changing perspectives. In the first pages of this novel it is all happy, smooth going life for Chandran. But afterwards the world becomes increasingly hostile to him. His adolescent yearnings for Malathi and his emotional outbursts are dismissed by a reticent, realistic world. The events reach a point of fantastic absurdity when Chandran dons the garb of a sanyasi, not out of genuine realization, but out of some fits of frustration -- a situation typical of Narayan's comic ingenuity. But events move and change very fast offering ample scope in the comic hero to display the various facets and possibilities of his character in response to the demands of living. Chandran takes up the agency of 'The Daily Messenger', marries Susila and becomes a man of the world as easily and quickly as he had renounced this world earlier. It is a crisscross of relationships between the individual and the world, sometimes opposing each other and sometimes coming to terms.

In Mr. Sampath one finds a rendezvous of all comic forces. Sampath, Srinivas, Somu, De Mello, Shanti, Ravi and many others are frantically involved with one another in bizzare relationships. The characters of Narayan's novels cannot exist independently. All their pranks and idiosyncrasies fit amazingly into one another's to form a total comic pattern. What John Killham says in connection with Dickens' Pickwick Papers <sup>seems</sup> true of Narayan's novels too:

The important thing to note is that the characters are only made possible by the story. Jingle cannot exist independently of Dr. Slammer and the widow, of Rachael Wardle and the White Hart. (3)

The characters in Mr. Sampath are at once contrary and complementary to one another. Srinivas' metaphysical concerns are inextricably linked with the frenzied material involvements of Sampath, Somu and De Mello, Srinivas, in spite of the philosophical disposition of his character unwittingly gets involved in the comic world of gross, mundane things. He hovers between the world of serious philosophic speculations and the world of philistine pleasures, being uncertain of the value of either. Ravi's impossible vision of beauty along with the concomitant frenzy sets the comic process in motion until the plot is carried to the point of resolution. In the grand portrait gallery of Mr. Sampath also exist numerous other comic characters, like the miser landlord who "collected the rent on the second of each month, took away the entire amount and placed it in Sarayu Street post office bank"

and at the same time professed himself to be a sanyasi who "bathed at the street tap and fed himself on cooked rice which was distributed as charity in a nearby temple" . In the character of this greedy, pharisaical old man the comic incongruity is self-evident.

Among all the comic heroes of Narayan, Sampath displays his existential potential to the full and till the end he remains a comic hero, unbeaten and untiring in spite of the hostility of all

the world around him. Other characters in this novel like Somu, De Mellow simply vanish; Srinivas is restored back to 'The Banner'. Narayan's comic heroes elsewhere fail to maintain their defiant spirit till the last against the scheme of things. Being battered in the process they switch over their allegiance from an imaginative world of unbridled freedom to the servile codes of a regimentative society, and some like Raju attain a sublime transformation. But Sampath alone remains, to the last, true to the comic credo. Through-out the novel the show is at his command. He can persuade people around him to his own way of thinking. He successfully dictates his own terms and demolishes the conditions of a moral world. The docile citizen in Srinivas becomes dumbfounded in his first meeting with Sampath :

They came to a costly furnished room upstairs -- a very special room as a board hung outside it said : "for ladies and families only", Srinivas halted before it, finding another excuse : "We are neither ladies nor families. How can we go in" ? "These rules are not for me", the other said .

For Sampath no rules exist. Even when he suffers a setback towards the end of the novel, his spirit is not defeated and probably a new venture awaits him at the railway station. To a question of Srinivas, Sampath replies. "Thanks, I'm going to the railway station. I'll manage there" . He takes up different roles in quick succession --- printer, film producer and actor. His spirit cannot be confined to any particular role or framework and

the options do not end for him. He challenges and jeers at all sorts of social institutions. He can crack and munch groundnuts in the court of a magistrate in a gesture of defiance at the judiciary, the most respectable institution of the society; he can ignore his family and flirt with the actress Shanti.

Sampath cherishes an independence of spirit and in such cherishing lies his conflict with the external reality. The encounter exposes the comic incongruity; but every conflict has its inherent pathos. One does not miss the subtle undertone of pathos in the characters of Sampath, Raju, Margayya and Jagon. Various emotions and aspirations of the individual respond to the compulsions of the world in diverse ways. Against the desire of Ravi's innermost self, against his intense aesthetic longings stand a host of forces of the commercial world represented by Sampath and his colleagues. This unequal relationship drags itself to a point where it is no more possible to maintain the apparent equilibrium and consequently the comedy of it springs to the surface in clear, visual details. Ravi's mad act of snatching Shanti away from the amorous Shiva (Sampath) in the most romantic scene of the film 'The Burning of Kama', his rampage through the entire studio virtually creating total chaos are gestures of comic challenge at a world that has strangled his inner urges. His frenzied hide and seek with Sampath, Somu, De Mello and all the other film folk during this episode of kidnapping subtly suggests the eternal hide-and-seek game that the individual and the world play between themselves. In Ravi's case it is the comedy of an individual's unrealised dreams and his desperate attempt to exist meaningfully, a comedy of human helplessness in the face of a cold, objective

world.

Against the odds of life the comic hero proudly proclaims his belligerent selfhood. The heroes in Narayan's novels suffer from a sort of ego-crisis and all their entanglements are the resultant effects of this crisis. Margayya's poverty and his inferior social status have made him challenge his fate. With wounded pride he snubs Arul Doss:

Arul Doss, I don't know about you, you can speak for yourself. But you need not speak for me. You may not see a hundred rupees even after a hundred years of service, but I think I shall do so very soon -- and who knows, if your secretary seeks any improvement of his position, he can come to me\*.

In Margayya's case money at first becomes an essential fact of existence; then it becomes an obsession and perversion. Successes boost his ego to a point when he considers nothing impossible for him :

He has immense confidence in himself now. He could undertake any plan with ease; he could shape his son's future as if it were just as much clay in his hand .

His burgeoning ego not only takes possession of his own self, but also of his own son and blinds him to reason and reality, thus destroying all of them in the process. He dwells simultaneously on two opposing planes -- the traditional and the modern. In the

first pages of the novel, Margayya's poverty, his dreams and aspirations are pitted against a rich society for which he madly craves. In the latter part, his ethical degeneration born of his own inflated ego leads not only to the corruption of his son but also to the collapse of his business empire. In the first part it is the comic challenge of a poor, aspiring man at his fate; in the second, it is a moral suicide of an apparently invincible hero that evokes a sense of both the ridiculus and the pathetic. In Margayya, the ancient and the modern simultaneously exist effecting perpetual comic tension. "The juxtaposition of the age-old convention and the modern character", Graham Greene rightly suggests, "provides much of the comedy".<sup>(4)</sup> The orthodox ritual of forty days, the publication of the book "Domestic Harmony", the cunning banking business through the succession of these events Margayya gradually moves away from innocence to a shrewd sense of material success. Ironically Margayya is caught in the coil of his own creations and is at last betrayed by them.

But all these events mirror his earlier deprivations and dreams. He successfully manoeuvres things to suit his own interests. His fall is hastened by Balu's modern way of living which his orthodox mind cannot endorse, but quite innocently he has long since accepted the values of the modern, materialistic civilization for the promotion of his own career. The comic incongruity can be perceived in terms of the two phases of Margayya's career -- his struggle against the society that loathes him for being poor; and his struggle against his son -- who is his

own replaced self -- which has nursed and nurtured the modern mode of living in violation of all traditional Hindu ethics that he has always held dear. With the denouement he moves a full circle and is back at his original position, chastened by his experience, wisdom and humility. It is in this sense that Graham Green speaks of Margayya as possessing "the hidden poetry and the unrecognised pathos we so often find in Tchechov's characters who on the last page vanish into life." (5)

The poignancy of the tragi-comic clash of generations is more acutely felt in The Vendor of Sweets. The aged sweetvendor Jagon is a bundle of contradictions, who skil-fully combines his business profits with exalted Gandhian principles. The comic incongruity is apparent in the unique blend of hypocrisy and sincerity in his character. The various urges in his character that are often mutually contradictory, find their own ways of fulfilment; and conflicting though they may be between themselves, they exist in apparently wonderful harmony. He advices everybody to conquer taste in order to conquer the self, spins for an hour everyday and wears sandals made out of the leather of an animal which dies of old age because "he does not like to think that a living creature should have its throat cut for the comfort of my feet." He has completely simplified his life, has discontinued sugar, and takes twenty drops of honey in hot water everyday instead. He has also given up rice and lives on "a little stone-ground wheat with honey and greens". He is capable of simultaneously managing both his spiritual and worldly affairs.

As long as the frying and sizzling noise in the kitchen continued and the trays passed, Jagon noticed nothing, his gaze unflinchingly fixed on the Sanskrit lines in a red bound copy of the Bhagavad Gita, but if there was the slightest pause in the sizzling, he cried out, without lifting his eyes from the sacred text, 'What is happening' ?

He surreptitiously counts the 'free cash' which "is entitled to survive without reference to any tax." Jagon's idealistic ritual is nicely woven into the shrewd pragmatism of a business man to form a unique comic personality. When Jagon is betrayed by his own fond dreams for his son the comic hero just becomes a pathetic stump of life. Before Mali's story producing machine, his half American, half Korean wife Grace, and his friends and foreign transactions, Jagon's cherished notions of marriage and morals crumble. With the approach of the Modern, his apparently religious stance is reduced to a ruin.

Through long flashbacks the sweet past of his adolescent and marriage days is brought to the forefront of the narration offering immediate contrast to the long days of his widower's life. Jagon's dreams and ideals are pitted against a hostile world of fleeting time and of fast changing values. The long nostalgic recollections convey in poignant terms life's inherent sadness of time passing away and one's dear world gradually receding with it. His sadness, his existential agony, in a way, becomes the lot of the



entire human kind. That is why the reader is able to build an emotional rapport with Jagon in a common understanding of life.

In The Guide such understanding is made possible by allowing the reader a glimpse into life's mysteries and myriad colours, into its depths and possibilities. Raju, the reckless and the romantic hero is poised against a whole set of hard realities represented in the forms of Marco, Velan, his mother, Gaffur and many others. He graduates from a small boy helping his father at the shop to the owner of a railway stall and then successively to a guide, a romantic lover, a fake swami and ultimately a martyr. In Raju's character, the ego-crisis is sensitively fendered. On this aspect of Raju's character William Walsh comments,

"... the events in the novel also have a thematic significance in that they suggest the apparently hopeless struggle of Raju's submerged individuality to achieve an independent identity. This is why we are aware so often of a rather frantic quality in Raju's actions and meditations, for all that he keeps up throughout his off hand, youthfully cheerful manner". (6)

The innate urge of man to find a meaning of life, to assert his identity in an imperious world, takes up an urgency in the character of the comic hero and the greater the urgency, the greater is the dynamism of his actions and reactions. He can defy the ethical injunctions of the society to satisfy his existen-

tial needs. This comic clash with the external reality presents life's depths and colours in a kaleidoscopic pattern.

Raju, in quite the characteristic way of a comic hero, becomes the architect of his own fate defying the compulsions of the traditions or of society, the forces outside and alien to his instincts and urges. He is an ever-aspiring young man, and his ambitions make him abandon his father's humble shop, the railway stall and the vocation as a guide. His romantic yearnings, which one fails to rationalize from the standpoint of social morality, are set against the cold reality of a social existence represented by the apparently invincible characters like his mother, uncle, Marco and his trusted friend Gaffur. Raju, Rosie and Marco have all broken away from a normal way of living all of them are involved in a curious triangular relationship. Dream and fact, within and without, are entangled with one another in an existential equation. The comic hero marches over reason and rationality in a defiant spirit of adventure to have a grand gala of an unrestrained life. Raju creates a world of his own where he can nurse his desires for this he cuts himself off from his family; he even robs Nalini and her husband of their original identities with whom he is engaged in immediate relationship. Nalini becomes Rosie and for her husband, Raju invents the name of Marco. His inner urges and the corresponding actions are set against a host of forces -- against the cold professionalism of Marco, against the orthodox morality of his mother and the aggressiveness of his uncle, against an unpredictable Rosie and at last against an alien and indifferent crowd during his spiritual ordeal at the riverside. Raju gets

entangled with the world on a multi-dimensional plane, and on each plane his actions are aimed at *subverting* an orthodox and rational world that puts bridles on human instincts and impulses. The reader feels a compelling sense of admiration for Raju for the independence of his spirit and the tenacity of his actions, in spite of all its implications of social impropriety.

The tragi-comedy of the individual's helplessness in the face of an awful external reality becomes abundantly clear when Velan, even after bearing the entire history of Raju's life, accepts him as 'Swami'. What makes Velan behave so is left ambiguous. But in the figure of Velan, all the weights of the world come to crush Raju and force him to maintain an utterly inconvenient mask. On the first day of his fast, quite in the guileful way of a comic hero, he secretly eats some stale rice. But on the second day, he searches for food in the aluminium vessel in vain. His indomitable ego, which hitherto has been responsible for all his crises, once again comes to assert itself as a challenge to the pressure of the world :

"He felt enraged at the persistence of food thoughts. With a sort of vendictive resolution, he told himself, "I'll chase away all thought of food. For the next ten days I shall eradicate all thoughts of tongue and stomach from my mind."

With this resolution of Raju, in forsaking a hedonistic life and in accepting martyrdom, the narrative moves out of the bounds of

the comedy and enters the portals of a religious drama; but the comic incongruity persists, though now outside the character of Raju. Raju's lone, rigorous penance and the loony crowd around him are in ironic proximity to each other. They are, in effect, an encounter between an extremely private self and an indifferent world lying outside :

"... each day the crowd increased. In a week there was a permanent hum pervading the place. Children shouted and played about, women came carrying baskets filled with pots, fire wood and foodstuffs, and cooked the food for their men and children. There were small circles of smoke going up all along the river bank, on the opposite slope, and on this bank also. It was studded with picnic groups, with the women's bright coloured sarees shining in the sun; men too had festive dress. Bullocks unyoked from their carts jingled their belts as they ate the straw under the trees. People swarmed around little water-holes."

Raju undertaking the penance in order to eradicate the drought and thus mitigate the sufferings of the people, becomes a part of the people in a spiritual sense. Yet, he remains his solitary self amidst all these merry-makings and religious festivities. The objective world looms large with the special trains carrying passengers. Gaffur's taxi, the big tea stall erected by the Tea

Propaganda Board, the khaki-clad inspectors of the Health Department and the D.D.T., the film shows about Malaria, Plague and B.C.G vaccination, the swarming press reporters and the American film producers, the gambling booth and peddlers and onlookers. A serious religious mission generating such propaganda and festivities that belong absolutely to a commercial world is, of course, a comic spectacle.

While the commercial world goes on exhibiting itself, Raju shrinks inward :

'The hum of humanity around was increasing. His awareness of his surroundings was gradually lessening in a sort of inverse proportion'

What seems to be a funny collaboration between innocent village folk and an imposter working for an impossible end takes on serious dimensions. Against the trepidations in the inner depths of existence of a sinner experiencing the metamorphosis into a saint through self-mortification, the flirtations and flippancy of the curious crowd, of the vast network of commercial and governmental activities are juxtaposed. The Government's silly telegraphic advice to persuade Swami to resume fast later comes as a comic relief at the height of a tense situation. Beneath the comedy of the entire scene, an awful anxiety lurks about Raju, who faces the most crucial tryst with his destiny. Narayan, here, not only depicts the state of Indian society in a period of transition; on the existential plane, he seems to suggest the bewildering relationship

between the individual and the world.

The human situation is portrayed in a sort of uncanny atmosphere in The Maneater of Malgudi, Vasu, the arrogant taxidermist lives a gross philistine existence. His highly inflated ego does not brook and challenge, and the humble society of Malgudi can only build a relationship of tame submissiveness with him. He virtually creates a parallel world where he reigns supreme. He has his own ideas and logic that confound our moral sense and the time-honoured social values. He considers marriage to be an unnecessary social institution. For him 'melas' (Fairs) are arranged in our country so that thousands can die in Cholera or Smallpox or just get trampled as a result of which the population of the country can be kept in 'manageable limits' and shooting is not at all terrible and it is just a 'give and take' between the shooter and the object who receive the bullet. His immense physical strength, his fantastic logic and way of life and the very nature of his profession set him in immediate contrast with the docile folk of Malgudi. He becomes a menace to the smooth flow of life and has his own will and terms. The spirit of independence has taken an exaggerated form in him and he brooks no moral or social barrier while celebrating the urges of his self. Eventhough Nataraj is embarrassed and overawed by Vasu he feels "a sneaking attraction"<sup>(7)</sup> for the latter's spirit of independence and his manly defiance, Nataraj's predicament springs from his transactions with the fantastic Vasu. From the Vasu-Nataraj relationship the scene moves to the sphere of the community when Vasu decides to shoot at the temple elephant. The

comedy of Vasu's relationship with the people of Malgudi is sustained with continuing anxiety till the man-eater is undone by the mere mosquitoes. Vasu revolts against all routine habits of mind, against all accepted beliefs and patterns of human behaviour. With such an attitude his transactions with a normal world produce a bizarre spectacle.

Vasu jeers at all sorts of social institutions. He belittles the world that does not allow the individual full sovereignty. He breaks the arm of the Police Inspector, flirts with any woman he likes without caring least for the public opinion and shoots according to his whims. In all his actions he brings down the world around him to its knees. But in spite of all his apparent successes, he remains a solitary, mysterious figure. A proper study of his character and his strange relationship with the world, is not possible unless the workings in the inner depths of his existence are probed.

K.R.S. Iyengar thinks that Vasu is the symbol of "anti-life".<sup>(8)</sup> But on the individual plane, Vasu lives his life to the full, even to an enviable extent, whereas Nataraj and his sort are just ordinary people living a life of bridled aspirations and instincts. Vasu just can't be dismissed as inimical to the spirit of living, once the darker recesses of his unconscious are understood. Vasu is a forlorn figure having no kith and kin -- for reasons unknown to us -- and is divorced from the mainstream of life. Possibly the monstrous actions of Vasu that we witness are the results

of his injured ego, the inevitable consequence of some deprivations in the earlier part of his life. Behind the violent facet, he still nurtures some of the dreams of life. His possessive affection for Rangî and his desire to build a cosy home with her provide a glimpse into one part of his inner self that is tender, that cares for the simple, elemental values of life. In his young days, inspired by patriotism, "he had joined the civil Disobedience Movement against the British rule, broken the laws, marched, demonstrated and ended up in jail".

It bears ample testimony to the man that lies concealed beneath the surface monstrosities. In his violent actions, he tries possibly to compensate what he has lost, what he has been deprived of. Here is a grotesque figure driven by violent impulses of his own character, and in the end when these forces reach their ultimate point, he meets his doom.

This is, of course, depending too much on psycho-analysis. But Vasu's conduct and character cannot be explained without it, as very little is known about him. As Erich Fromm observes:

"... the human passions (such as striving for love, tenderness, freedom as well as the lust for destruction, sadism, masochism, the craving for power and property) are answers to 'existential needs' which in turn are rooted in the very condition of human existence."<sup>(9)</sup>

The characters of Raju, Sampath and Margayya can be looked at with sympathy when viewed from this angle. And Vasu, failing to find



satisfaction in the higher levels of life "creates for himself the drama of destruction", (10) Sastri's mythological interpretation of Vasu's death -- "Every demon carries within him, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction, and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment" -- closely corresponds to this line of analysis of human character. From <sup>my</sup> has summed up this paradoxical phenomenon thus ; "... life turning against itself in the striving to make sense of it." (11)

Vasu's response to this world takes up a terrifying form. The awesome personality of Vasu, the docility of the Malgudi folk and a revered Indian tradition facing an apparent threat -- all act and react with one another to form a comedy of the grotesque. Various existential problems are posed and not only Vasu, but also Nataraj, the mono-syllabic poet, and others meet these problems in their own ways. Nataraj shares Vasu's libidinal instincts to some extent. He reflects in comic bewilderment on the temptations of Rangî's body :

When I tiptoed back to my place beside the grille,  
there she was, ready as it seemed to swallow me up  
wholesale, to dissolve within the embrace of her  
mighty arms all the monogamous chastity I had practi-  
sed a whole lifetime

Against Vasu's defiant manner of living a life of instincts,  
Nataraj, the orthodox moralist looks ridiculous.

