R.K. NARAYAN'S MALGUDI NOVELS: A CRITICAL STUDY OF THEME AND CHARACTER

by

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SUMMARY

This thesis analyses critically theme and character in the fourteen novels of R.K. Narayan, written between 1935 and 1990, and it assesses their importance in Narayan's Indian world view. It evaluates Narayan's depiction of Indian middle class society in the comic-ironic mode. His skills as a narrator who experiments with various narrative techniques are examined. The thesis traces the development of Narayan's fictional town, Malgudi, and illustrates how it reflects changes on the Indian sub-continent and how they impact on the Malgudi character.

The themes of parental love, the conflict between orthodoxy and modernity, academic disillusionment, harmony in family relationships and Hindu astrology are examined in Swami and Friends (1935) and The Bachelor of Arts (1946). Narayan's portrayal of orthodox and modern concepts of marriage is appraised in The Dark Room (1938), The English Teacher (1946) and The Painter of Signs (1976). This thesis examines the deterioration of marital harmony and Savitri's portrayal as the typical Hindu housewife cast in the *Pativrata* tradition in The Dark Room. In The English Teacher this thesis evaluates Krishnan and Susila's idyllic marriage and the couple's psychic communication when Susila dies. Raman and Daisy's proposed *Gandharva* marriage is reviewed in The Painter of Signs.

This study assesses Narayan's treatment of the themes of religious faith, Hinduism and Gandhian ideology in Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), The Guide (1958) and The Vendor of

Sweets (1967). Raju's transformation from a jailbird to a swami is evaluated in The Guide. The dedication of Gandhists such as Bharati and Sriram in Waiting for the Mahatma, is reviewed. In A Tiger for Malgudi, Narayan's innovative talking tiger, Raja, is examined as well as his treatment of the concepts of reincarnation and the transmigration of souls. The deleterious effects of materialism are highlighted in The Financial Expert in which Margayya is obsessed with accruing large sums of money. Srinivas and Sampath's desire to achieve fame and fortune is explored in the filming of the Burning of Kama in Mr Sampath.

This thesis ends with an exploration of the conflict between orthodoxy and modern lifestyles, and the cyclical nature of life in The World of Nagaraj (1990).

THE ORGANISATION OF MATERIAL in my thesis follows the guidelines set out in the UNISA 1992 Department of English Publication - The Masters Dissertation and Doctoral Thesis: A Guide to Research and Organisation of Material. The Bibliographical method as well as the End Notes procedure is based on the MLA Style Sheet, discussed in the Guide. For references in the body of the chapter the Harvard Referencing system is used.

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THE FOLLOWING ABBREVIATIONS are used for the titles of certain Malgudi novels:

1.	Swami and Friends	- Swami
2.	The Bachelor of Arts	- The Bachelor
3.	The English Teacher	- The Eng. T.
4.	Mr Sampath - The Printer of Malgudi	- Mr Sampath
5.	The Financial Expert	- The Fin. Exp.
6.	Waiting for the Mahatma	- Waiting
7.	The Man-Eater of Malgudi	- Man-Eater
8.	The Vendor of Sweets	- The Vendor
9.	The Painter of Signs	- The Painter
10.	A Tiger for Malgudi	- A Tiger
11.	Talkative Man	- Talk. Man
12.	The World of Nagaraj	- The World

PREFACE

During the period 1961 to 1990 trade, cultural and academic boycotts of South Africa effectively resulted in a dearth in the country of research material on Indian English literature and literary criticism on this branch of English literature. Therefore, neglected by both critics and academics in South Africa, Narayan's literary works have remained relatively unexplored. Some primary and many secondary texts of Indian English literature were unavailable in South Africa. In order to study R.K. Narayan's Malgudi novels, it became necessary to undertake a study tour of India in 1990 to interview the author, to meet certain critics, to purchase texts and to gather research material.

I acknowledge with gratitude the assistance I received from certain individuals in South Africa and in India. I am indebted to my promoter, Dr Y.G. Reddy, in the Department of English at the University of Durban-Westville for readily accepting the task of promoting my thesis, even though he was on the verge of retirement. I am grateful to him for his guidance, assistance, his encouragement through difficult periods and for giving of his time unstintingly, during retirement, to promote my work.

The highlight of my research tour to India was a visit to R.K. Narayan in Mysore. (See Appendix.) The author informed me as to where I could locate various literary critics whom I wished to interview. He pointed out that Professor

C. D. Narasimhaiah was based at Dhvanayaloka, also in Mysore. Narayan told me that I would be able to obtain important research material relevant to my thesis at the library at Dhvanayaloka. He promptly arranged for me to meet Professor Narasimhaiah, before I returned to Bangalore. My meeting with Narayan inspired me to continue my research with renewed vigour.

I was honoured to meet the distinguished author and critic, Professor Narasimhaiah, resident editor of The Literary Criterion and Director of Dhvanayaloka, the centre for Commonwealth studies in English. We exchanged views on Indian Writing in English and spoken English in India. I am grateful to him for his guidance, and his hospitality on my return visit to Dhvanayaloka to gather research material. I am also indebted to Ms Rajeswari, his Secretary, for her assistance.

In Madras, Professor K.R.S. Iyengar informed me telephonically that Dr V.P. Rao could be contacted in Delhi. Equally beneficial to my research project was my meeting with this scholar and critic, Dr V. Panduranga Rao, also known as Ranga Rao, senior lecturer in English at the Sri Venkateswara College in Delhi. I had read his stimulating interviews with R.K. Narayan and his criticism of the novelist's works. During our discussion, Dr Rao focused attention on contemporary Indian English writers whose works were of literary merit. He also mentioned additional research material obtainable at the Sahitya Akademi and referred me to

the Director of the Akademi, Dr D.S. Rao. I am grateful to the latter for allowing me the use of research material at the Akademi, and for the assistance I received from his library staff.