In the drama of Malgudi we find life in all its totality,

where man tries to assert his status and lives by various designs, however, puny and evil these may be. To quote Erich Fromm again;

The truth is that all human passions, both the 'good' and the 'evil' can be understood only as a person's attempt to make sense of his life, and transcend banal, merely life sustaining existence ... Even the most sadistic and destructive man is human, as human as the saint. He can be called a warped and sickman who has failed to achieve a better answer to the challenge of having been born human, and this is true, he can also be called a man who took the wrong way in search of his salvation. (12)

Thus Sampath is basically no different from Srinivas; Raju is very much like us; and Vasu also is like Nataraj or the monosyllabic poet is so far as basic human aspects are concerned.

The focus shifts from the bellicose egoism of Vasu to a sort of baffling individualism of Daisy, an inspired family planning worker in The Painter of Signs. This novel is a comedy of adolescent visions of romantic love and of fanatical idealism. Apart from Raman and Daisy, the various pranks and idiosyncrasies of Roman's customers, the superstitious beliefs of the village folk, the lawyer who wants a left **slant** in the letters in his signboard, the bangle seller who massages soft feminine hands, the town hall professor who sells profound messages for only five

paise each, the old priest of the temple who can read one's past from a number of a colour and numerous others with their individual peculiarities exist in Malgudi making it almost a human zoo. The Painter of Signs follows the characteristic comic pattern that one finds in the other novels of Narayan. Roman's romantic yearnings not only face an opposition from her aged aunt, the repository of all the traditional values, but he has also to encounter the uncertain responses from Daisy. Daisy remains an enigma for him. He, with his most private longings builds a queer relationship with Daisy who ultimately proves to be an embodiment of indifference for him. On the other hand, Daisy alternately responds to and rejects her own instincts. For her Raman represents the emotional aspect of life that hardly agrees with her strong individualistic temperament. Daisy's abandonment of the proposed marriage in preference to the family planning campaign in some distant hilly village is as sudden and absurd as Raman's quick acceptance of this reversal with a desire to drive a nail into the tire of Daisy's vehicle and with the carefree act of throwing the key into the dry fountain. Daisy's unrealized instincts and her fanatical idealism make her character an entity of incongruities. With the gradual unfolding of the Raman-Daisy relationship, the contours of the comedy become clearer and clearer as the incongruity of the situation gets exposed. The suffocations of a crowded joint family have heavily weighed upon Daisy's childhood which has resulted in the built-in aversion in her character for any sort of private relationship. Raman, on the other hand, tries to weave his life into that of Daisy, who is

utterly incapable of any emotional relationship. The individual's instincts and aspirations confront an inhospitable reality of things.

Narayan's protagonists are out of assert their identities in the face of a cruel world that never comes upto an individual's expectations. Margayya knows that he has been thrown into a world that "seemed to be a very risky place to live in, peopled by creatures with dark powers", a world that "treated him with contempt because he had no money". It is not only Margayya who has to face the odds of the world, it is also Raju with his instinctual yearnings for Rosie, Sampath with his ambitious projects, Ravi with his impossible vision of beauty and Raman dreaming to marry a woman who pathetically confesses, "Married life is not for me. I have thought it over. It frightens me. I am not cut out for the life you imagine. I can't live except alone".

K.R.S. Iyengar surveys the scene from a social context and finds Malgudi "a field of unpredictable forces, a theatre where forces and tragi-comedies are played without end", "the net result being the enthronement of the Absurd."<sup>(13)</sup> This 'Absurd' is not only the outcome of "war and the post-war years of hectic striving, chronic uncertainty, expense of spirit and lust in action,"<sup>(14)</sup> it is there entrenched in man's fundamental existence right from the time of Dr. Faustus, Don Quixote and many others, right from the time of man's birth into this universe with his instincts and yearnings, wishes and dreams.

The comedy in Narayan's novels carries a subtle sense of pathos. Both the socio-economic conditions as well as questions

pertaining to man's very existence haunt him -- questions such as the silent process of ageing, the temporality of our existence and the futile search for some stabilizing factor in life. For Margayya, the illusion of marriage days no more sustains him.

He had thought that <sup>that</sup> world continue for ever.  
What a total false view of life one acquired  
on one's wedding day.

And for Jagon the charm of married life is also long since lost giving place to the forlorn days of a widower. The old miserly landlord in Mr. Sampath dies with his dream of seeing his granddaughter's marriage unrealized. Man by his puny efforts tries to create impressions of permanence in a transitory existence. The dreams fall flat to the ground and there comes the shock of recognition, the pathetic awareness of the fragility of an impermanent universe.

Narayan's protagonists, who are ordinary man and women, move out of their ordinariness in their quest to make life more pleasurable or meaningful. They passionately cling to a life that time and again betrays and batters them. Thus his novels are tiny worlds where the lilliputian man with his dreams and sufferings is celebrated; where one finds man untiringly limping across the boundaries of life with the beauty and bruises of existence.

A comic vision embraces the multifarious facets of human life. Narayan operates in a framework of traditions and social morality which is much bigger than the individual, his ego and

oddities. Sooner or later, normal reality takes hold of the situation including the aspiring and erring individuals. Hence man's encounter with the world appears ludicrous. The comic vision always offers the consolation of a reconciliation. Man's small villainies, his innumerable temptations and tragedies and the frequent abysses and heights in his life -- all these that form the totality of life are affectionately treated by Narayan with a humane understanding of life's complexities. Raman in The Painter of Signs declares that "people are moved by strange, inexplicable drives ..." a statement that serves as a key to Narayan's comedy in The Painter of Signs as also in his other novels. He explores subtly the psychic depths of man, brings him close to a world outside himself, and from this orchestration of realities, carves out a human comedy.

\* \* \*

In Narayan's fiction the comic vision operates in a framework of irony. It embraces not only the particular social context in which Narayan's men and women have their various transactions, but also focuses on an existential reality based on their particular experiences. Behind the narrative facade of his novels, Narayan attempts at a vision of life - a life of opposing dualities, of appearance and reality, beliefs and betrayals.

The ordinary man's response to the Indian milieu of the transition period becomes naturally ambivalent as he gropes his way between the old tradition and the new civilization. The Indian

is tossed between tradition and modernity and hence presents himself as a comic figure. No big promise is held out for him and hence no big disillusionment. Individual aspirations and the urge for personal heroics are prompted by the new civilization that comes with western education, life style and rapid material advancement. Individualism becomes the new-found ideal. But these are betrayed successively by the old India ethos, which still asserts its immense force and influence and which believes more in community existence than in individual achievements. The old tradition apparently gives way to the modern; the community temporarily yields place to the individual. But in the course of events the process reverses itself, lending an ironic dimension to the entire perspective. The middle class that emerges with the new education and industrialization suffers from a peculiar predicament. The middle class character oscillates between the old and the new, ambition and humility, between morality and hypocrisy. This plight of his, of course, does not forebode any great disaster. Because of his typical middle class character he can neither be a king nor a commoner. His troubles and sufferings, his misunderstandings and misadventures are in the end washed out by the cohesion of the community. An optimism, springing from this cohesive spirit of the community or the traditions, embraces all the ups and downs of life and with the optimism in background all the ambitious plans and plights of the individual appear comic. It is only an objective but sensitive artist who can penetrate into the reality of things and irony is his chief tool with which he can focus on the peculiarity of the human situation

without betraying his personal emotions. In the particular social context of India, Narayan remains equidistant from the Old and the New, and this position offers him a vantage ground to view reality objectively. Thus Narayan sets himself as a pioneer in the tradition of ironic realism in Indo-Anglian fiction. In his novels, irony is not only <sup>in</sup>grained in occasional episodes of the narrative, but is a built-in phenomenon in plot, character and style.

Swami and Friends is a plain story about the experiences and exploits of children, placed in the larger perspective of an adult world. Their frequent quarrels and conciliations, the burning of caps and the breaking of glass panes of schools as a patriotic ritual of the Freedom Movement, the big launching of the M.C.C., their crazy efforts to create a bigger world by naively imitating a perverted one of the adults, constitute a saga of innocence and fun. As C.D. Narasimhaiah aptly remarks :

"What interests Narayan is the brave talk of the youngsters who collected in street corners and echoed the high sounding words of their elders, most of whom could not have been any more effective than the school boys who employed nationalistic postures to no purpose. It is these that brought forth Narayan's comic genius in fiction." (15)

The transactions of the adult world in their professed seriousness and in their hypocrisy look ridiculous before a joyous world of innocent children. Swami and Friends stands



in ironic contrast to all other novels of Narayan that embody such adult preoccupations.

The plots of Narayan's novels follow the usual pattern of irony - order, disorder, order. From the saga of innocence in Swami and Friends one moves to a realm of adolescent romanticism and recklessness in The Bachelor of Arts. It is only in the dreams and foolishness of an adolescent where irony finds itself quite swift to operate because the adolescent stands in a peculiar position between ignorance and innocence of the child and maturity of the adult. With the unusual topic for the college union debate, 'Historians should be slaughtered first', irony unfolds itself with a hint at the shape of things to come. The tinge of extremity as suggested by the word 'slaughtered' is ridiculously heroic in this improbably concept and it is ironic that Chandran, a student of History and later the first Secretary of the History Association, is its prime mover. From a sentimental lover to a world renouncing Sanyasi donning an ochre robe and then again to a devoted husband - these are the successive somersaults of the comic hero.

The counterfeit Sanyasi which illustrates the hide and seek phenomenon of appearance and reality in one single role, is a favourite theme with Narayan. Traces of this phenomenon are found in the character of Jagon and in some other minor characters like the old landlord in Mr. Sampath. But it finds its artistic culmination in Raju's role of a saint on which the edifice of the ironic vision of the novel is built. In The Bachelor of Arts, Chandran becomes a 'sanyasi' not out of any genuine spiritual realization, but

out of frustration:

"He was different from the usual sanyasi. Others may renounce with a spiritual motive or purpose. Renunciation may be to them a means to attain peace or may be peace itself. They are perhaps dead in time, but they do live in eternity. 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 sanyasi because it pleased him to mortify his flesh. His renunciation was a revenge on society, circumstances, and perhaps, too, on destiny"

This authorial intrusion is perhaps not warranted from the point of view of an ironic style since in such a style motives are never made explicit and the events speak for themselves. Narayan, however, succeeds in building up the image of a saint during Chandran's encounter with the villagers. In the background of the reality of Chandran's character, the reverential response of the villagers to the sanyasi and the innocent interpretations of his silence create a comic situation.

In the course of events Chandran falls in love with Susila as instantly as he fell in love with Malathi. After his frustration in the Malathi affair he opens out his painful heart

to the barber, Ragavan:

'Ragavan, help me. You will gain my eternal gratitude. You will also profit yourself. My heart is dead, Ragavan. I have lost everybody I love in this world, Ragavan'.

These are the agonized words of one crossed in love and for whom the world seems to have lost all meaning. But this statement sounds ironically ridiculous in the face of what succeeds it:

'Susila, Susila, Susila. Her name, music, figure, face and everything about her was divine - Susila, Susila -- Malathi, not a spot beside Susila'

These two statements show the volatile nature of human feelings and emotions. Against the background of this fact any supposedly serious attempt or any emotional outburst of the individual anticipates ironic turns.

Such ironic turns also happen to stray episodes that are woven into the main plot. The thief catching episode in which the father, Chandran and his small brother get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and comb the garden from all sides to catch the thief is a clear example. Words such as 'Panther-like steps', 'Command', 'War cries' speak of almost a military operation. But when the thief is caught after all these huge preparations, his appearance betrays all expectations for he is found to be a middle aged man, bare bodied, with matted hair, wearing only a loin cloth, a

'sanyasi', Narayan's ironic technique is to pack contradictory dualities in one single character -- either the sanyasi in the role of a thief or thief in the role of a sanyasi.

With small modifications here and there this technique has been applied in all his novels. Ramani in The Dark Room combines in himself the roles of a faithful husband, a father and something of a philanderer. Srinivas, with the metaphysical disposition of his character, also shares to some extent the adventurism of Sampath. In the characters of Margayya and Jagon, the orthodox tradition and the modern materialism simultaneously operate, effecting a series of conflicts. Margayya, who sincerely believes in all traditional rituals, falls to a craze for money, a feature of the modern civilization that goes against traditional ethics and humility. He reconciles these two contradictions initially for something to suit his own interests, but is unable to carry it on. The pharisaical sweet-vendor preaching the sermon of non-attachment -- "Conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self"

-- is thickly engrossed in his worldly attachments, in the fondness for his son and in his 'free-cash'. Daisy suffers from a conflict of instincts and ideals, and the queer course of her life and her relationship with Raman reflects this conflict. Raman moves from a carefree businessman to a sentimental lover and then finally to a reckless realist. But among all the characters of Narayan, the character of Raju in The Guide offers the supreme level of Narayan's ironic stance. Here is the thief in the role

of a sanyasi, accepted and recovered by the innocent villagers and the Government of India as well as by Velan who knows his true identity. The contradictions involved in this situational irony are soon resolved when the appearance and reality merge together to form a distinct identity -- the thief becomes the sanyasi. This pattern is also repeated in the character of Jagon when he renounces this world, true to the spirit of the sermons that he has been hypocritically professing all along.

The plot of Mr. Sampath is full with episodes that have little relationship with one another as far as the centrality of theme is concerned, as a result of which no distinct ironic treatment is noticeable. But, in contrast, all the events gyrate round the character of Raju, in its various stages of development. Mr. Sampath is to be read either as a story about the adventures of Sampath or about Srinivas journey to equilibrium and wisdom; it may also be analysed from the point of view of the relation and interaction between these two aspects. Srinivas shares and participates in Sampath's adventures till he achieves his equanimity. At the same time Srinivas' metaphysical questionings, his occasional philosophic nihilism ironically match with the gross material involvements. After all the storms are laid to rest, Srinivas fortunately finds a patron to resume the publication of 'The Banner' where in an editorial 'Non-sense-an adult pre-occupation', he with the knowledge of hindsight makes an appraisal of all the earlier events and concludes.

Adulthood was just a mask that people wore, the mask made up of a thick jowl and double chin and diamond earrings, or a green shirt, but within it a man kept up the nonsense of his infancy, worse now for being without the innocence and the pure joy. Only the values of commerce gave this state a gloss of importance and urgency .

Adult occupations and its apparent seriousness are nothing but futile exercises in nonsense, even more so than the play of children. In this ironic perspective, the hubbub as well as the hubris noticeably present in the Malgudi life only amount to much 'sound and fury signifying nothing'. Srinivas has been searching for the significance of life; and experiences finally teach him about the absolute reality of things : "Even madness passes. Only existence asserts itself" . Against this fact of life, the adventures of Sampath or Ravi's vision of beauty or for that matter all the aspirations and actions of men appear illusory.

The ironic process starts right from the moment Srinivas offers himself completely to the care of Sampath and the latter not only takes charge of his paper, 'The Banner', but also of all his personal affairs. And the relationship becomes so compelling in nature that Srinivas cannot easily extricate himself from it. The relationship moves through a zigzag process. Sampath obliges a helpless Srinivas by undertaking the publication of 'The Banner'; handles the court formalities in quite a professional way; helps him get all the necessary amenities like water taps through the greedy

relatives of the dead landlord and in fact does a lot of things for Srinivas. But at the same time he shocks and surprises Srinivas by inserting a green slip inside the pages of 'The Banner' which announces the temporary suspension of its publication. He involves Srinivas in the film making project, and Srinivas, because of the extrovert nature which he shares with Sampath, gets involved in all the surrounding human activities. Careless of his own affairs, he plays a major role in Ravi's personal life and at times also intrudes into the private affairs of Sampath. But in due course he deems it wise to maintain a safe distance from Sampath, his one time friend and guide. He learns to realise the vagueness of all these adult activities. But yet these experiences have provided him with better philosophic insight to realize life and things. The ironic stance of the narrator makes it possible to involve Srinivas in all these events only to make him realize at last their meaninglessness. Srinivas confesses this in one of his editorials entitled "Nonsense -- an adult pre-occupation".

The ironic nature of human transactions can be noticed in the queer relationship between different characters of this novel, Sampath being in the centre of such relationships most of the time. He voluntarily offers himself to be the spiritual disciple of the miser landlord, hears from him with rapt attention the discourse on the Gita and the Vedas and at last very subtly robs him of his money. He makes the relatives of the old man, who live with one another for the latter's property, <sup>Complete idiots.</sup> He becomes a mentor of Somu and Sohanlal; but after the shooting of the film faces disaster midway.

Sampath hides himself from them. He can become the God Shiva wresting the title from V.L.G. only to be outdone by Ravi in the next moment. He also wins over Shanti and possesses her till the time he gets completely outwitted by her. The peculiar manner of Shanti's departure leaving the sleeping Sampath in utter humiliation at the Koppal station becomes a sort of comic anti-climax to their flirtation:

The bus had put us down at Koppal at six in the evening and we had nearly twelve hours before us for the train. We ate our food and then sat up, intending to talk all night till the arrival of the train. But really there was so little to talk about. Having done nothing but that for five days continuously. I think both of us had exhausted all available subjects. And a passing thought occurred to me that we might have to spend the rest of our lives in silence after we were married. This problem was unexpectedly simplified for me. I must have fallen asleep on my stool. When the train arrived and I woke up, her chair was empty. The train halts there for four minutes or so, and we had to hurry up. The station master said, "She left by the eleven down. I gave her a ticket for Madras"

Sampath accepts the ironic reversal of situations in the true spirit of a comic hero. Caught in the ironic process of human actions and its unexpected consequences, Sampath works out endless possibilities one after another and hence the world does not close for him.



In other characters also Narayan has attempted to show the built-in irony in human nature. Irony helps unfold the ludicrous beneath the apparent grandeur, the stupidity and weakness beneath apparent cleverness and strength. The shrewd landlord who exploits his tenants, professes himself to be a 'yogi' and zealously observes all orthodox rituals. Any ordinary instance can reveal the true nature of his identity:

'I'm a sanyasi, my dear young man -- and no true sanyasi should eat more than once a day', he said pompously. He ate the cakes with great relish. When a tumbler of coffee was placed beside him he looked lovingly at it and said : 'As a sanyasi I have given up coffee completely, but it is a sin not to accept something offered', he said.

In him the two contradictory traits coexist as the two selves of his character -- a shrewd custodian of his financial wealth and a zealous guardian of the 'Vedas' and the 'Upanishads' and all the ancient culture of India. Sampath takes advantage of both the weaknesses of this old man when he introduces himself as the latter's spiritual disciple and then as a promoter of his financial interests by persuading him to advance a loan. The shrewd landlord who till then has been making his tenants and borrowers fools is subtly bamboozled by Sampath, Srinivas' casual suggestion of the children's tennis ball hitting the old man to death only highlights the point of ludicrousness in the latter's character. The one-time district board president Somu, Sohanlal and even the district judge who comes to preside

over 'the opening ceremony', are all shallow, superficial block-heads beneath their grandiose social designations and positions. De Mellow with his technical jargon and Hollywood nostalgia is quite close to a caricature. The film, after elaborate preparations and enough fanfare ends in a fiasco. In fact the film 'The Burning of Kama' is, in an ironic way, the celebration of the beginning of 'kama'.

In 'The Financial Expert' the ironic treatment embraces the rise and fall of Margayya's fortunes. As far as the Indian milieu is concerned, the superstitious spirit of the Traditional on the threshold of the Modern, appear funnily anachronistic. The astrological wrangles over the horoscope and tricky manoeuvres of Dr. Pal in order to bring a match of the horoscopes illustrate the peculiarity of the transition period. The liberated Modern and the orthodox Traditional stand in an ironic relationship with each other. Many of Margayya's predicaments start as he is tossed between these two sides. The fundamental innocence in his character, which Graham Greene observes in his introduction to The Financial Expert, responds in strange ways to the various forces in the society. Margayya's ambition which in fact leads to the series of events involving his checkered life springs from his particular socio-economic status:

"Margayya felt that the world treated him with contempt because he had no money. People thought they could order him about. He said to Arul Doss: 'Arul Doss, I don't know about you; you can speak

for yourself. But you need not speak for me. You may not see a hundred rupees even after a hundred years of service, but I think I shall do very soon -- and who knows, if you<sup>r</sup> secretary seeks any improvement of his position, he can come to me "

Margayya has in him the innocence of the ordinary folk which comes out of the humble status of his life, and the fanatical ambitions that issue from his humiliation and inferiority complex. In Margayya, dream and reality operate together in network of strange and unpredictable relationships. Margayya earns the sympathy of the readers because of his basic simplicity and the humiliation he faces because of his socio-economic condition. There is an elemental sadness about him throughout and even in his moments of supreme success, he betrays the pathetic helplessness of a bewildered father. Margayya's faults and foolishness are treated by Narayan's ironic technique not from the standpoint of strict moral judgement, but with an affectionate understanding of life's predicament. As a consequence, the bitter bite of irony yields place to a mild disapproval or a tender stroke of the tragi-comic.

Apart from Margayya's eventful life the novel abounds with ironic suggestions of different nature. With reference to his own life, Margayya's name itself is ironic. 'Margayya' means "one who showed the way. He showed the way out to those in financial trouble " . While managing others' financial affairs,

he is unable to manage his own, much in the same way as Raju who guides others, but fails to guide himself properly till the final moments of his conversion. Dr. Pal, the guide and confident of Margayya, is the sole cause of all of the latter's doings and ultimate undoings. The peculiar first meeting between Margayya and Dr. Pal in the lonely, abandoned pond is not only a travesty of the usual, the commonplace, but also faintly indicates the queer nature of events to come as a result of their relationship:

"He arrived at the pond .... He tucked up his dhoti and looked round in order to make sure. 'If a man lives here, he will not need a square inch of cloth', he reflected. Far in a corner of the little mantap on the other bank he saw some one stirring. He felt a slight shiver of fear passing through him as he peered closer. 'Is it a ghost or a maniac' ? He withdrew a couple of steps and shouted 'Hey, who are you' ? Vaguely remembering that if it were a ghost it would run away on hearing such a challenge. But the answer came back. 'I'm Dr. Pal, a journalist, correspondent and author'

.

This meeting with Dr. Pal, which proves to be the key to the financial success of Margayya, happens, even though in an indirect way, as a result of the forty days' ritual. Hereafter events move in rapid succession and Margayya has no time to look back till the point when he finds that his gains are ironically accompanied by more than equal losses. Dr. Pal, who in one of his first meetings with Margayya speaks of his plan "to start a sociology clinic

where people's troubles are set right", is himself a pervert and ruins the domestic happiness of Margayya's family. Dr. Pal, who professes himself to be an academician is in fact a gross travesty of it. The book 'Domestic Harmony' of which Margayya is the publisher and which promises happiness for the people becomes the main breeder of domestic disharmony in his own family.

Like Narayan's other heroes, Margayya faces the crucial challenge of his own creation. He is a poor, ambitious man whose desperate craze for money gets fulfilled and he successfully lifts himself out of his humiliating status. But the wealth, which he makes for his own comforts, turns upon him, literally swallowing up his very physical existence.

'In his home the large safe was filled up, and its door had to be forced in, and then the cup boards, the benches and tables, the space under the cot, and the corners. His wife could hardly pass into the small room to pick up a saree or towel'

His tremendous complacency and the consequent hateful attitude towards Balu's teachers coupled with his extreme affection for the son, only blinds him to correct judgement and undermines his own interests. This helps spoil his son in whom he has pinned great hopes. The relationship between the pupil (Balu) and the home tutor, Mr. Murti, a teacher in the school of which Margayya is the secretary, turns to be a mockery of the sacred teacher-taught relationship. What one notices is a sort of commercial transaction:

'The teacher and the pupil were like old partners, now seasoned partners who <sup>k</sup>new each other's strong points and weak points'

Margayya learns the art of cunning through the guileful guidance of Dr. Pal, by which he manages to swindle others and climb the social hierarchy. The fateful moment comes when Balu, his eye's apple confronts him and demands his share of the property. Discovering Balu in Dr. Pal's evil company, Margayya finds to his grief that he has been caught in his own cunning. Unable to control his anger and excitement, he hits Dr. Pal with one of his sandals. It is Dr. Pal who had offered the red lotus to Margayya for the worship of goddess Laxmi. Immediately after, Margayya's illusory fort crumbles and once again he is reduced to his original status. His life thus completes a full circle.

During the course of these incredible fluctuation of fortune, illusions are dispelled and the individual is chastened. Irony leads to the realization of things not in their illusory glitter, but in their essential reality. This fact is evident in the final scene of the novel:

'Balu approached him and sat beside him. Margayya put the arm round him : 'You see that box there. I have managed to get it out again.' He pointed to a corner where his old knobby trunk was kept, 'It's contents are intact as I left them years ago -- a pen and an ink bottle You asked for my poperty. There it is, take it; have an early meal tomorrow and go

to the Banyan tree in front of the co-operative bank ... 'Very well then, if you are not going, I am going on with it, as soon as I am able to leave this bed,' said Margay, a. 'Now get the youngster here. I will play with him. Life has been too dull without him in this house.'

These are no doubt words of sorrow and suffering; yet these are also the words of wisdom and an intense realization of the facts of life. His wealth, for which he madly craved, alienates him from his family and now wealth being no more there, it is a happy family reunion. In Narayan's fiction the ironic stance leads to the attainment of wisdom, that helps man to reject the illusions and unites him to his roots -- either in his own self or in his family or community.

The Guide, as far as the ironic perspective is concerned, achieves the supreme concentration of purpose. No episode is superfluous or unrelated to the others and all contribute to the singular theme of Raju's spiritual odyssey. The sequence of events that encompasses the innocent pleasures of Raju's childhood days, his romantic adventures or misadventures of later years, his brilliant showmanship as a saint and his ultimate ordeal, are set to an ironic rhythm of life. Raju's life is cast in a criss cross of fortunes. He undergoes a process of gradual degradation from an illicit lover to a liar forging the document and then to a fake swami swindling the entire community. But this process is suddenly reversed and Raju by an extraordinary feat of suffering and

sacrifice becomes the true saint redeeming his earlier life. Narayan's theme here is "the irony of life and human nature"<sup>(16)</sup> which he communicates not only through the simple, unpretentious language of a story teller, but also by the help of his great technical innovation of telescoping the past and the present into one another. It helps to trace the genesis and growth of the present in the past in a very subtle, but compelling way.

Irony spans the entire life of Raju, right from his childhood days to the final moments. The childhood days form an indispensable factor of the total ironic vision of the novel. It not only serves as a backdrop of idyllic innocence to all the events that happen afterwards, but also establishes an intimate kinship with the decisive moments of his life as the Swami. As the Swami he narrates the story of penance to the villagers, unaware of its ironic turns whereby he will be called upon to perform the penance.

"He remembered that not long ago he had spoken to them of such a penance, its value and technique. He had described it partly out of his head and partly out of traditional accounts he heard his mother narrate"

By telling the story, which he had heard from his mother in his childhood, and by undertaking the penance, he enacts the story in his own life and in a symbolic way gets united with his mother whom he had driven away earlier. After this tremendous spiritual ordeal he regains the innocence of his childhood which is suggested through the symbol of a physical situation -- "They held



him as if he were a baby". Beneath this fact of the physical condition of Raju, the fact of Raju's new birth into spirituality is subtly hinted at by the use of the image of 'baby'. This spiritual birth is signalled by Raju's realization at the end of his ordeal.

"Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs . . .

Various other events of the past also return to him, but in a strange, alien relationship. Once such is the small railway station at Malgudi. It is at the railway track that he learnt his first bad words. The railway station which goes before his eyes and where he played as a child and also from where he was physically thrown out one day, now takes its own bit of role in the drama of Raju's life :

"The railways were first to feel the pressure. They had to run special trains for the crowds that were going to Malgudi. People travelled on foot boards and on the roofs of coaches. The little Malgudi station was choked with passengers".

His successive rise and fall in fortune are curiously associated with the railways. So also is Gaffur with his taxi, Gaffur's taxi has been a witness to many a romantic moment of Raju Rosie relationship, a relationship which Gaffur himself did not approve of. And now, absolutely in a different context, "Gaffur's

taxi derive up and down dozen times a day", though Gaffur hardly knows that it is Raju in whose service he is engaged. The same old world returns to him, ironically at a time when the external world has lost all significance for him and he has made an intense journey from without to within.

Of Raju's chequered career, C.D. Narasimhaiah comments,

Raju, a loafer getting education from old scraps, guiding tourists, himself illiterate falling in love with a highly educated married Indian woman without outraging Indian sentiment, taking charge of her, talking to judges and civilians, going to jail and becoming a 'sanyasi' recognised by the villagers and even by the Government of India --Narayan has done the most incongruous things and made them credible in terms of high art. (17)

But even in his mistakes and sins Raju has a debonair appeal of personality that endears him to the readers. His meetings with Rosie and Velan turn out to be decisive factors respectively in the sensuous and spiritual chapters of his life. He wins over Rosie by fanning and satisfying her instincts for dance and makes Marco cuckold. But as William Walsh has commented,

As Rosie succeeds, as her gift gains recognition, Raju's status changes. He is less the lover and more the manager, trainer and agent. (18)

Their public successes are ironically accompanied by the failure in their private relationships. As A. N. Kaul observes, "...

the moments of their greatest public successes are also the moments of their greatest isolation". (19) The denouement starts soon and a small blunder of Raju wrecks the entire understanding delicately built between them. Hiding Marco's book from Rosie and forging her signature are pardonable offences on the part of a jealous lover, because Raju apprehends that Rosie may get enamoured of her husband's achievements. But this triggers off a whole series of fateful events for Raju as on the other side of the scene Marco, the zealous guardian of rules operates in his usual non-chalant manner. The star lawyer who fights the case for Raju, whose presentation of the case appears like a three-act comedy, proves to a hoax who fails to save Raju from imprisonment in spite of his braggadocio.

Raju's ego, which in all occasions determines his fate, calls upon him to be the master of any situation --- whether it is in his vocation as a guide or in his relationship with Rosie, whether as a convict or as the Swami. His extraordinary sense of self-directed humour as is witnessed in his conversation with the barber or in his ruminations about the jail life extolling its merits, enables him to come through the many crisis of his life. This practice of humour at one's own cost transforms itself to the sublime spirit of self-sacrifice when the situation warrants. And during this process of transformation the comic gradually yields place to the serious, as happens in the last scene of this novel.

Once Raju's spiritual journey starts. Rosie, Marco and all others, who were once important in his life, are rendered unnecessary and hence are removed from the scene, for such a

journey must be taken alone. The religious conversion in Raju comes through his communion with the innocent villagers of Mangal. Earl conceals facts about Marco and his book from Rosie and this act of his undid him. He conceals his true identity from the villagers successfully presents himself as the great man and this also undoes him. But when he no more conceals and unfolds his true identity before Velan, the curtain has already been raised in his spiritual life. The reality of his identity bows to the falsehood he professed, because in that falsehood the traditional beliefs and the intense feelings of the community are contained. And these have the power, by virtue of its innocent sincerity, to transform any falsehood into truth, as it ultimately happens to Raju who from the counterfeit becomes the real.

On the other hand, as C.D. Narasimhalah says, "Rosie is completely free from Marayan's ironic handling." (20) Of course the marriage interview of Rosie resembles any interview for employment, a parody of the traditional marriage negotiations. Both Marco and Raju serve as ironic foils to each other -- the former with his extreme cold, mechanical approach to life, the latter with his warmth of personality and particularly his instinctual way of living. On her side, Rosie breaks the walls of the doll's house and takes extreme swings that should warrant censure from the orthodox Indian society.

The ironic vision in the novel emanates from the astounding transformation of personality in Raju's life. After returning from the prison he becomes Swami, or more pointedly speaking the

mantle of swamihood falls on him. Ordinarily, everyday accidents play a significant role in shaping the destiny of his life. But an overall analysis of his life would reveal an implicit design in all these accidents which lead him step by step to his ultimate salvation. This design is governed by his dynamic spirit, his indomitable ego that can rise to any occasion and meet successfully any challenge. It is a pure coincidence that he, just after his release from the prison, should be discovered by Velan who has been burdened with the domestic problem of a disobedient sister. And fortunately the girl gets cured and this confirms the villagers' belief in Raju's spiritual powers. Thus the village life flows on with Raju in their midst as the spiritual guide. Raju by virtue of his various manoeuvres lends credence to this new image of his. He accepts this role because it is the only comfortable occupation for him under the circumstances of his stigmatized life. And once the image has been built on the rocks of the innocent beliefs of villagers, Raju finds it cruel to break their illusion. In his first meeting with Velan this has been made clear :

But he hesitated, wondering how he should say it. It looked as though he would be hurting the other's deepest sentiment if he so much whispered the word 'jail'

Raju is aware of this tendency in him to try to appease others and never to frustrate them --- a tendency without which he would have been one among the countless commoners of the world :

I suppose, if I had the inclination to say 'I don't know what you are talking about', my life would have taken a different turn"

As the villagers' beliefs get crystallized in Raju to make him their spiritual anchor, he makes his hypocrisy appear more and more sacrosanct. He grows a beard; tells them episodes from the lives of great men; narrates to them stories from mythology and in his words and silence maintains the dignity expected of spiritual figure. To this deception he brings perfection partly by his cunning and more by the fact of the villagers sincerely accepting him with their typical rustic simplicity. But this brings a curious development in him. He not only deceives the villagers, but soon starts deceiving his own self. He thinks of counting the stars with the illicit motive of being considered as a night guide :

"People will say, "Here is the man who knows the exact number of stars in the sky. If you have any trouble on that account, you had better consult him. He will be your night-guide for the skies " .

For a moment he begins to believe in his own cunning and in fact attempts counting the stars :

"He told himself, 'The thing to do is to start from a corner and go on patch by patch. Never work from the top to the horizon, but always the other way" . He started the count from above a figure of palmyra trees on his left hand side ... .

Such is the compulsion of his make-up that he attempts to live quite close to it, an attempt which takes serious dimension afterwards.

He gets bewitched by his own make-up, which blinds him to the limitations of the man hiding inside the great mark of a saint.

"He was hypnotized by his own voice; he felt himself growing in stature as he saw the upturned faces of the children shining in the half light when he spoke. No one was more impressed with the grandeur of the whole thing than Raju himself" .

His mask sits so much embedded on him that an ordinary happening brings in the inevitable predicament of identity and illusion. The casual and thoughtless misreporting by Velan's brother before the villagers that the Swami shall not take food unless it rains ironically conforms to the image that he has been steadily building for himself. Sacrifices are now demanded of him in the very manner in which they were demanded from others in the stories that he had narrated to the villagers. The mask has outgrown the man;

He had told them, "When the time comes, everything will be all right. Even the man who would bring the rain will appear all of a sudden'. They interpreted his words and applied them now to the present situation. He felt that he had worked himself into a position from which he could not get out .... He now saw the enormity of his own creation. He had created a

giant with his puny self, a throne of authority  
with that slab of stone .

Such is the nature of his mask that it stifles the man  
within; but also such is the nature of the man (Raju) that it can  
raise itself from the quagmire of deception to get itself merged in  
the mask.

What one witnesses in the last pages of the novel is almost  
akin to a baptism -- a sinner metamorphosed into a saint. This  
at once reminds us of the 'Ratnakar Valmiki' myth. Such transforma-  
tions are not incredible in India where feeling is considered more  
important than knowledge; where Marco with his scholarship remains  
only emotionally frigid; Vasu with his M.A. degree remains a  
maneater; and Raju with no academic qualification to boast of, but  
only with warm feelings of life supplemented by the innocent be-  
liefs of villagers, attains the spiritual height.

The ironic vision in the novel lets us notice the immense  
possibilities in the life of a wayward young man, doing bits of  
jobs in the small railway station of Malgudi who in course of events  
emerges as the benefactor of humanity. Accidents build the edifice  
of his life and his efforts lie in submitting to them and mastering  
them ultimately. A casual analysis of Raju's life makes it abun-  
dantly clear that a hideous sense of humour is deeply embedded in  
the pattern of our existence :

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; They  
kill us for their sport (King Lear IV. 1.36).



Some way or other men are dragged from the height of their successes to the abyss of their misfortunes. Raju's herculean efforts in winning Rosie are pathetically undone by a trivial occurrence of forging a not -so-important document. His comfortable stage-show of the saint faces a serious crisis from the thoughtless reporting by a village boy. Vasu, the man eater of immense strength is ironically killed for an equally trivial cause of the mosquitoes.

When Raju undertakes the fast, "he is pitted, not against a vindictive husband, but against the vengeful nature of an image he has so stupidly built up himself, and those who will hasten his doom are in fact his most dedicated supporters".<sup>(21)</sup> If this happens, in keeping to the logic of irony, Raju also has got the propensity to fulfil the expectations demanded of him and in a heroic feat he wipes out the difference between the man and the mask. This process has been presented by an ironic externalization which is

couched not in words but in a symbol -- the crocodile which infests the river by the side of Raju's sanctuary. The crocodile, an archetypal symbol of hypocrisy provides an apt parallel for the fake saint. Appropriately enough, no one in the village seems to have actually seen the crocodile, though they all know it is there - it is a myth, which even like Raju's sainthood, becomes a reality only in death, for it is seen for the first time when the drought, which is to kill Raju, also kills it.<sup>(22)</sup>

Raju, during his days as the counterfeit Swami says to the village school teacher, "What can a crocodile do to you if your mind is clear and your conscience is untroubled"? The words return to him to be applied in his own case. Raju's beginning of the ordeal with a clear mind and an untroubled conscience occurs almost simultaneously with the death of the crocodile.

Raju attains his fame not by banking upon Rosie's talent but by his own efforts of sacrifice. As A. N. Kaul comments, he gets more fame and newspaper coverage than Rosie and Marco and irony lies in his remaining anonymous in this role.<sup>(23)</sup> His anonymous status suggests in a subtle way his state of non-attachment, the prelude to any spiritual realization. In the final pages of the novel, Narayan describes Raju simulatneously by his proper name 'Raju' and by his spiritual title, 'Swami' and 'Sage', which helps to bring an ironic juxtaposition btween identity and illusion and keeps the reader in perpetual awareness of Raju's spiritual conversion. In the dualities of Raju's life the ironic attitude of Narayan is inherent. He describes the complex psychic process at work in Raju's inner self; and at the same time focuses on the world of traditional values emerging triumphantly from the materialistic blandishments of the Modern. Narayan's irony highlights the values that sustain the sweet old world of Malgudi or of India and at the same time affectionately exposes the small vices and illusions of man. As V.Y. Kantak rightly feels:

His irony here becomes something like a new perspective because his sympathies are as

deeply engaged by the genuine component of that prototype as his decision is aroused by the imposture often foisted upon it. (24)

Here, as also elsewhere in Narayan's fictional world, the motive of irony is never to castigate, but to understand life's pleasure and pain, its sins and hypocrisies as well as its innocence and tenderness. But in all these, whether in their virtues or in their vices, there is the intense feel of life which contributes to the unique poetry of the Malgudi existence. In the ironic framework of Narayan's novels, one notices a thousand small revolts and reverses of life; the amazing transformation of a wayward boy and later a swindler into a martyr is not a saviour. "In any case", as William Walsh remarks, "his attitude is too nimble with irony for one or the other. And that irony, it should be noted, is an irony of recognition, not an irony of correction." (25)

Narayan's irony recognizes the queer and complex workings within the individual, as well as his relation to the world without, Raju's ~~ordal~~ during his final role, amidst a motley crowd of pilgrime, T.V. Producer, gemblers, peddlers selling ballons, reed-whistle and sweets, men from Health Department showing films about 'mosquitoes, malaria, plague and tuberculosis and B.C.G. vaccination' and above all curious onlookers, suggests the utter loneliness of a man who is on the verge of a spiritual awakening. This is the loneliness of all great men, who choose to be different from others, yet cast their lot for the sake of others, for humanity in general. As William Walsh puts it.

For Narayan, then the very conditions of human growth are individual discrepancy and communal collaboration. It is this double insight which the career of Raju embodies and justifies. (26)

His lone, serious ordeal gives rise to a village carnival and he, though in the centre of it, is ironically, aloof from all these. Narayan, here, focuses on the aspect of man's loneliness in his relationship with others :

... at every stage of his life, the isolated individual faces the enormous, fundamentally indifferent crowd. (27)

Closely surrounded by a crowd who watch his movements each minuce, Raju, if no physically, yet mentally and spiritually, is far distanced from them for he is the only one who is called upon to perform this task. He is one who cannot share his agony, his fortunes with others; not even with Velan who hears the entire story of his life. Raju is doomed to isolation. Raju's ordeal, over which hangs the question of his life and death, for sometime is pushed to the background, in the hubbub of loud-speakers, film shows, merry-go-round and all other items of the fair. The superficialities of the modern, commercial civilization is brought close, during the narration, to a serious quest for salvation quite in the spirit of ancient traditions. Malone's casual questions to the Swami meant for commercial T.V. shows, questions that range from Raju's physical condition and fast to irrelevant issues of caste system in India; Government's absurd telegraphic message to the doctors to "persuade

'Swami' resume fast later" and many such things appear childishly funny before Raju's intense spiritual groping. This is subtly suggested by Raju's smile:

The shallow modern civilization becomes the butt of the ironic treatment in the background of the sacred traditions and the innocent feelings and superstitions of rustic villagers.

From the childhood innocence of Malgudi to a flamboyant and yet professional involvement with dance and then back to the rustic innocence of Mangal -- the ironic pattern becomes complete as the circle closes where it has begun. The logic of irony leads him to the threshold of a spiritual realm and once Raju steps in, the focus of irony shifts from Raju to the flippant crowd of peddlers, gamblers and onlookers, the men from the Health Department and the T.V. Producer from California. After Raju resolves to continue the fast with sincerity rising above all selfish considerations and uniting himself with the community, the narrative no more deals with the conflicts and the complex workings within his psyche. The comic irony which has moulded the career and character of Raju now reaches its culminating point. We are carried beyond the boundaries of a comic world to a solemn religious occasion, to the soberness of a sort of crucifixion. Raju rises above the ordinary human level by virtue of his spiritual steadfastness and accordingly the ironic perspective shifts from him to the convivial crowd enjoying the fair. Now, the latter, in relation to Raju are exposed in their frailties and flippancy. Raju transcends the ironic predicament as his drama begins on another plane of existence. It

is a sort of 'die into life' with fierce convulse', very much in the manner of young Appollo in Hyperion.

The theme of The Vendor of Sweets has close resemblances with that of The Guide. The 'die into life' theme is in a way manifested in Jagon's wish, "At sixtyone is reborn" and in his apparent renunciation of the world to see a deity emerge from stone. In the ironic design a sinner is lifted to the sublime spiritual height in The Guide and likewise the hypocritical sweet-vendor is brought to the shores of spiritual experience. But unlike Raju, Jagon is unable to take a plunge and there, between the borders of the physical and the metaphysical, he stands with his failings and predicaments exposed. The built-in contradiction in Jagon's character inevitably put him in the centre of the ironic perspective of the novel. He is a puritan taking salt-free and sugar-free diet. He preaches to conquer taste, yet sells all sorts of delicious sweets. He reads the Bhagavad Gita to himself and to his workers, but at the same time manages to smuggle the 'free-cash'. He combines a shrewd sense of business with sayings and 'slokas' from the Vedas and the Upanishads, his hobbyhorse to which he turns frequently. In his role as a moral man he looks sad and tender. These two aspects contribute to the unique appeal of his personality.

Yet in his adherence to Gandhian principles or to the doctrines prescribed by our ancient scriptures, there is a strange innocence, a kind of sentimental belongingness to his ideals of Gandhi or of the ancient traditions. What is exposed is not his villainy, but his naivete. When asked by the cousin about the need

for conquering the self, Jagon can merely reply, "I do not know, but all our sages advice us so." And at time he nostalgically reflects.

... how Mahatma Gandhi used to address huge assemblies on the sands of the river and how he himself, a minute speak in such a crowd, had felt his whole life change when he heard that voice.

His loyalty to Gandhi is the only motto in his life which guides him through every state :

If Gandhi had said somewhere, "Pay your sales tax uncomplainingly", he would have followed his advice, but Gandhi had made no reference to the sales tax anywhere to Jagon's knowledge.

But the ironic treatment of Jagon's character attributes a subtle motive to his innocence or fanaticism.

Jagon's fanaticism results in arduous quest for the leather of dead animals, or in his taking twenty drops of honey in warm water as a substitute for sugar and in many such fads which appear comically out of date. On the other hand Mali's ultra-modern innovation, the story manufacturing machine in the India of grandmothers who are repositories of ancient stories, appear a gross perversion. Jagon for sometime shares the fancies of Mali, leaving his own emotional moorings. "Gradually his reading of the

Bhagavad Gita was replaced by the blue air mail letters" .  
And this starts undoing him, landing him in more and more difficulties till he once again asserts the his self of traditional beliefs and values. He says to the cousin with a firmness, hitherto unnoticed in his tender heart of the father.

If what you say is true, well truth will win.

If it is not true, there is nothing I can do .

His shrewd business sense and his small corruptions of free-cash' and the like, which do not conform to the sacred principles he professes are understandable and excusable human flaws. He always propagates that attachment is a delusion which man must be rid of; yet he indulges in attachments -- one of money, the other of his son -- which ultimately ruin his happiness. Jagon wipes out this weakness in him by a final decisive act of renunciation. But it is not also without Narayan's characteristic tinge of irony. Even on the verge of his spiritual birth he does not fail to carry his bank book with himself. Here, as also elsewhere, irony leaves bare a cluster of ambiguities. In this context it is worthwhile to refer to V.Y. Kantak's analysis of Naipaul's criticism against Narayan.<sup>(28)</sup> Without looking into the ironic motive of Narayan, Naipaul has criticised him for indicating Jagon's corruptions and hypocrisy, his 'bewilderment', as a fact of Hinduism. What Naipaul misses in his criticism is the ironic banter of Narayan's treatment. Jagon, unlike Raju in the earlier novel, is unable to take the final leap and remains only in the twilight region of spiritual realization. Jagon's



attempt at renunciation appears ridiculous as much as his earlier life of high sermons and low scruples. As Prof. Kantak suggests, Narayan's irony vindicates the traditional values.

At the heart of Narayan's irony lies the comic incongruity. He makes ludicrous things takes serious significance, and often brings delightfully unexpected turns of events. Jagon's salvation lies through the hair-dyer, who is having a white beard himself but blackens all other's hair and whose percentage is not known. Hair dying is a profession, grossly commercial in itself and it is naturally incredible that a hair dyer should serve as a sort of priest to baptize Jagon into a spiritual life. But in Narayan's ironic scheme of things, the trivial and the serious exchange places. A mere 'half a bottle of some alcoholic drink' is cause enough to seize Mali's car and arrest him just as a couple of mosquitoes happen to serve as the agent of the maneater's death in The Maneater of Malgudi. The irony in both these instances suggests a deeply planted motive in the nature of things. Pride and arrogance, apparently invisible, are ultimately and unceremoniously undone by the smallest of objects.

The Vendor of Sweets is the drama of an ungrateful son and an extremely fond father. At the back of Jagon's commicality one can perceive the injured and bewildered feelings of a father. He flaunts Mali's letters with the pride of a father even though he disapproves of his doings in America and feels extremely broken for it in his inmost heart. There is a deep awareness of the tragic behind the veil of the comic. It is characteristic of the writer whose vision of

the universe or more specially of human life is ironic vision unfolds depths of reality. It reveals to us that underneath the gales of laughter there are also stifled cries of pain.

As it happens in The Guide and The Vendor of Sweets, Narayan's ironic device concerns itself with the religious or spiritual, and in an allegorical way, in The Man-eater of Malgudi. To the docile, religious-minded Malgudians, Vasu is a 'demon' and his arrival at once brings in its wake all sorts of chaos. Vasu possesses tremendous physical strength, his arguments have strange logic that sound novel and notorious; he is unpredictable and dynamic. He is an extreme individualist and he seems to believe in the superiority of strength as the key to existence. He is not bound to the society by any ethics save his own interests. In a way, he remains in the awesome isolation of a demon and Narayan carves out the peculiar reactions of the timid Malgudians to him in terms of high comedy. Stage by stage Narayan builds up the aggressive personality of Vasu only to humiliate his strength at the end through an apt anti-climax. Vasu breaks the laws during the Civil Disobedience Movement, hits and injures his 'pahelwan' master, breaks the arm of the Police Inspector, kills tigers and other jungle animals, terrorizes people and even challenges God's creation; but ultimately he is undone by a couple of mere mosquitoes. He laughs of Nataraj ;

'So you are taken in ! You poor fool ! These eyes were given it by me, not by God' .

'We have constantly to be rivalling Nature at

her own game. Posture, Look, the total personality, everything has to be created'. This man had set himself as a rival to Nature and was carrying on a relentless fight .

He mocks at the poet who writes an epic on Krishna's life in monosyllabic verse and jeers at everybody, even at the village festival, very contemptuously Ironically, it is the poet's epic that leads to the festival and events happen fortuitously in which Vasu meets his death. That an insignificant creature like the mosquito will be the instrument of Vasu's death, underscores the irony involved not only in this particular context, but also in a symbolic way in the entire scheme of things. Sastri explains this in the novel :

Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the rakshasas that were ever born. Every demon carries within him, 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 ?

Neither Nataraj nor the other Malgudians have any role in Vasu's death except that they are participants in a religious festival. The irony embedded in Vasu's death once again vindicates the sacred traditions. When humanity is threatened, the grace of God, which comes in mysterious ways, destroys the wicked and saves others.

What saves the Malgudi community from Vasu is not an accident but, as William Walsh suggests, 'the blessings of the gods or just the stubbornness of life itself.'<sup>(29)</sup> The hypothesis of 'the blessings of the gods' cannot be easily rejected in an Indian context. With Vasu's death, peace and order are once again restored to the society. Nataraj is roused from his complacency and this brief disorder, if not to any one else, at least to Nataraj and sastri alone, brings renewed faith in God's subtle ways of saving humanity.

In a way, Vasu faces the enormity of his own creation. He becomes a victim of his own strength. In Narayan's ironic scheme, his heroes face the challenge from their own creations -- Margayya and Jagon from their sons; Raju from the image he creates; and Vasu from his immense physical strength. He has broken his cot-frame to display his strength as a result of which he sleeps in his easy chair on the fateful day instead of sleeping on the cot provided by a mosquito net. It becomes evident that an extreme arrogant individualism, however, powerful it may be carries the potential of its own doom. In the irony of his death, Narayan has amply suggested his disapproval of Vasu's evil strength and genius.

It is strange that a man who has taken his Master's degree in History, Economics and Literature should choose no other profession but killing and stuffing animals. Vasu's unnatural death is fitting finale to his strange life. His arrival throws into disarray the apparent stability and the comfortable illusions of Nataraj and his society. As H. New William puts it.

"The print shop is only an arena where the pretence is consciously cultivated. Nataraj must seem to be busy, Sastri must seem to have full staff etc. The flamboyance of the mask and the naivete that underlies it is evident leading to a happy acceptance of face values and the willing inference of more than the eye comprehends.<sup>(30)</sup>

Even though there are some genuine flashes of irony here and there in his latest novel The Painter of Signs, yet unlike the earlier novels, there is no definite ironic pattern in which the characters gradually mature into realization and knowledge. Of course, Raman emerges from his sentimental relationship a bit more realistic; but irony which triumphantly upholds the traditions and lifts the individual to a sublime height is conspicuously absent here. The prolonged love-hate relationship between Daisy and Raman, the decision and dreams of marriage, and ultimately in a fiasco. There is a number of anecdotes in the novel that are informed by an ironic stance. The lawyer, whose profession makes it imperative to practise the art of reasoning, depends on astrology to hang his signboard. Daisy is a woman, who has 'sort of unmitigated antagonism to conception' and who confesses. "Married life is jot for me. I have thought it over. It frightens me. I am not cut out for the life you imagine. I can't live except alone. It won't work" . In the context of Indian traditions where it is unusual for a woman to stay alone and where her chief desire is to get married and make her household joyous with children, Daisy is an iconoclast and she stands

in a sharp ironic contrast with the traditional Indian woman-hood.

The Dark Room, The English Teacher and Waiting for Mahatma move away from the usual ironic pattern of Narayan's novels. K.R.S. Iyengar says,

"Waiting for Mahatma is an ambitious effort and an impressive feat; but one also feels that Narayan's art now denied the security of Malgudi and catapulted into Gandhian or terrorist political action - betrays unsureness and perplexity." (31)

Attention continuously and confusedly shifts from the political theme of the novel to the romantic theme and vice versa. Sriram's political hobnobbing in Gandhi's movement to win Bharati's love carries an ironic tinge as much as Bharati's consent for marriage as conditional on Gandhi's sanction does. Sriram's conversion from a Gandhian worker to a terrorist, his sentimentalism, and Bharati's fanatic devotion to Gandhi that reminds us of Daisy, the family planning zealot in The Painter of Signs, are all affectionately drawn with delicate irony. To miss the duality of the theme -- the political and the romantic, is to miss the subtle irony in the treatment of the characters. The superstitious Indian milieu occasionally comes to the forefront of the narrative revealing Narayan's characteristic good-humoured irony. One such is the priest's refusal to bring Sriram's aunt from the funeral pyre even after it is revealed that she is alive. The crowd's endorsement of the priest's view that she cannot be carried back to the town because 'no one who has been carried here can ever step into the town bounds

again lest the whole town should be 'wiped out by fire or plague', focuses on the naivete of the Indian masses. The irony here not only confines itself to stray religious episodes but also it embraces the political side. It is an indirect reference to the people who supersititously join Gandhi's movement or who shrewdly profess Gandhian ideals for their own interests, as does the Municipal chairman.

In The Dark Room the attention is focused on Savitri's misfortunes and the plot is not congenial enough for the comic irony to operate. Of course, Shantabai's shrewd conquery comes for Narayan's ironic banter as much as Ramani's foolishness and frailties. Yet, on the whole The Dark Room remains a domestic drama like The English Teacher where the narrative moves from the physical aspect of existence to the metaphysical. In both these novels, the small Malgudi town of various forces -- of unbridled aspirations and instincts as well as of taboos and traditions -- has been tapered to the narrow confines of husband wife relationship. In other novels, the human fate or the world plays a perpetual hide and seek with man's emotions and ambitions; and the Don Quixotes fall to the ground time and again to shed their illusions ultimately. In the framework of the comic irony the individual rises to fall and falls to be restored to his roots; and in the process the comic incongruity is focused. Follies are discarded and it is once again a happy reconciliation.

In Narayan's fictional world there is no agonizing sense of waste and void as in the great tragedies of Shakespeare, no utter

helplessness as in some of the dramas of Ibsen, no deep pathos as in Hardy's novels, not even the gruelling sense of suffering as in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand; but there is an amusing sense of life's small dreams and defeats. There is always the sure presence of life throbbing in its virtues as well as in its vices. Against the fixed background of the age-old traditions and a strong community life of Malgudi, the individual's frenzy, feds or fetish operate, from time to time towards bringing temporary disorders. But throughout the narrative, in an implicit or subtle way, the ultimate victory of the traditions and the society is assured. As Srinivas puts it, "Even madness passes. Only existence asserts itself" .

Narayan, with a humanist's vision notes the follies and angularities, the revolts and retreats of the Malgudi folk. He finds them wallowing in their favourite illusions, wooing their ladies, worshipping their gods, running after wealth, making films, dancing, gossiping and doing a hundred other things. But also, along with these, there are the jolts in life that awaken man from his dreams. It is a built-in ironic device in the nature of things that an universal harmony is there among all individuals and the society, for whose preservation, individual instincts and ambitions often have to be trimmed.

In Narayan's fiction irony underscores a fundamental fact of human existence; that our instincts and aspirations are subject to the tantalizing nature of the society or the external world; that we are more or less Don Quixotes living with our Lady Dulciness or fighting with wind mills. The compelling presence of the tradition



brings, of course, the prodigal sons back to the fold of society. The reader feels relieved and gratified, for 'all's well that ends well'. And this can well be said to be the achievement of comic irony.

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CHAPTER - V

STUDY IN NARAYAN'S CHARACTERS IN THEMATIC PERSPECTIVE.

An analysis of Narayan's characters would reveal a definite journey of the self from innocence to experience and then to wisdom. There is a movement towards 'ripeness' and when this stage is reached, the truth is realized and life again gets reunited to its moorings. Swami matures from the sensuous delight of his childhood years to a sort of metaphysical awareness in The English Teacher, as much as Raju matures from his adolescent recklessness to a transcendental existence. The illusions are abandoned in course of time in favour of some 'stabilizing factor of life' (Mr. Sampath);

Narayan's characters are like caravans journeying along life's varied experiences. Diverse facets of human nature are presented. At times the social order is threatened. But the Comic always presupposes some stable social values against which the instincts and aberrations of the individuals are focused in their awkward postures. In spite of their frailties, there is an elemental simplicity about them. There is a sure human feel in the virtues as well as in the vices of the Malgudians.

What John Falmer says about Shakespeare's comic plays seems to hold good for Narayan's novels also:

The appeal of his comic characters, even as we laugh at them, is to the touch of nature which makes the whole world kin. A delicate balance is constantly sustained in the person of the play between the folly which makes

them laughable and the simplicity which makes them lovable, between the frailties or faults which lay them open to rebuke and a common humanity with ourselves which calls for charity and secures for them an immediate understanding.<sup>1</sup>

All the human follies and idiosyncrasies are the visible manifestations of life, however, absurd or odd these might appear. Nataraj with his 'original Heidelberg', Vasu with his pythons and carcasses, Mali with his story-producing machine, the cousin with his listening capacity, the monosyllabic poet with his epic 'Radhakalyan', Sampath with his film 'Burning of Kama', Ravi with his vision of beauty, Jagon with his philosophy and many other strange creatures crowd the stage of Malqudi. The countless frailties and fantasies of their existence are juxtaposed to project a sense of comic incongruity. They act and react as a result of which the harmony in which the various components of the society exist, gets disturbed. Of course, the comic vision ensures an ultimate return of the erring individuals to the fold of the society. But in all their attempts, however, irrational these may be, there is an intense throb of life which binds them to us in a shared human fate. This understanding of the human situation enables us to accept them not with hatred, but with affection and sympathy.

Narayan's moral stance makes his characters discard their jaundiced visions and realize the reality of things. Through

frequent rise and fall, they move until their experiences culminate in wisdom. After many adventures and misadventures in life the characters return to the all-pervasive reality of Malgudi sadder and saner. And during this journey, Narayan observes the vast spectrum of life.

Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts and The English Teacher appear to constitute a trilogy that envisages the journey of life from the tender, innocent existence of a child to the transcendental awareness of the Beyond. In successive stages of this journey Narayan brings his hero closer and closer to the point of maturity. The childhood pleasures in Swami and Friends and the adolescent emotions of The Bachelor of Arts are effectively caught with numerous comic details. But these are also punctuated<sup>d</sup> with episodes of parting and loss, of trials and tribulations of life. All these experiences, through a process of encounter, interaction and mutual absorption lead to the final moment of journey, a moment that discloses eternity when, as Krishnan in The English Teacher declares, 'the past, present and the future welded into one'.

Swami and Friends presents not only an idyllic Malgudi and the fun and play of its little inhabitants like Swami, Rajam, Mani and Samuel, but also a picture of a child gradually getting groomed to the complex ways of life. Stage by stage Swami gets acquainted not only with different schools, but with cricket and even politics. The flirtations of Swami and his friends with politics and the exploits in cricket, their innumerable adventures are rendered in vivid comic details. The children's world of inno-

cence in Swami and Friends stands as contrast to the adults' world of wiles which has been more pointedly presented in Narayan's later novels. Here we can see the various activities and feel the innocent minds of children. The comic vision is reflected in the children's simple ways of interaction with a world that is of far serious dimensions. The children's participation in the Freedom movement without any mature understanding of the problem is manifested in the burning of clothes and breaking of glass panes in the schools. The incongruity ensues from an interaction between the real world of serious business and the children's world of unadulterated pleasure. For a moment the gravity of the freedom struggle gives place to the play of children's impulses. Similarly the endless debate over the formation of a cricket club, the M.C.C. (Malgudi Cricket Club) with an implicit reference to the world famous Marylebone Cricket Club, the letter to Messrs Binns and many such episodes speak of the children's innocent attempts to enact roles of an adult world. In all their activities and adventures, Swami and his friends quite unwittingly make a parody of the adult world.

But Narayan's intention is to bring Swami, through various stages of experience, to terms with reality. The fantasies of the earlier days gradually recede into the past and Swami moves to experience the first shock of reality in the parting of Rajam, his dearest friend. Swami already has had the full experiences of his childhood, its wonders and excitements. Now when he steps from childhood to adulthood, he needs to be first initiated into the workings of the world; he needs the first feel of 'some natural sorrow, loss or pain'. In the pangs of separation from his friend



Rajam, Swami moves away from the simple pleasure of his childhood years and comes one step closer to maturity.

Swami and Friends ends with this parting between friends, marking the culmination of innocence reflected in children's lives. Logically enough, in the next novel, Narayan leads us along with corridor of time, to the years of youth. In the next move Swami becomes Chandran, the adolescent youth of the college days. The first part of The Bachelor of Arts provides a vivid account of the happy college life, just as the previous novel catalogued the sweet reminiscences of the school life. Here the character is blissfully ignorant of the various constrictions and compulsions of reality. Narayan's task is to shift his character from the plane of innocence and ignorance to that of experience and knowledge. That is why in Swami and Friends the character is made to suffer the first shock of the world in the experience of parting with his intimate friend. In The Bachelor of Arts and The English Teacher, he is to be exposed to further shocks. Accordingly at the end of Part One of The Bachelor of Arts Chandran bids farewell not only to one friend but to all his college friends. A chapter of his life is turned over and he has to enter the portals of the wide world. Whereas Swami is aware of it only in simple, emotional terms, Chandran realizes it not only with an intensity of feeling, but also with a factual understanding of the ways of the world:

... Chandran was aware that he had passed the very last moments in his college life, which had filled the major portion of his waking hours for the last

four years. There would be no more college for him from tomorrow. He would return to it a fortnight hence for the examination and (hoping for the best) pass it, and pass out into the world, for ever out of Albert College. He felt very tender and depressed.

From this moment Chandran moves through a series of experiences till he gets himself finally reconciled to Malgudi. Out of the conservative background of Malgudi, and the assured comforts of home, Chandran makes forays into the outside world. He passes through infatuation and frustration, and comes to know the confusing ways of the world outside. His mind, nurtured by the moral values of an orthodox society, refuses to accept drinks and prostitutes in the metropolitan city of Madras. "This was the first time he had been so close to a man in drink; this was the first time he had stood at the portals of a prostitute's house. He was thoroughly terrified".

His contact with the outside world reveals to him the sham of things. Also no less sham is his brief spell of 'sanyasihood'. Chandran's bewilderment in these encounters speaks of a sensitive heart's predicament in a world of strange forces. But in the comic design such predicament is viewed with fun and sympathy. Chandran returns to Malgudi discarding the illusions of his earlier days, because he realizes that for him his home and Malgudi are the inescapable realities which can comfort and caress.

And once these illusions of earlier days are abandoned, Chandran seriously decides to take up a vocation. In the struggle

for existence he realizes that dreams and fantasies have no place in this world of hard, down-to-earth facts. Subsequently a proposal for a trip to England is dropped, because it is nothing more than an usual 'vague desire' of an adolescent who has just passed his B.A. Stage after stage Chandran gets tuned to the ways of the world and learns to shoulder the responsibilities of life. The carefree life of his college days is a contrast to his mature businessman's attitude when he takes up the agency of the 'Daily Messenger'. His plan for the circulation of the paper seems almost like a military combing of the town with sharp precision. Soon after he is soundly established in his business, he is taken to marry and build his own home. Before he is made a full fledged man of the world, he undergoes the various experiences of pleasures and partings, of agony and ecstasy. Before plunging into the network of human relationships in the real world, he realizes the temporality of all these, perhaps as a prelude to the spiritual lessons of his life.

Chandran rose from the gallery and stood looking at some group photos hanging on the wall. All your interests, joys, sorrows, hopes, contacts and experience boiled down to group photos, Chandran thought. You lived in the college, thinking that you were the first and the last of your kind the college would ever see, and you ended as a group photo; the laughing, giggling fellows one was about the Union now little knew that they would shortly be frozen into group photos.

This recognition of the transitoriness of things finds a more serious treatment in The English Teacher where the character moves out of the bounds of a temporal existence in order to build a bridge with the life beyond, on the plane of the Eternal. At the end of The Bachelor of Arts the character is led to the threshold of the domestic life. But in The English Teacher, he intimately experiences it. In the journey of life another stage is reached.

In The English Teacher Krishnan is none other than Chandran of The Bachelor of Arts. He is just like his other friends who are lost in this wide world, entrapped by their own problems of existence. Chandran reflects nostalgically :

He met so few of his classmates, though they had been two hundred strong for four years. Where were they ? Scattered like spray. They were probably merchants, advocates, murderers, police inspectors, clerks, officers, and what not. Some must have gone to England, some married and had children, some turned agriculturists, dead and starving and unemployed, all at grips with life, like a buffalo caught in the coils of a python ....

In The English Teacher, Krishnan obtains this same awareness. He is entangled in the visious 'grip with life' till he comes to the realm of spiritual experiences.

The English Teacher does not correspond to Narayan's comic design. The action is frequently confined to the domestic

scene or more properly, to the husband-wife relationship. In Swami and Friends and in The Bachelor of Arts opportunities exist for the interaction of various discordant forces, for the display of the incongruity which is at the heart of the Comic. But in The English Teacher, the harmonious relationship between characters are perceived as existing not only in life, but also in death, or life after death.

Krishnan's ordeal of suffering brings him to the realization of the fundamental reality about existence. He reflects :

Wife, child, brothers, parents, friends .... We come together only to go apart again. It is one continuous movement. They move away from us as we move away from them. The law of life can't be avoided. The law comes into operation the moment we detach ourselves from our mother's womb. All struggle and misery in life is due to our attempt to arrest this law or get away from it or in allowing ourselves to be hurt by it. This fact must be recognized. A profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life. All else is false .

It sounds almost like the soliloquy of a tragic hero. Krishnan, after enacting his assigned role on the mundane plane of existence feels the striving within :

I was in search of a harmonious existence and everything that disturbed that harmony was to be rigorously excluded, even my college work. .

and he feels, "I find I can't attain it unless I withdraw from the adult world and adult work into the world of children".

The seriousness and the apparent efficacy of the adult world appear futile in the face of the void of temporal human existence. The bliss of life can perhaps be attained only in the innocence of children. In moving into the children's world, Krishnan completes a full circle. While Raju has to go the hard way for his salvation, for Krishnan, it seems an easier process, for he chooses an esoteric path the typical Indian way of occult. For Krishnan, it is more a readymade solution than the hard way of suffering and self-sacrifice. The episodes of the headmaster and his wife, and the small school of children are beautifully woven into this main plot. As the novel advances, not only does Krishnan mature to a metaphysical awakening, but also the headmaster. Simultaneously the wife of the headmaster, who is little short of a shrew, has also been metamorphosed to 'a greatly chastened person'.

From Swami and Friends to The English Teacher there is a distinct pattern of development as far as the central character is concerned. In spite of the variation in names from novel to novel, one can clearly perceive a chronological account of experiences of an individual beginning from the innocent fun of childhood to the sorrow and wisdom of adult life. Thus Swami, Chandran and Krishnan are the three successive phases of an individual's life -- childhood, adolescence and adulthood respectively. Further, there is a significant movement from the atmosphere of humour and fun towards a sense of pathos and redemption achieved through experiences that are apparently ridiculous and incongruous. It is a pattern that characterizes Narayan's fictional world in novels like The Guide or The Financial

Expert . It is in this sense that the three novels, Swami and Friends, Bachelor of Arts and The English Teacher may be considered as forming a trilogy.

In Mr. Sampath, the Spiritual quest of Srinivas is almost identical with Krishnan's. In the early part of the novel, we find him preoccupied with the metaphysical problem.

Life and the world and all this is passing -- why bother about anything ? The perfect and the imperfect are all the same. Why really bother ?

To attain the state of knowledge or equilibrium that can sustain his existence, Srinivas undergoes various experiences of events as in a phantasmagoria. He not only experiences events that happen to himself but also all the events that happen to all others in the small town of Malgudi. During his travel he comes across many men and women who in unknown ways contribute to his understanding of the mystery as well as the reality of this world.

The problem of communication between the individual and the community is a major concern with Narayan. 'The Banner', which has stopped its publication, resumes once again because it serves as a viable medium of communication. 'The Banner' becomes a forum for calm contemplation for realizing experiences objectively in their real perspectives, when Srinivas is away from Sampath and his sorts. He realizes that the individual and the community, as much as man's within and without, are in eternal conflict :

The Banner has nothing special to note about any war, past or future. It is only concerned with the war that

is always going on between man's inside and outside. Till the forces are equalised, the struggle will always<sup>go</sup> on .

Till the point of ripeness, when the passions will have been spent of the ego and the eccentricities will have reached their climatic stages, human life must take its chalked-out course. At the point of ripeness, the erratic forces will be brought to a halt, the equilibrium will be restored and "the forces are equalised". Srinivas, whose life has been a meeting-ground of all sorts of experiences not only of himself but also of others, gains most from it. For him it has been more of an intellectual progress than spiritual one. (2)

Srinivas in Mr. Sampath and Nataraj The Maneater of Malgudi serve as springboards for the various forces to act and react. Left to themselves, they are passive, peace-loving citizens who seem to have no difficulty in getting integrated with the community. As Raju, Sampath, Margayya and other heroes of Narayan's novels grow into ripeness, so also do these humbler characters like Srinivas, Nataraj, Sastri and Velan. Srinivas partakes of the experiences of Sampath, Ravi, Sohanlal and De Mello as much as Nataraj partakes of those of Vasu. For Nataraj, Vasu represents the force of Evil that is inherent in the world of reality. The First Chapter of The Maneater of Malgudi, builds a picture of peace and stability in the everyday existence of Nataraj as well as that of Malgudi. But the smooth sailing of life is suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Vasu. Malgudi is gripped by a fear psychosis, and the free spirit, the community feeling and the normal business of this small town



remain under temporary suspension. Implicit in this design is a motive to break the complacent attitude of the Malgudians and rouse their dormant inner spirit to fight against the force of Evil. The festival offers such an opportunity when the community is to be reintegrated and the enemy of the community is to be contained. With Vasu's death, the elephant does not face any more danger nor does the festival, and the people's faith in their religious roots is asserted. Nataraj feels confident that :

God Krishna was really an incarnation of Vishnu, who had saved Gajendra ; he would again come to the rescue of the same animal ... .

Sastri interprets Vasu's death along the Bhasmasura myth who was 'unconquerable' and 'who scorched everything he touched, and finally reduced himself to ashes by placing the tips of his fingers on his own head'. For the Malgudians the nightmarish presence of Vasu is a necessity for the reassertion of their community spirit. For Velan and for his fellow villagers of Mangal, Raju's ordeal is not something outside themselves; it also becomes their own spiritual experience. They also fast in sympathy with Raju's suffering.

In Vasu's case it is a blast of his tremendous ego. He terrifies everybody. His attic is full of stuffed animals, and his vocation turns him into a symbol of death. He goes on harassing individuals like Nataraj, the monosyllabic poet and Mr. Sen, the Journalist. He even defies and assaults the police inspector. But his ego swells to its saturation point when he defies the entire

community by planning to injure the temple elephant. Vasu's ego is taken to the height of absurdity and correspondingly his fall becomes absurd and comic.

In the school of life, Narayan's characters learn to discover their own follies and discard their illusions and pseudo values. The compulsions of reality weigh heavy on the characters; Man's ego is trimmed and he matures into a blissful state of knowledge. Margayya, Raju and Jagon, Narayan's three prominent comic heroes demonstrate this process in their respective lives. All of them, through sheer wit and efforts, attain commendable material heights; but in the long run they are made to witness their own monuments crumble and life for them begins anew with a different set of values. Once the fever and the frenzy of the material world are over, the individual's vision of existence gets tuned to the expectations of the world of reality. Both Margayya and Jagon undergo the same painful experience of a spoilt son. Both of them in their own ways pursue the materialistic ends of life. Margayya climbs the social ladder by dubious means such as the publication of the book 'Domestic Harmony' and the dishonest banking business. Dr. Pal, who is Margayya's adviser becomes the evil genius for Balu. Margayya's passionate desire to become rich, reflected in such events as his 'forty days' ritual, leads him to a state of hysteria. His meteoric rise calls for our admiration as well as censure. He shapes things to suit to his own interests and a time comes when he is no more able to extricate himself from the things he has been associated with. Dr. Pal, with all his vulgar obsessions of sex and money moves from being

Margayya's messiah to being the cause of his final ruin. Margayya's successful attempt to rise from the obscurity of his insignificant conservative background to a celebrity in the modern society is a testimony to his cunning. Till Margayya reaches the summit of his success, no morality, no social custom is allowed to come in the way of his ambitions and achievements. His observance of the religious rituals, and publication of 'Domestic Harmony' and his material cravings provide a picture of a funny medley. In him the value-oriented past and the money oriented present simultaneously exist and for a time the illusion of success blinds him to the absurdity implicit in the relationship between these two opposing forces. This illusion is nursed and carried to a point when no longer can it sustain itself and a split soon occurs making Margayya aware of the truth of things. The course of his life moves through two stages. He defies all orthodox values and all norms of decency to attain his materialistic aspirations. It is the struggle of a comic hero striving to assert his individuality in the face of all the odds of the world. But in the next phase of his life, it becomes almost the pathetic preoccupation of a father to contain his spoilt child. The comic hero who can defy the limitations of reality and have his own ways and terms becomes a helpless victim of his own misfortunes, being no longer able to shape things to his desired mould. His humble desire to lift himself out of dire poverty to a position of comfortable means gradually becomes an intense passion for 'wealth'. This frenzy not only swallows his mental existence, but also his very physical existence :

In his home the large safe was filled up, and its door had to be forced in, and then the cupboards, the benches

and tables the space under the cot, and the corners. His wife would hardly pass into the small room to pick up a saree or towel ; there were currency bundles stacked up a foot high all over the floor.

Right after this Balu comes and demands his share of the property. Margayya also learns of Balu's degeneration -- his drinking habits and his flirting with women. As he learns all this, he suffers from a sense of pathetic indecisiveness, because all these things have been, in a way, his own doing. And soon the bang comes razing Margayya's entire fortune to the ground. But simultaneously it restores to him the harmony of life, the inner peace which Margayya has, for quite a long period, deprived himself of. He is united to his borther and son. It seems like a family reunion, made possible through sorrow and an understanding born out of it. Suffering brings Margayya to a state of wisdom and he is now able to see through the veil of illusions. He is prepared to go to the Banyan tree in front of the co-operative bank once again, with his 'old knobby trunk'

and start life afresh. He has not forgotten, and now realizes it with a renewed understanding, that the Banyan tree, the 'old knobby trunk' with its pen and ink bottle are the realities to which he is basically ordained. He realizes the vanity of this gross materialistic world. Like Krishnan and the headmaster in The English Teacher, Margayya seeks an emotional refuge in the innocent world of children. He had neglected this joyous aspect of existence, being blinded by the glitter of money; but now earnestly asks,

"Now get the youngster here. I will play with him. Life

has been too dull without him in this house."

In this state of knowledge when the sham of life has been exposed and abandoned after immense suffering, Margayya is able to build a bridge to the world of innocence.

While for Margayya it is a home-coming, a return to humility, for Jagon it is a spiritual journey. Jagon is a vendor of sweets, a self-proclaimed Gandhian and a curious amalgamation of hypocrisy and sincerity. He has in him an elemental innocence which evokes sympathy in spite of his fads and fancies. He is deeply involved in his own worldly affairs in spite of his frequent pious statements on Gandhi, the Gita and the Upanishads. Yet Jagon is set for a spiritual destination in the journey of a lifetime's experience. When he feels utterly shocked at the shattering of illusions that he has all along lovingly nursed, he feels he has already 'outlived' himself in this mundane world. He must now detach himself from all the routine drudgeries of life and have a 'new janma'. He reduces the price of sweets just out of sympathy for poor people and children, just at a time when his fond hopes about his own son have been betrayed. To a question of the cousin about the reduction of prices, Jagon replies, "I've had enough". The reduction in prices leads to the meeting with the white bearded man and consequently to Jagon's final retreat to the deity. The contact with this man suddenly transforms him, and opens before him hitherto unknown vistas of experience. Ecstatic visions of the entire cosmos flash before him:

He went on talking and Jagon listened agape as if a new world had flashed into view. He suddenly realised how narrow his whole existence had been -- between the

Lawley statue and the frying shop : Mali's antics seemed to matter nought. 'Am I on the verge of a 'new janma ?' He wondered.

But Jagon does not instantly get transformed into a sanyasi who renounces the world in search of higher truths of life. With Jagon it is a gradual process involving pain and conflict. Once his spirit reaches the threshold of the Spiritual, he no more feels crushed by the weight of this world. Eternity begins to unfold before him :

Sweetmeat vending, money and his son's problems seemed remote and unrelated to him. The edge of reality itself was beginning to blur ... .

Jagon renounces the world, but does not forget to take the bank book. He also writes down a cheque for the lawyer's fees and is prepared to arrange a ticket for Grace, if she desires to go back. It seems as if Narayan does not allow his comedy to lose its foothold of the earth, even though the realm of the Spiritual has already extended its invitation. Or perhaps, Jagon has been able to establish the desirable balance of which Srinivas speaks in Mr. Sampath, among various roles as father, father-in-law, shopkeepers and even a 'sanyasi'. As far as Jagon's spiritual transformation coupled with his possession of the bank book is concerned, one would tend to agree with K.R.S. Iyengar that "... the demon has been worsted; but the Deity hasn't arisen yet".<sup>(3)</sup> In the first phase of awareness, Jagon realizes:

An internal transformation had taken place, although he still cared for the shop and house, this latest contact had affected him profoundly.

As this ecstatic spell continues, he triumphantly declares, "I am free man". From the tame docility of his earlier life and from the bondage of his shop and son, he moves to metaphysical experiences. From that height of blissful freedom, he looks upon Mali, Grace and others with sympathy, who are lost in the quagmire of worldly attachments; and dutifully enough, Jagon makes provision for them.

Jagon knows too well that suffering would bring Mali back to sense. He wisely comments, "A dose of prison life is not a bad thing. It may be just what he needs now". Mali's perversion leads him to a height of buffoonery when he tries to manufacture stories with machines. The arrogance in his behaviour with his father, his contemptuous defiance of the sacred traditions drag him to a point where he outgrows himself. Soon the punishment follows to shock him back to sense. Jagon knows the course of things to come when he advises the cousin.

Open the shop at the usual hour and run it. Mali will take charge of it eventually.

Jagon has learnt to discard his weaknesses arising out of his worldly involvements. For his spoilt son Mali, he believes in the efficacy of punishment, or, in other words, of suffering. And as far as Jagon himself is concerned, even though he has not been able to leave this world of attachments completely, he is already bound towards the Spiritual.

Among all the characters of Narayan, Raju's character is most completely and clearly drawn. From the innocent days of

childhood to the days of his ordeal he undergoes innumerable experiences related mainly to an instinctual way of living without any respect for social ethics. In a long series of unscrupulous acts he cuckolds a husband, drives out his mother, forges Rosie's signature and at last plays on the beliefs of innocent villagers. His entire career becomes one of deception and he is gradually led to its height where he must meet the inevitable fate of <sup>being</sup> doomed or being resurrected as it was with the bandit Ratnakar in the Indian mythology. It is because of the inherent goodness in him and the unique compulsion of his mask that Raju is metamorphosed from an imposter to a martyr. His life takes a dramatic turn when he meets Rosie and after this incident, he is engaged in perpetual conflict with the society or the world outside. For the satisfaction of his libidinal instincts he offends not only Marco, but also his mother, uncle and Gaffur and the whole Indian tradition. A small jail sentence for just an ordinary offence does not seem adequate to his ~~expiation~~. His salvation is to be worked out on a far greater scale and he must be led to a further height of sins -- of exploiting the innocent faith of the villagers -- where his sufferings in the process towards redemption will also be correspondingly more intense. And since the transformation is on a spiritual plane, what is warranted is not a decree of jail sentence but a willing acceptance of suffering. To borrow the words of T.S. Eliot:

What we have written is not a story of detection of crime and punishment, but of sin and ~~expiation~~.



In his eventful career, Raju assumes various roles. When one role proves insufficient for him he immediately discards it and takes up a new one until the options are exhausted, and a new possibility begins to offer itself on another plane. With a determined effort, Raju rejects his role of the fake 'Swami' and volunteers to martyr himself for the sake of others:

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.

Here the comic hero ceases to be himself and enters the arena of the Sublime. He transcends his ego, forsakes the physical pleasures of life and from a fake 'Swami' emerges as a saint.

Waiting for the Mahatma with its predominant political theme does not explore the potentialities of the individual's character. The narrative centres round the general theme of Gandhi's movement keeping the individual, the workings of his mind and the gradual development of his character subservient to the compulsion of that theme. That is why the growth of the character is not conspicuously evident in this novel. In spite of so many experiences of the freedom struggle, one still wonders if Sriram has grown from his adolescence. Of course, his marriage with Bharati gets postponed from time to time till he passes the

the test of service and sacrifice and gets the blessings of Gandhi for the marriage. In The Dark Room the comic pattern is very faintly perceived because all attention is focused on Savitri whose pathetic predicament evokes a kind gloom and seriousness. Her feminine helplessness has been presented in poignant terms and it pervades the entire story.

The Painter of Signs is marked by a difference in the treatment of the comic theme. The intensity of feelings and emotions of the deep vibrations of life, that underlie the process of transformation of a character are noticeably absent in this novel. The plot is based on an unusual relationship between Daisy, a family planning zealot with her fanatic idealism, and Raman, a painter of signs still roaming in adolescent recklessness. The relationship which begins with a business transaction temporarily moves to an intimate bond. The claims of the 'deals' gradually disrupt this intimacy and the relationship meets a premature end. From Daisy's idealistic standpoint, this relationship helps her to be wise and humble. She realizes with repentance the betrayal of her emotions and instincts.

At some moments and moods, we say and do things --  
like talking in sleep, but when you awake, you realize  
your folly ... .

The repentance makes her humble : "First time in her life she was humbling herself". And now with this rare humility that comes out of repentance, she can probably devote herself to family planning work with greater dedication. Even though it is not going

to be a spiritual experience for her, it is bound to strengthen her idealistic commitments. What happens afterwards is beyond the scope of this novel.

For Raman, there is no spiritual progress and hence the poignancy that is felt in various trials and tribulations of life in the career of Jagon or Raju is missed here. Compared to theirs, Raman's experience is of minor significance affecting only some adolescent dreams. After undergoing this experience, he discards his earlier sentimental self. O.F. Mathur considers Raman's act of throwing the key, which Daisy wants to be handed over to the watchman, as an 'act of existential defiance of the universe'. He further adds:

One of the movements of the novel seems to be towards a greater degree of self realization by Raman. He is now less a sentimentalist, and his earlier rationalism, partially and temporarily belied by his falling in love with a girl like Daisy, is now developing into a sort of rebelliousness against the Unknown.<sup>(4)</sup>

The intense realization of Jagon or Raju during their final hours of trial and suffering is absent in Raman's life and he does not return to the humility that accompanies such realization. He only returns to the carefree days of his past, **shedding** his earlier sentimentalism:

He looked at the key in his hand. "To hell with it", he said, and hung it into the dry fountain -- an act which somehow produced the great satisfaction of having

his own way at last. He mounted his cycle and turned towards. The Boardless -- that solid, real world of sublime souls who minded their own business.

The illusions over, he returns to the reality of Malgudi, 'that solid real world' of The Boardless. And he even can take pride in having 'his own way at last' by throwing the key to the gutter. But this gesture of Raman in declaring his freedom to have 'his own way' appears childish before the triumphant declaration of Jagon, "I am a free man". Raman's experiences have been far less intense than those of Raju or Jagon or Margayya and hence his realization is not deep and intimate enough to be able to lift the comic to the sublime height of human possibilities.

An overall analysis of Narayan's fiction makes it clear that in his comic vision, comedy transcends itself, as ignorance leads to knowledge, and the temporal yields to the Eternal. In the ripeness of events folly is discarded, illusion is abandoned and knowledge reigns, humility returns. This new awareness born out of suffering brings calm and repose. The gravity and calm that descend into the depths of existence wash out all the clap-trap of the comic hero. The spirit of the comic, in a benign sweep over individuals and the community, assures life once again. Herein lies the triumph of the comic vision.

Narayan's fictional world is circumscribed by a traditional Hindu society where men rather than women hold a superior position. In his novels, Narayan's immediate concern is with the

oddities and eccentricities of men. Women are generally confined to the home and the hearth, and all sorts of taboos and traditions are clamped on them. But as the milieu gradually changes from a strictly orthodox one to that of progress and liberation which comes in the wake of modern civilization, women slowly and subtly begin to assert their independence in the society. Caught between the pressures of the Old and the lure of the New, a few women do venture to realize their potentialities only to face hostility and end up in failure. Narayan is quite aware of the position of women in the society. He says in My Days:

I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of woman as opposed to man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament 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 notion of her independence, her individuality, stature and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances. (5)

Yet, as one notices in The Dark Room, Narayan does not advance his theme of Women's Lib to a decisive resolution, as Ibsen does in A Doll's House. As A. N. Kaul comments:

The point here, however, is not that, unlike Ibsen's heroine, 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 or deed. (6)

Her revolt and her quick retreat are the alternate facets of the predicament that the adventurous Indian woman faces in a society where the orthodox traditions still have considerable influence. This predicament reverberates in Narayan's novels in different degrees. It seems worthwhile to see how far this plight of women contributes to the comic design of Narayan's novels.

Narayan is not preoccupied with romantic love as a theme in his novels. He says in My Days:

I wished to attack the tyranny of love and see if life could offer other values than the inevitable man-woman relationship to a writer. (7)

Narayan's major concern is to bring out the elemental humanness in men and women out of their various relations and reactions and to that end the man-woman relationship has figured in Narayan's fiction. But, The Dark Room is an exception in so far as it concentrates only on the plight of woman locked up within the confines of an orthodox society. This society has nothing to offer her except material refuge. The peace of Savitri's family life gets disturbed when the glamorous Mrs. Shantabai arrives at Malgudi. She proudly declares "If I had a family to hinder me I shouldn't have come here with my application". Shantabai comes as an intruder defying and despising the traditional values. She

dreams of owning a Baby Austin and dismisses films like 'The Ramayan' as sheer mythological non-sense. She flirts with Ramani to promote her selfish interests. She combines her feminine independence with a shrewd opportunism that characteristically belongs to the New civilization. Ramani's romance with her and his willing servility to become a toy in her hands only makes him look ridiculous. To an equal extent, Shantabai evokes our derision. She abandons her drunkard husband and her family and successfully crushes the walls of the doll's house. But she carries her new-found feminine liberty to a perverted height, quite unlike Nora who makes a revolutionary attempt to realize the essential human being in her suppressed self. Shantabai appears comically odd in Malgudi where traditional values govern human relationships. Marayan also does not make Savitri a martyr like Antigone nor a crusader like Nora. But as P.S. Sundaram suggests:

Rufusing to be a discarded drudge, Savitri goes out of the house, not dramatically banging the door like Nora, but fleeing like a hunted animal ... Freedom is a fine concept but creatures like Savitri can do only one thing with it -- commit suicide. (8)

She moves from the darkness of her house to the darkness of the temple, both the house and the temple being considered as sacred social institutions, in spite of the oppression they inflict. But parallel to the husband-wife relationship of Savitri and Ramani, there is another relationship between Mari and his wife, Pooni, Mari is a blacksmith-cum-burglar, who maintains a strange but

sweet relationship with his dominating wife. Their peculiar world seems to be a pleasing liberation from the oppressive inhibitions and the accompanying hypocrisies of the middle class society. The Dark Room, of course, does not present any particular creed about women. It rather presents the novelist's aesthetic realization of the predicament of women in a particular social context. In different forms and degrees it has figured in Narayan's other novels. But because of a society that respects women, Narayan does not make his women characters and their mistakes and moral lapses explicit targets of ridicule.

Discarding the austere life of a widow and leaving her son to the care of strangers, Shanti in Mr. Sampath accepts a life of easy morals in the tinsel, celluloid world and thus moves to one extreme of permissiveness. But her return to the fold of the society is equally dramatic. In rejecting the jaundiced vision of her earlier film life, she now prepares herself to move to another extreme of religious austerity :

I am sick of this kind of life and marriage frightens me. I want to go and look after my son, who is growing up with strangers. Please leave me alone and don't look for me. I want to change my ways of living. You will not find me. If I find you pursuing me, I will shave off my head and fling away my jewellery and wear a white 'saree'. You and people like you will run away at the sight of me. I am, after all, a widow and can shave my



head and disfigure myself.

Her arrival in the Sunrise Studio creates sensation as well as complications. She becomes a mistress of Sampath who is also a house holder and coincidentally she also turns to be Ravi's lost vision of beauty. Shanti soon becomes the centre of the plot and various human drives and deeds related to her create an atmosphere of incongruity, which is represented in concrete physical terms in the scene of kidnapping. But in the midst of all these confusions, Shanti, quite like a typical Indian woman, lets herself carried on by the events. She flirts with Sampath and moves with a handbag made of the hood of a cobra. She becomes a glamorous film actress, but stupidly sells herself. Yet underneath all her immoral acts there lurks a certain naivety which draws sympathy rather than harsh judgment.

This attitude is evident in the character of Rosie in The Guide. Opposing compulsions weigh heavily on her life, propelling her along a path usually unchartered for women in an Indian society. Having been born into a family of temple dancers who "are viewed as public women", she has no option but to seize any opportunity of marriage. Her marriage is quite unconventional and funny. Rosie recollects,

I had myself photographed clutching the scroll of the University citation in one hand, and sent it to the advertiser. Well, we met, he examined me and my certificate, we went to a Registrar and got married .

She marries an archaologist husband with no human warmth :

Dead and decaying things seemed to unloose his tongue and fire his imagination, rather than things that lives and moved and swung their limbs.

Confined to a mechanical existence, Rosie's instincts for dance cannot find fulfilment till she finds a patron in Raju and moves out of the walls of the family. Marco's apathy and indifference towards her feelings and desires take such a cruel form that Rosie readily receives the reader's sympathy. As events proceed, she gradually rises to fame. But, all through, her passion for dance has been so intense and her devotion has been so sincere that her aberrations are viewed with kind understanding. Time and again her repentant self is brought to the forefront of the narrative through her repeated brooding over her husband. C.D. Narasimhaiah 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. (9)

During all her unethical transactions she remains the figure of a docile, innocent Indian woman and her inner self seems not to have been stained by what she does on the surface. After Raju's imprisonment she becomes a completely pathetic figure, being virtually alone in the world. She tries her best to save Raju, which she considers an obligation and duty. Her sins, if not from an ethical,

yet from an existential standpoint, are vindicated and her suffering combined with her moral lapses makes her strikingly different from other women characters in Narayan's novels. Her predicament verges almost on the tragic.

Bharati, the young heroine of Waiting for the Mahatma, comes full way out of the traditional inhibitions and chooses a public life dedicating herself to the service of Gandhi. It is a conscious attempt made by an inspired girl and even though in pre-independence India the orthodox taboos still hold good, Bharati is never made the butt of ridicule. Rather her sacrifice, purity and humility bestow on her character a certain dignity in spite of her sharp divergence from the common code.

As Malgudi registers changes in urbanization and material advancement, a liberated atmosphere begins to prevail. The age has its own slogans and shibboleths and family planning is one of them. The spirit of liberation has been manifested in the character of Daisy, whose dynamism controls all the events in The Painter of Signs. Whereas Rosie has the traditional woman in herself in her dependence on the men folk (first on Marco, then on Raju), Daisy is strikingly modern in her spirit of independence. Even in the Malgudi of the 70s Daisy appears absolutely unconventional and she shatters all our routine impressions of woman. She has a "sort of unmitigated antagonism to conception" that flagrantly violates the traditional Indian notion that a woman's glory lies in giving birth to a large number of children. Ironically, this family zealot is always alienated from the institution of family in some

way or other. She gets suffocated in a joint family into which she is born and feels that her individuality is strangulated. Right from the age of thirteen, when the prospective bridegroom visits her, she becomes conscious of her humiliating status as a doll :

And then they seated me like a doll, and I had to wait for the arrival of the eminent personage with his parents.

At this very moment, she decides to break the walls of the doll's house. She offends the groom on his face and thus also offends a whole orthodox tradition. In her early years she flees her family and in later years, unable to rid herself of the feelings of guilt, she fails at translating her courtship into marriage. Somehow or other she cannot get herself reconciled to the idea of a family. In the familiar background of Malgudi, she is a bizzare figure. "She had no taboos of any kind" and "the only topics she could appreciate are birth control, population and allied subject".

She roams the countryside with her mission of family planning :

If she found an upturned packing case or a stone-slab, she sat on it, cross-legged and never stirred until the bus came, without saying a word or noticing the people who stared at her. In order to be unnoticeable, she wore a saree of the drabbest shade, never used any powder or make up, and did her hair up indifferently, and if it was ruffled in the wind, she smoothed it out with her palm.

She is the 'New Woman', on whom no social inhibitions are clamped. With rare exception to her emotionalism at times, Daisy can be said to be nearer to the female version of Marco. Both of them are clearly not cut out for a married life; both of them are heart and soul dedicated to their projects -- one to the archaeological survey in the Mempi hills, the other to the cause of family planning. In Daisy, the cold professionalism of Marco and the revolutionary zeal of Bharati exist together. If Savitri and Rosie revolt against their doll's houses, Daisy seems to carry this revolt farther, even to a hysterical height. If The Dark Room is 'an early testament of the Women's Lib movement',<sup>(10)</sup> The Painter of Signs is its more pronounced representation.

William Walsh thinks that in Narayan's novels .... the women rather than the old represent 'Custom and Reason' and know 'what is and what is not proper'.<sup>(11)</sup>

The sweet old world of Malgudi is sustained by grandmothers and aunts and by their innumerable superstitions. The wives of Spinivas, Sampath and Nataraj, the very pictures of docility, are still devoted to their domestic drudgeries. Into such a pattern of traditional life the adventures, or perhaps the mis-adventures, of women like Shanti, Rosie and Daisy, do not instantly fit in and hence they evoke varied responses from the readers -- wonder and sympathy, doubt and disapproval and at times mild ridicule. They are not rebels as Nora is. They merely escape the suffocation of an orthodox society and hence they do not have any definite mission and their movements are haphazard. Daisy, who carves out her life with a singular determi-

nation reminds us of the uncompromising idealism of Alceste in Moliere's The Misanthrope. But in her iconoclastic views and rigid unconventional habits, in the particular social context of Malgudi, she is a travesty of womanhood.

In spite of their lapses and violations of social norms, Narayan's women characters evoke a sympathetic response. The contribution of these characters to the comic design of the novels, though small, is significant. Like their male counterparts, they also return to the fold of the society, a little sadder and wiser. Savitri returns to her children and husband and for the time being at least it is a happy family again. Shanti, once her illusions are over, returns to take care of her son. Experience chastens Rosie to accept a life of calm resignation.

The Malgudi drama possibly would not have been completed without these women characters, since they constitute an inalienable part of the society and thus are subjected to the influences and pressures of the changing times. Narayan is hesitant to extract the comic potentials out of his women characters to the extent he does it out of his men. The barriers of orthodoxy and social conventions forbid a woman to choose her own way to realize her individuality. Those who have crossed their domestic frontiers even for reasons which can be defended or excused are easily derided by the tradition-ridden society. The helplessness of their plight and the traditional concept of dignity in women have obstructed them to rise to the heights of the Comic; yet they have been instrumental in exploiting the comic tension in the novels and also

in affecting at times a desired balance between the serious and the comic which is typical of Narayan's narrative technique.

In Narayan's novels, the characters -- the men folk to a greater extent and the women folk to a lesser extent -- swerve from the normal path. The men characters move along erroneous paths to realize their ambitions and instincts. On the other hand the women characters move along unchartered ways, as far as the orthodox Indian tradition is concerned, in quest of some relief from the suffocation or oppression of domestic life. As they move, they clash with the established codes of a traditional society and thus appear funny, pathetic and absurd. They are ultimately led to a point where their whims and fancies can no more sustain them. When the stage of ripeness is reached, their illusions crumble and normal reality is restored. Narayan's comic vision ensures normalcy and harmony as his men and women ultimately and inevitably mature into wisdom.

CHAPTER - V

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CHAPTER - VI

LANGUAGE TECHNIQUE OF THE NARRATIVES

The artist, says James Joyce, remains like God in his creation, within or behind, or beyond and above his handi-works; so does R. K. Narayan remain, silent yet eloquent, unseen yet ever present behind the language of his fiction. 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: <sup>(1)</sup> "The simplicity of the dialogues and first person-narration is commonly adequate mirror of reality. His simplicity is no deceptive that V. Y. Kantak finds his language casual, convincing, objective, modest but "Closest to the language of newspaper and the Sunday Weekly". <sup>(2)</sup>

The language seldom obstrudes and it neither detracts from nor adds to R. K. Narayan's qualifications as an artist. 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 social. 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 addressed his pupils as donkeys and traced their genealogy on either side with thoroughness. <sup>(3)</sup> There are many scenes of anger in his novels but the strongest curse is "You earth-worm". <sup>(4)</sup> Sometimes, Narayan's use of English slips. The farmer-spiritualist of The English Teacher

uses the word "epigraphist" (5) and the first person narrator says :  
"All right, why not you let me take you both ?" (6) But unlike Forster, Narayan is not afraid to let his characters that the hours away. He is careful in not using much Indian terminology. He is very conscientious in indicating the general meanings of the words he uses. Nearly all are names for food, clothing, furniture or vehicles. It is only in The Man Eater of Malgudi that Narayan uses religious and philosophical terms relying on the reader's basic knowledge of those terms.

Narayan is a person, who maintains privacy. He rarely comments in print on his writing or intentions and issues he deals with in his novels. (7) His power to communicate is based purely on the resourcefulness of English and his admirable success in artistically blending it with local colours. He presents details of day-to-day life with an air of authenticity, a realistic setting and a concrete texture. It consists of minute details of the situation.

Narayan says :

English has proved that if a language has flexibility 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. All that I am able to confirm, after nearly thirty years of writing, is that, it has served my purpose admirably of conveying unambiguous by the thoughts and acts of a set of perso-

nalities who flourish in a small town located in a corner of South India. (8)

A creative writer has to struggle hard for communicating his vision honestly in a language other than his own. English is successfully adopted by our writers. It has been a vehicle for expressing the subtle nuances of our thought and tradition. It has been a better medium of creative effort than our own regional languages and it has audience all over our country. Our novelists have made laudable efforts to mix it up with native colours. It is due to their creative brilliance that English is not a handicap with them. Summing up this aspect of the problem of the Indo-Anglian writer C. Paul Verghese writes :

The Indian social, cultural, and linguistic set up has affected the feature 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. And the Indianness of it consists in its cultural overtones and undertones and not a legalization of ignorant misuse of English. (9)

Narayan uses the spoken English of a small town in the Tamil State Country-side. His style is similar to Tamil usages and there is also use of Indian English idioms. His Tamil usage is most obvious in the use of verbs. The interrogative 'have' is often used without 'got' as in "How many sons and daughters have you ?" (10) Another common construction is the use of the imperative 'let' at the

beginning of a sentence. "Let him demand them immediately if he wants betal leaves also."<sup>(11)</sup> And "Let her not worry, but just look into a mirror and satisfy herself."<sup>(12)</sup> New composite words such as 'nose-led', line-cleared, have been used at times. One such composite word is in The Guide : Do not eat off all that eating stuff on the shelves.<sup>(13)</sup>

The telescoping of words is the common features 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"<sup>(14)</sup> It is also in some abbreviated sentences such as "Saffron stock will last only another day."<sup>(15)</sup>

Many Indian-English idioms commonly appear in Narayan's writing : 'It is still paining me', I never knew that ...'. If only be started cross-examining the teachers, the teachers would be nowhere', 'mug up', behave like a rowdy.<sup>(16)</sup> There are use of Tamil proverb : 'She signed deeply and said', 'A lot of people are saying that. After the rent control case ...'. Oh shup up 'I cried impatiently', what nonsense is this :

You may close the mouth of an over, but how can you close the mouth of a town 'she said, quoting a Tamil proverb'.<sup>(17)</sup>

Another use of Tamil proverb is : "And what would one do with many mansions?" asked Jagan and quoted a Tamil verse which said that even if eighty million ideas float across your mind, you cannot wear more than four cubits of cloth or eat more than a little measure of rice at a time".<sup>(18)</sup> The English catch-phrase', 'I want to be of

service in my own way' has been used with equal felicity by Sampath, Jagdish and the elderly cousin in The Vendor of Sweets.

The purpose of the use of this colloquial medium is for a better expression. In Narayan there is no break down of English intimate conversation within a family. There is a great ease in such conversations. 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?' Swaminathan had not noticed his father's presence, and now writhed ~~awkwardly~~ as he answered, 'Nothing oh, nothing father.'<sup>(19)</sup>

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 evident from the conversations that these are in Tamil. There is such another example in The Dark Room, in the conversation between Ramani servants. Here the English comes very close to the regional language Tamil :

What should a father do? I merely slapped the boy's check and he howled as I have never heard any one howl before, the humbug. 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.<sup>(20)</sup>

A particular kind of wit is derived from the fluency of the use of Narayan's language in shorter conversations and exchanges between the characters. "Here is the vessel I borrowed yesterday, 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. (21)

Srinivas tarried and said : 'I am in a hurry'.

Who is not ? asked the old man promptly. Every creature is in a hurry, every bird is in hurry, every fellow I meet is in a hurry. The sun is in a hurry, the moon is in except this slave of God I suppose. (22)

Sometimes Narayan's language is highly emotional. The English Teacher is such a book of personal and semi-mystical experience of the main character. There are several beautiful passages. One of them is as follows :

It was ineffably lovely -- a small pond with blue lotus, a row of stones leading to the water. Tall casuarina tree swayed and murmured over the banks. (23)

Krishnan, the English Teacher, becomes poetic and quotes to Shushila the whole of Wordsworth's poem, 'she was a phantom of Delight.' This provides an example of the assimilation of English literature and poetry into an Indian experience. Narayan beautifully described Krishnan's first visit to the house of Sushila :

I visualised her all a 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. (24)

This shows Narayan's mastery over handling of apt language similar to the experience of a poet like Wordsworth. The poem 'She was a phantom of Delight' is source of the light and shade imagery throughout The English Teacher in the context of Sushila. Narayan's use of imagery 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. (25)

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." (26) 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." (27)

Narayan's style is characterised by its particularity and concreteness of reference. The individuality of the use of words can be seen first of all in certain favourite adjectives. "Bare" is used to denote a meal : 'Don't blame me if the meal is bare', 'bare rice'. 'Coarse' and 'raw' indicate grief : 'The coarse, raw pain he had felt at the sight of Mali on that day remained petrified in some vital

centre of his being'. 'Elegant' describes different meanings : 'elegant wink', 'elegant slip of coffee'. The adjournment lawyer 'elegantly' avoids imprisonment. Krishnan's father makes his own ink and prizes for its 'elegant' shade. His 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 as in the following lines :

Savitri squatted down and wiped the dust off the dolls and odd 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 ... (28)

Narayan uses a suggestive style for the economy of narration. It is always suggestion and not the description of emotion. Only gesture is significant as when Savitri returns to her family and makes her place in it. She offers to serve her husband his meal forgetting all humiliations :  
\*The Car sounded its horn outside, Kamla 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 ...' (29)

Savitri stood at the passage for sometime. She stepped into the dining room and stood before him, watching his leaf, she noticed a space in the corner of the leaf : 'Shall I call for some more beans ?'

'No' Ramani said without looking up. 'Curd' ? Savitri went to the cup board and took hold of the curd vessel ... (30)

The same suggestive style describes in detail Sushila'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 shrivelling heat has haked her face into a peculiar tinge of pale yellow. The purple cotton saree which I bought her on another is wound round her and going to burn with her.

Once again the same description to give minute details :

We are on our homeward march, a silent and benumbed gang. As we cross Nallappa's Grove once again, I can't resist the impulse to turn and look back. Flames appear over the wall ... It leaves a curiously dull pain at heart. There are no more surprises and shocks in life, so that I watch the flame without agitation. For me the greatest reality in this and

nothing else ... Nothing else will worry or interest me in life hereafter. (31)

Thus, the detached listing of details i.e. the half dozen flies, the yellowish tinge of Sushila's face, the purple saree, the hairy man under a tree perfectly conveys the numbness caused by grief rather than grief itself. There is deliberate use of pedestrian language as 'brought and dumped' 'a silent and benumbed gang'. For me the greatest reality is this and nothing else ... Nothing else will worry or interest me in life hereafter' is capable of conveying philosophical thoughts and metaphysical speculations better than the full length description on such occasions.

Narayan is an artist of language and he has an insight into the psychology of his characters and people. He always begins with the concrete and describes the concrete, the particular and the historic, experienced and observed fact. He himself at once places writes that it is one of his principles to compress the range of observation and subject the particle to an intense scrutiny. (32)

William Walsh sums up Narayan's use of English language in these words :

Narayan uses a pure and limpid English, easy and natural in its run and tone but always an evolved and conscious medium without the existing, physical energy -- sometimes adventitiously injected that marks the writing of the west Indians. Narayan's language is beautifully adapted to communicate a different, an Indian sensibility ..... (33)

Narayan handles most critical situation with a fine touch of language. 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 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 ... The girl looked up with her teardrenched face ... 'The moment she gets a telegram that the line is clear' said uncle and added : 'We are not the sort to let down our sisters' ... uncle carried the trunks and she carried the basket ... I stood on the step watching. At the threshold stood Rosie. I was afraid to turn round and face her, because I was crying... (34)

Each word is in tune with their task and every movement is firmly and truthfully expressed. Here is an expert manipulation of language and tone. He never ignores his instinct for limitation in structure and address it is moderate.

Similar success in the treatment of language is found in the scene where Raju describes 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 ... I pleased him, he opened his purse .... with limited language ... (35)

Narayan is able to evoke the common rhythm of life. The lively scenes, the absurdities, the pretensions, the inner and outer excitements and the traditional make up of the situations grow fuller and deeper with the touch of his gentle irony. The entire description seems authentic. The characters vanish into life giving us a strong sense of unrealised lives at the end of his every story. Narayan is objective in the treatment of his subject matter. He can cause to work as miracle even a modest language resource with honesty and confidence. He sticks to standard English and never attempts to convey the flavour of Tamil or Indian language. There is nothing sort of distortion of the rules of English grammar. 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 of Indo-English idioms.

Narayan has made a personal confession that English as a language has served his purpose admirably :

English has been with us for over a century and a half. I am particularly fond of the language. I was never aware that I was using a different medium, a foreign language when I wrote in English, because it came to me very easily. I cannot explain how ... (36)

Narayan's language is easy and graceful, direct and straightforward. It is remarkable for an economy of expression. The vocabulary is adequate to deal with the range of subject matter. 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 contains lucidity, extreme purity, simplicity, colour, verve and exactitude in writing. The idiom of speech adds casualness and realism. The underlying secret irony in his language is gentle and smooth. It hardly pricks 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 ... (37)

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. (38)

The use of Narayan's English language is clear and easy. It puts the reader in tune with the leisurely, philosophical and ironic sketches of men and events. It is this style of his writing that makes the simple things of life to have a special charm and quality. His men and events stand out clearly. He touches everything with the

surety and an instinct of an acute observer of human follies.

At times his language is even coarse while 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 analysis, specially of the troubled or the miserable heart. He looks at life with a detachment, ignores its darker aspects and seems to enjoy every moment of its apparently lighter side.  
(39)

Narayan is a writer of delicate and soft feelings. The distant and the unknown are as dear to the novelist as the near and known ones. He is sometimes humourous, sometimes compassionate and sometimes even bitterly satirical above all he is a charming storyteller for which he derives raw material from South India, but he touches every Indian heart by his insight into life and human nature. He takes life easy and refuses to go deep into human problems. Soon after the commencement of his story he takes the reader into the scene of action with no time lost. The real test of fiction is its readability and it is there with Narayan. He has a striking start, and engaging middle, and a satisfactory end.

Narayan's dialogue is not normally peculiar to his characters' family background, education, age and social status. They all speak alike. He individualises his characters, and as much they are memorable. He has ability to bring a character to life with a few deft-strokes of his pen. C.D. Narasimhaiya rightly observes :

Indeed the world makers and world-foresakers never ceased to assume 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 every one, everything, but mainly for what fell within his province. And his province was the South Indian middle class ... (40)

Whatever be the weaknesses of Narayan, he is normally able to conceal them behind an attractive and familiar style of narration. But at least in his writing he inherits his Tamilian volubility. He not only uses language to push on the story but make the best use of English language. His another important feature of language is that he takes his readers directly into the middle of life he presents. He rarely attempts to evolve an Indian English in his dialogues. On the other hand his purpose is served by copy-book English which suits his dialogue and provides it a better effect. After all Narayan's language has a strong popular appeal. It is significant in giving a true picture of the social life of India.

The narrative method of Narayan has the advantage of flexibility. 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 master pieces in its time. Narayan has also adopted third person narration because in his use of the third person, he has made the 'I' of his narrative prone either to self-glorification or pretentious humility. However, both narrative techniques appeal equally to his readers. At places it has accommodated his self-revelation. 'I' of the third person narration becomes a depersonalised expression of the suffering modern sensibility. Earlier writers tend to use the story within a story device, allowing the 'I' self-expression but confining it within the frame-work of an outer third person narrative.

It is this method that he adopts in The Guide. It is used to give perspective and variety to the narrative. He is able to give expression of private feelings. It has helped to safeguard his detachment while depicting highly subjective personal impressions. He portrays everything without a single direct comment from himself as narrator :

His beard now caressed his chest his hair covered his back, and around his neck he wore a necklace of prayer-beads. His eyes shone with softness and compassion, the sight of wisdom emanated from them ... He protested to Velon one day, 'I' am a poor man and you are poor man, why do you give me all this ? You must stop it. (41)

With equal skill, he manages to convey to his readers rather more of the general situation than Raju (the self-styled 'Sanyasi')



is able to see. He concentrates third-person narrative on a single view point.

The 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 mannerism. He also records and analyses hidden movements of feeling and thought. But characters get many of their best effects through dialogue. Dialogue is an element which imports into the novel something of the dramatist's discipline and objectivity. The dialogue of a craftsman like Narayan manages to be natural and at times extremely funny:

"Donot you feel sleepy ?" Raju asked, 'No, Sir -- keeping awake is no big sacrifice, considering what you are doing for us.' 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. (42)

Narayan describes middle class people with comfortable middle-class fluency of English. He has even wider range of idioms and phrases used by all sorts of people. The conversational inter-change is quite remarkable. 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. He shapes a character and makes him what he is. One can breathe and smell and feel the atmosphere of a small town, Malgudi.

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CHAPTER - VII

C O N C L U S I O N

R. K. Narayan's outlook is primarily comic. It is comic in a broad philosophic sense, which enables him to weave all the bizaree events into a beautiful vision of life; in which every small event, every small acquaintance, however, insignificant and absurd it might seem, turns out to have a meaningful role in the eternal scheme of things.

Narayan's vision is shaped by a strong Indian sensibility that precludes any possibility of tragedy, because man here is safely placed in a cosmic hierarchy with relations extending not only to his fellow men but also to Nature and God, not only in time and space but also beyond time and space. In the scheme of things man is responsible to God as much as God is responsible to man. In hours of human helplessness God's grace comes to help, as it is symbolically affirmed in The Man Eater of Malgudi. In such a universe man is never driven to the 'boundary situation'<sup>(1)</sup> so as to feel completely abandoned. The Indian world view holds that the world and the various human attachments are 'maya', and failure on the mundane level does not necessarily bring any awful sense of tragedy. For the Indian, man is finally, not alienated from but united with the universe or with the source of all creation. With the cycle of cause and effect ('Karma') operating from birth to rebirth, and man assured of the ultimate spiritual reunion, no final pessimism is possible. Moreover, the Indian traditional society by means of its rigid social and moral codes maintains a keen sense of social cohesion thus making any

alienation or disintegration impossible.

Malgudi comedy underlines this traditional Indian belief in the ultimate integration. This also corroborates the views of critics like Potts and Northrop Frye with regard to the Comic. Potts believes that there is in man's character a compelling tendency which seeks integration with the life of his society, to merge with others and to be a part of something greater than the individual self :

The conviction that the individual is unimportant except as a part of something wider; the impulse to mix, and to seek common ground with the rest of one's kind ...<sup>(2)</sup>

Potts calls this, 'social sense'<sup>(3)</sup> which forms the basis of comedy.

This social sense is the dominant motif in Narayan's novels. In them "the social and moral world are contiguous" and "the social world is properly conceived a moral world. ...."<sup>(4)</sup> The emphasis is not so much on puritan moral values as it is on a social consciousness rooted in traditional morality that nevertheless allows concessions to human frailties. To quote Northrop Frye :

Comedy usually moves towards a happy ending, and the normal response of the audience to a happy ending is 'this should be'; which sounds like a moral judgment. So it is, except that it is not moral in the restricted sense, but social. Its opposite is not the villainous but the absurd.<sup>(5)</sup>

Characters like Sampath and Vasu are dismissed because they become absurd in the Malgudi setting. At the heart of Narayan's comedy there is an awareness of absurdity. Even though in his novels there is a perceptible moral bias, "one feels that the social judgment against the absurd is closer to the comic norm than the moral judgement against

the wicked". (6) In his comic world the characters are purged of their absurdities and are integrated with the society.

But through these absurd characters -- printer, poet, man-eater, guide, financial expert, sweets vendor --- Narayan weaves his Malgudi comedy that follows the traditional comic pattern of order-disorder-order. Narayan's heroes, notwithstanding their stupidity, rebel against all social constrictions which thwart their freedom. Their actions embody their existential defiance against a hostile universe. But in the process they fall into incongruous and absurd situations in relation to their society. They overstep their limits and forget the reality of their stations like the pretty wife of the shoemaker in Lorca's. The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife, or take to a hedonistic credo of living, <sup>like</sup> the Falstaff or like Don Quixote fighting imaginary battles. The characters work out their various schemes, pursue their grandiose ambitions in the orthodox, tradition-bound society of Malgudi. All these take place in a special world where the established roles of the society are in temporary suspension, upto the final comic resolution when various human forces are brought to the orbit of social equilibrium. The Malgudi society has tremendous resilience to withstand all these pressures because there is a built-in restorative mechanism in it that at the opportune moment gears itself back to order.

If the 'disorder' is due to man against his society, the ultimate order in the comic framework is due to man wedded to his society. In Narayan's fiction man and society are symbiotically related and the bliss that comes at the end is the outcome of this rela-

tionship. Not only man alone emerges chastened; the society also gets affected in the sublimation process. Narayan's comedies register this movement "from illusion to reality",<sup>(7)</sup> and in the process characters as well as the society are born into a sort of new life. This is a form of the comic archetype of death-resurrection. Frye's comment on this ritual pattern in comedy is relevant in this context:

The ritual pattern behind the catharsis of comedy is the resurrection that follows the death, the epiphany or manifestation of the risen hero. In Aristophanes the hero who often goes through a point of ritual death, is treated as a risen god, hailed as a new Zeus, or given the quasi-divine honours of the Olympic victor. In New Comedy the new human body is both a hero and a social group.<sup>(8)</sup>

Narayan's novels can be said to be in the pattern of the New Comedy. The individual traverses along a path of follies and misadventures seemingly throwing the social stability into peril, and at last expiating for his blunders, returns to the fold of the society. In view of the assured security of the Malgudi society, the apparent disasters resulting from the unbridled impulses and instincts of the comic hero only serve to build up the comic tension. The narrative implies this sense of social security, and in the context of this awareness the erratic acts and adventures of characters in Narayan's fiction arouse laughter.

In all the chaos and confusion, in all the disorderliness that we perceive in his fictional world, Narayan systematically shapes the emotional response of his readers towards the final end.



He, by means of clever contrivance, weaves the disorderly episodes into a significant pattern within a framework of moral or aesthetic awareness. This pattern may suggest either a reintegrated society or a repentent individual. The individual's acts and aberrations are judged against certain pre-existing values implied in the narrative. The narrative shapes the reader's response or attitude, for it contains, as Bradbury suggests, 'a running act of persuasion'. Bradbury says :

Our means of engagement with that world is through a running act of persuasion which may be stabilised as a 'tone', a rhetorical wholeness or narrative posture devoted not only to convincing us that there is here a whole world operational and worth attention but that it is *assessable* and comprehensible only if a certain attitude is taken to it. (9)

This 'narrative posture' in Narayan implies an awareness of moral norms of social manners. And because of the subtle assurance of the narrative posture, the reader is able to laugh at the eccentricities and absurdities of the characters. It is worthwhile to quote Maynard Mack in this context:

Even a rabbit, were it suddenly to materialize before us without complicity, could be a terrifying event. What makes us laugh is our secure consciousness of the magician and his hat. (10)

Narayan's comic vision, like the magician, gives us the assurance that all *shall* be well despite all the follies and misadventures of his

heroes.

Narayan uses irony as a rhetorical weapon to wake his characters out of their dreams and thus to bring them back to the fold of the society. Narayan does this by an affectionate understanding of the various existential compulsions which confront his characters. It "accepts life and human nature"<sup>(11)</sup> and in that sense it is different from satire. Satire "does not accept, it rejects and aims at destruction"<sup>(12)</sup> whereas Narayan's comedy aims at correction and integration as it evokes ridicule and laughter.

There is a distinct low mimetic bias in Narayan's comedy. It operates within a definite social framework with roots in traditional and moral values. The historical and geographical details about Malgudi and the behavioural details of its people convey a vivid impression of Malgudi's small, docile society. The reader can feel immediately its "weighty ecology"<sup>(13)</sup> so that the human comedy that he witnesses here becomes a part of his intense, intimate experience. The characters who are brought to the stage of Malgudi are ordinary men and women with common human ambitions and flaws. Margayya, Raju, Jagon, Vasu and many others are bound to their obsessions and thus exist in states of 'ritual bondage'.<sup>(14)</sup> These obsessions relate to either money or son or other common human aspirations. Because of these shared premises between the characters in the novel and the readers in terms of the ordinary human longings, Narayan's comedy is rendered affectionate and intimate. Rather than bear the satiric venom of Swift, it combines the good humour of Fielding and Wodehouse,

the moral awareness of Jane Austen and the humour and pathos of Chekov.

Narayan's comedy does not, of course, ignore the sad things of life which are at the very root of human existence. But these are woven into the very soul of comedy. It admits the painful fact of man's living in an ironical universe. Whether it is the painful process of ageing, or the death of a grandmother, whether it is the sad disintegration of Jagon's dreams and ideals or the compelling ordeal of Raju -- all these are woven into the fabric of comedy and as inevitable facts of life, these are accepted not with bitterness but with humility. The Comic always ensures a triumph of life over death, separation, over all that negates life in a social context. The sorrows make the characters humble and wise and this is the vision that the comic spirit reveals. With this humility and wisdom, it becomes again a family or social reunion or at times, as with Raju, a final transcendence.

Whether it is a story of children as in Swami and Friends or a story of an old man as in The Vendor of Sweets, the reader is straight carried into the heart of the scene without any aid of the author or the narrator. He wins the citizenship of this world and emotionally gets involved in the events and in the characters. Any authorial interjection or any comment of the narrator would have conditioned the reader's response creating a barrier between the reader and the fictional reality. Neither Narayan, nor his language which is a 'plain mirror', creates this barrier. In Mr. Sampath we accept Srinivas, the narrator, because of his close proximity to us. The narrative technique wants us to see things as Srinivas sees it. One

may say that the reader identifies himself with Srinivas as much as Narayan does it with the latter, that "The author is present in every speech given by any character who has had conferred upon him, in whatever manner, the badge of reliability". (15) Through Srinivas, the human comedy is brought home to the reader. This is made possible by the occasional comments and the philosophical reflections of Srinivas. This technique has sometimes the danger of sacrificing the dramatic tension. Save The Man-eater of Malgudi where Nataraj could well have been the narrator because of his proximity to the common reader, no other novel could have justifiably employed any of its characters as narrator. The case of Jagon narrating the story of his own life or Raju describing his last days would have reduced the comic tension to a great extent. In both the cases it would have slid into the sentimental or the melodramatic. But when there is no such medium as the narrator or the voice of the author to carry the reader, the scene is an open one where the reader can have a sweeping vision of all the things happening both inside and outside the characters without ever being biased or prejudiced or in any way conditioned by any particular point of view. He sees events in all their aspects and with an unclouded vision perceives the inherent comedy. In The Guide Narayan makes an innovation in his narrative technique. Through the autobiographical narration of Raju's life from his innocent childhood to the crucial turning point, we are persuaded to see the joys of his early days, the adventure of his adolescence through his eyes so that his willing martyrdom can be understood in the perspective of the spiritual journey of his life.

The 'authorial silence' in Narayan's fiction is not absolute void, for "though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear".<sup>(16)</sup> The objective narrator always remains in the wings to guard us against going along blind alleys of judgment and enjoyment. In this context Narayan's neutrality is based on a strong sense of the traditions, on the accepted decorum and decency of life in a middle class family as well as in a small town. Through the very treatment of plot and particularly through his delicate irony, Narayan subtly communicates his point of view. Mr. Booth's words may well be applied to Narayan :

Everything he shows will serve to tell; the line between showing and telling is always to some degree an arbitrary one.<sup>(17)</sup>

The deep sense of humour which pervades all his novels springs from the recognition that our misfortunes are the consequences of our silly ideas and ambitions and can be accepted not with despair, but as a positive influence on our characters. The discomfiture of the individual is mainly of his own doing resulting from his absurd aspirations in a limited world. Thus "humour may be defined as the sense within us which sets up a kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life, and the expression of that sense in art".<sup>(18)</sup> Not only are the comic hero's confrontation with an unfriendly universe and the corresponding comedy depicted; but also are presented the numerous peculiarities of other men and women, their oddities and angularities in doing the various transactions of life. The Malgudi reality is based on stable social

values so as to contain these irregularities, these occasional eruptions of passions and emotions. Malgudi's presence is made vivid not only by mere geographical details; the reader also becomes emotionally aware of its enduring presence. The thousand small comedies of man's dreams and aspirations, of his revolts and retreats glow in their typical humanness, against the backdrop of the intimate and eternal presence of Malgudi. That in this docile yet vivacious setting of Malgudi, human suffering often has a humorous side, is illustrated by Narayan's delectable irony. It is because the religion of the comic asks to take pains and suffering in one's stride and laugh at one's own self as Raju and to a lesser extent Jagon do. By refusing to suffer in pain they deny the supremacy of pain and assert their indomitable ego. Narayan's comic vision not only deals with the joyous sides of life, but also with its serious and painful aspects. The odds of life are transmuted into meaningful experiences. In spite of the occasional sorrows and sufferings in the novels. Narayan's world does not present any picture of gloom and despair as the comic vision diffuses the assured warmth of life. Most of our problems are the result of our wrong understanding of this world and ourselves. Since disaster is not the ultimate fact in Narayan's fiction and since the Sarayu river the Taluk office gong, the Lawley statue the Puja rituals of the mother, the superstitions of the grandmother and a lot of other things convey the sense of the inevitable and the eternal reality of Malgudi, the individual's absurd designs and his

corresponding sufferings and embarrassments appear funny deserving to be viewed with a sympathetic smile. What Ian Watt comments while discussing Fielding's Tom Jones holds equally good in the case of Narayan's treatment of plot;

Fielding must temper our alarm for Sophia's fate, by assuring us that we are witnessing, not real anguish, but that conventional kind of comic perplexity which serves to heighten our eventual pleasure at the happy ending, without in the meantime involving any unnecessary expenditure of tears on our part. (19)

In a work of comic realism the fictional world must closely correspond to our impression of the real world. Minute details with regard to the way people eat, dress, worship, desire and do a lot of other things are described so as to create the successful fictional illusion. As David Lodge comments :

Fictional characters are, therefore, provided with a context of particularity much like that with which we define ourselves and others in the real world; they have names, parents, possessions, occupation etc. ordered in such a way as not to violate our sense of probability derived from the empirical world. (20)

Since Narayan's main concern is not with any social documentation, but with the depiction of the comic side of life, he has to provide an authentic locale in which he has to treat men and women in their various manners and moods. Rightly, therefore, he sharply chisels

out his characters in terms of their particular individualities. These characters seldom fall into the category of 'types' and are distinctly marked out from one another by their individual ideas and idiosyncrasies. The characters as well as the place Malgudi with its distinct features like the river, the hills, etc., convey unmistakably the impression of a living existence. The Malgudi experience is brought home to the reader through, what Ian Watt calls 'the individualization of its character', and 'the detailed presentation of their environment'<sup>(21)</sup>. These contribute to the 'feel', 'the atmosphere' of the novels, which as Brooks and Warren say, is also 'an element of the meaning'<sup>(22)</sup>.

In Narayan's fiction there is no prolonged description of natural scenery. The topography has been rendered clear and vivid to the extent that it serves a meaningful role in the human drama. The Sarayu river is as much associated with the childhood play of Swami and his friends as with Raju, Jagon, Raman and so many others. Narayan is more concerned with the details of human actions, and the small geographical descriptions provide necessary authenticity to these actions. The river, the hills, the statue and the streets together with the Malgudians and their thousand small events and aspirations provide a vivid rendering of life, a community existence bound not only to one another, but also to the mute Mampi hills and the Sarayu river in an age-old emotional attachment. Sarayu particularly brings an intense nostalgic fervour to the novels, not because it is associated with the daily living of the Malgudians, but because it is an enduring company of the innocent days of childhood,



of the carefree adolescence and the long years of old age. The Sarayu is not only a fact of the immediate present, but as Srinivas muses in Mr. Sampath, mingles with the hoary tradition as its history stretches from the remote past to the present. Into this flux of time, the abiding spirit of the Sarayu brings in that compelling sense of the Eternal before which the serious transactions of the temporal world of Malgudi appear quite quixotic.

The characters journey through time. The journey is very often focused in a biographical perspective, that unfolds their movement from ignorance to knowledge in the comic framework of the narrative. 'Life by time' and 'Life by values', to quote phrases from E.M. Forster's Aspects of the Novel, are intertwined together.

In order to create a successful fictional illusion the local is to be properly identified. Narayan provides all the details of a traditional society in transition -- the age old superstitions, gods and grandmothers, the cricket club, the film actress and the family planning. Simultaneously, the values that sustain the Malgudi society are underscored implicitly as the plot advances. By the technique of 'formal realism' Narayan provides authenticity as well as credibility to his creations. This helps in directing all the narrative efforts of Narayan towards, what Malcolm Bradbury calls, 'the persuasive ends' of the novel:

the novelist undertakes so to shape and use the fictional transaction as to elicit from himself and the reader, the highest sense of meaning, relevance, sig-

nificance, of variation and richness but also of con-  
(23)  
cord and elegance...

In Narayan's human comedy, a sort of liberated awareness of life is inherent. This awareness is realized not through a moralising stance, but through aesthetically satisfying form and style that enable us to derive a meaning of life and things, for as Brooks and Warren suggest "We do not like to be preached at, but we do demand a sense of meaningfulness."  
(24)

That there is a certain moral concern in Narayan's novels is generally accepted. A casual reading of his novels will acquaint us with, what F.R. Leavis calls, 'a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life and a marked moral intensity!'  
(25) But the moral concern is not divorced from the form of the novel. Ordinary human transactions are transmuted into the beauty of living as these are described to us lucidly, with authentic circumstantial details, with ironic turn of events and understones, and with a unique sense of good humour permeating even the odds of life. We can safely apply here David Lodge's analysis of Emma, as he wishes to amend Leavis' comment on the novel:

When we examine the moral preoccupation that characterize Jane Austen's peculiar interest in life as manifested in Emma, we find that they can be appreciated only in terms  
(26)  
of the formal perfection of the novel.

Narayan's sensibility operates on various levels of human experiences and he does it in a style that can be called 'neutral'. He draws

from the vast spectrum of life -- from the ordinary details of daily drudgeries to high ambitions and passions, and all these are shaped and moulded by the comic sensibility of Narayan to find their due places in the Malgudi comedy. All these contribute to the unified impression of the Comic. It is made possible by Narayan's extraordinary sensibility, which is like, as Henry James points out while discussing the artist and the artistic process, "a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue." (27). He gives vivid details of his men and women and in the process he subtly suggests the peculiarities involved. The trivialities, whether they have a direct bearing on the plot or not, build up the comic atmosphere of the novel. Narayan in treating these trivialities in a very simple and affectionate manner, transmutes them into significant aspects of life. His is not any grand theme of kings and emperors, of marvels and murders; his is a theme of the ordinary man trying to live life more meaningfully. Narayan's art takes cognizance of the fact that "some of the most interesting experiments of which it's capable are hidden in the bosom of common things". (28). Narayan chooses a style which is in perfect harmony with such a theme, a style that is simple yet dignified and graceful.

Narayan's narrative records the details not only of the physical states of being, but also of the psychic states of the characters. His language and the manner in which the narrative is laid out govern the tone of the novel. In this simple style, the style of a story-teller, the reader instead of remaining away from

the events becomes involved in it and is completely won over by the fictional reality, and becomes a citizen of the fictive town. Such privilege is denied to the reader of the comedies of Aristophanes or of Shakespeare. But Narayan makes it possible for he treats the actions and aspirations of the common man in a common language of the middle class and of the mediocre town. Malgudi is any small South-Indian town, experiencing increasing pressures of the modern civilization in its traditional set-up. Much of the sweet old way of living is still in tact. The language and the style convey an impression of intimate familiarity and there is a nostalgic fervour which springs from its unpretentious simplicity. With unfailing faith in human life, Narayan records the oddities and the beauty of the common man's existence.

A sense of good humour informs Narayan's narration. In a study of 'Good humour and Gaiety' F.L. Lucas remarks, "Johnson has summed up in two words that charm of Falstaff which covers (on the stage at least) all his sins ---" perpetual gaiety"<sup>(29)</sup>. There is in Raju's character this 'perpetual gaiety' which springs from the comic defiance of all his misfortunes and which endears him to the readers. That is why the moral censure for Raju's sins and mistakes is not so immediate and severe. This warmth of life can be perceived in all his characters in varying degrees.

Narayan views life's lapses not with any missionary benevolence and zeal, but with the understanding and wisdom of an artist who admits life's various compulsions and whose vision of life is essentially comic. Hence in his novels, the treatment of any episode

or of any character hardly moves to an extreme. Even Vasu, the man-eater is very casually dismissed. The narrative treatment always keeps to the straight middle path, neither becoming chivalric nor churlish. Instead of the 'dreary and portentous solemnity', which F. L. Lucas finds much 'oppressive', there is in Narayan's novels a sobriety of style that corresponds to the flow of life that is recorded. Narayan never sounds pompous or pedantic. His language has the charm and magic of ordinary speech that persuades us to the fictional reality because of our intimate kinship with the language.

Good humour is a way of living where life's occasional sorrows and sufferings are not only accepted but also are transmuted into meaningful experiences. A sportive spirit dominates over the defeats and disillusionments of life. This sense of good humour pervades all the descriptions of Malgudi life where man's sins and mistakes even though disapproved of, are also loved, for these sins and mistakes are intensely human. The characters of Sampath, Raju, Jagon, Margayya and of all others are affectionately drawn. Humour in Narayan's novels serves an aesthetic purpose in terms of shaping the reader's response of various situations -- capturing nostalgically a lost childhood in Swami and Friends and an adolescence in The Bachelor of Arts, disapproving the pseudo values of the modern civilization in The Financial Expert and The Vendor of Sweets, realizing the various compulsions of life with Raju in The Guide, and partaking of the timidity and innocence of

ordinary humanity and negating an aggressive individualism in The Maneater of Malgudi.

In order to bring a sense of immediacy as well as of intimacy to a recognizable Indian theme and setting, Narayan not only harps on the traditions, its beliefs and superstitions from time to time in the course of his narration; he also draws broad mythic parallels to his plots. While analysing Indo-Anglian fiction from the standpoint of Myth as technique', Meenaskshi Mukherjee comments.

If a world-view is required to make literature meaningful in terms of shared human experience, then the Indian epics offer a widely accepted basis of such a common background which permeates the collective unconscious of the whole nation. (30)

The Guide and The Maneater of Malgudi are very close to the Valmiki and the Bhasmasura myths respectively and thus bring an easy credibility to the actions and their consequences in the context of an Indian ethos. Dr. Mukherjee in an extensive discussion of The Maneater of Malgudi notes that "the battle between the gods and demons, the sura and the ashura" happens to be a "recurrent motif in Hindu mythology." (31) Narayan, in addition to finding well defined mythic parallels to plots, often weaves the narrative with allusions from ancient scriptures. In Mr. Sampath Srinivas muses about the god Nataraj. In The Maneater of Malgudi an anxious, worried Nataraj prays to Lord Vishnu who had saved the elephant. This is what Dr. Mukherjee calls the 'digressional technique', by means of which the (32)<sub>2</sub>

novelist serves to illustrate a point, or make the realization more vivid. Equally significantly, the mystic reunion of Krishnan with his dead wife, the renouncement of Jagon, the penance of Raju to save a village from drought are age-old beliefs and ideals that have percolated to the very bottom of our psyche. These Indian myths and the traditional rituals, beliefs and superstitions not only create an authentic Indian locale, but also contribute to the effective communication of experience. The use of myth whether as a broad parallel to plot or as a 'digressional technique', has made Narayan's style of story-telling lucid and amply communicative.

As has already been suggested in Chapter II, Narayan's plots move in a pattern of order-disorder-order, and this pattern becomes a "part of his world-view". This 'world-view' is typically Indian as it owes to our traditional concepts of creation. The forces of Evil which from time to time appear in the world disturbing its peace and stability are ultimately undone by themselves or are destroyed by the Incarnation. The stability returns with a renewed assertion of moral and spiritual values. This theme is recurrent in Narayan's novels with an astonishing degree of accuracy. But while the battle is fought between the force of Evil and the force of Good on an ethical plane, on an existential plane the focus is on Man's comic predicament. With the exception of The Guide, Narayan's novels evoke a feeling of traversing a circular path of life's various experiences, reaching at last, the ordered world at the beginning. "That is why, most of his novels do not have decisive conclusions as there is in The Guide.

Narayan's comedy does not move to any height of fantasy as in the comedies of Aristophanes, nor does it bank explicitly on satire as Swift does in his novels. His forte is the commonplace -- the commonplace events and aspirations of people in a small South Indian town. For this Narayan uses a language that can well bear and provide ample testimony to the reality of ordinary lives. He treats not only individual's experiences, but also a collective, social experience. It is not only the life story of Swami, Chandran, Raju, Jagon and others; it is the saga of vast Malgudi experience. He portrays the diverse experiences of an average human existence -- dreams, anxieties, actions, frustrations and so on in a manner in which,

.... it is not the phrase that lingers in the memory as the thing itself .... Words are merely a plain glass through which one sees the things. (33);

Narayan's style encompasses many diverse facets of life and experience, which are all subject to one Malgudi ethos that is constant or eternal in spite of the seeming changes. His canvass is limited in the sense that he treats a small group of people in a small geographical setting; but at the same time he gives details of the innumerable equations in which they exist with one another and with the society.

Narayan not only focuses on the universal through the particular or tells a story and conveys an allegorical meaning as in The Man-eater of Malgudi, but also takes the comic to the deepest



human level. His human comedy bases itself on the comic incongruity arising from man's peculiar reactions to his society. The eternal world thwarts the desired way of living of the individual and in this conflict between the individual and the world, an ambivalent attitude is generated. In spite of his violation of the moral codes of the society, the individual is not wholly condemned. This incongruous relationship with the world, is a fundamental fact of our existence. Narayan's genial humour, which permeates his narrative, embracing the innumerable small triumphs and tragedies of life, forms the anchor of his comic vision.

The novels of Narayan illustrate the fact that despite all the odds and frustration we encounter and experience, life has an indefatigable persistence and charm of its own. Within the bizarre events of Malgudi, Narayan subtly focuses on the beatific side of human life. As Narayan's comic vision embraces an intense humanism, his comic mode constitutes of the grace of a language of the everyday world, of a style that simply but truthfully tells the story of the common humanity as they live in the small town of Malgudi. Thus his style while embodying his vision becomes an inalienable part of it.

CHAPTER - VII

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