In Bombay I met Mr Darryl D' Monte, then Resident Editor of The Times of India. We discussed the role of newspapers in promoting spoken and written English in India. He also informed me that Mr Narayan's brother, R.K. Laxman, the famous cartoonist, worked in the same building, which housed a conglomerate of newspapers and furnished me with a copy of the article ' My Brother Myself' by Laxman, published in Sunday Observer of 28 October, 1990. The article provided fascinating family background material.

I also met Professor M.K. Naik, author and critic, at his home in Goregoan, Bombay. He is a University Grants Commission Research Professor at the Department of English, University of Bombay. It was stimulating to discuss with him some of his critical works pertinent to my study. He also referred me to bibliographers of Narayan's works, specifically Dr Hilda Sales Pontes, and arranged for us to meet at her home in Bandra West. I am indebted to Professor Naik and Dr Sales Pontes for their guidance.

I am deeply indebted to my typist, Ms Vatsela Pillay, for her industry, and the many sacrifices she has made to complete my work diligently and timeously. My heartfelt gratitude also goes to members of my family, especially Daya Naidoo, for her

painstaking proof-reading, and Sathia and Sinda Naidoo, for their moral support. I also thank Mr Dawie Malan, Subject Reference Librarian at UNISA, and Mr R. Fenske, at the University of Durban-Westville Library, for their assistance.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the University of Durban-Westville and the educational institutions in India, which afforded me the opportunity to complete this challenging research project. It is hoped that my work will help to promote greater academic links between South Africa and India. India's contribution to international English literature, particularly in fiction, has been extensive, and I cannot but envisage a mutually enriching exchange of ideas between the two countries.

March 1994.

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I, Rajasverrie Naidoo, hereby declare that the views and opinions expressed in this thesis are my own, and that the research is the result of my own work.

CONTENTS PAGE

INTRODUCTION

Of the many novelists and poets of the twentieth century who are classified as Indian English writers, such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Anita Desai and Rabindranath Tagore, R.K. Narayan is the most prolific. Since his first novel, Swami and Friends (1935), Narayan has published thirteen more Malgudi novels. In addition he has published short stories, retold legends based on the Hindu epics, a diary, a memoir, travelogues, literary criticism and essays. The latest Malgudi novel to be published is The World of Nagaraj (1990), and his latest publication, The Grandmother's Tale (1993), comprises three novellas. Swami and Friends served as a literary springboard for a series of Malgudi novels written during a period of over forty-five years.

The skills of this indefatigable writer have won for him both local and international acclaim.[1] Some of his achievements are outlined in this Introduction. Narayan received India's prestigious literary award, the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1961 for his novel The Guide (1958).[2] In 1964 he received the Padma Bhushan Award.

In 1965 Narayan received the National Association of Independent Schools Award (U.S.A.), his first international award. In 1975 he received the English-Speaking Union Award and in 1980 the Royal Society of Literature Benson Medal. The American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters bestowed honorary membership on Narayan in 1982. At the

ripe age of eighty-three he was invited to lecture for a term at the University of Texas, Austin.

It is clear that Narayan has achieved much and his works deserve close scrutiny at doctoral level, especially here in South Africa where, as I mentioned in my Preface, he has received almost no critical attention. I have chosen to focus on his fourteen Malgudi novels because this group forms a cohesive whole and abounds in a variety of thought-provoking themes and a diversity of characters. My thesis will illustrate that these novels often deal with contentious issues reflecting life in pre- and post-independent India.

My first objective is to analyse critically theme and character in the Malgudi novels, and to examine their importance in Narayan's Indian world view. I shall evaluate this novelist's preoccupation with South Indian middle class society, exemplified in the fictional town of Malgudi. I demonstrate that Narayan's primary intention is to depict Indian life in the comic-ironic mode which entertains the reader.

In my thesis I identify what appears to be a centrifugal pattern of themes: childhood, youth, harmony in family relationships and parental love are portrayed within the microcosm of the family, whilst other themes which reflect social concerns, religious and existential issues predominate in the macrocosm of Malgudi society. I aim to point out also that although Narayan writes from a non-didactic

and non-moralistic standpoint he focuses attention on societal problems such as academic disillusionment, the conflict between orthodoxy and modernity, the disruptive influence of the film world, materialism, and infidelity.

A second aim is to examine Narayan's creation of the imaginary world of Malgudi, and to show that he artistically concretizes his personal experiences of childhood and adulthood in this little India. I shall examine the comedy and conflict evident when eastern and western lifestyles are juxtaposed. I also demonstrate Malgudi's evolution from a rudimentary, pastoral town in Swami and Friends (1935), to a sophisticated, business centre with nightclubs in The World of Nagaraj (1990).

My third objective is to analyse Narayan's artistic development from 1935 to 1993. I aim to evaluate his comic-ironic style of writing; his skill in portraiture evident in his motley collection of characters; his comic detachment and non-judgemental authorial standpoint and other literary techniques which he employs. I shall show that the *dramatis personae* progress from being somewhat flat and uni-dimensional in the early novels to rounded, multi-dimensional characters whose complexity keeps pace with Malgudi's expansion.

Attention will also focus on Narayan's skill as a narrator who is influenced by the *harikatha* tradition of

story-telling in which stories were narrated by special story-tellers, and this was often accompanied by dance and drama. My examination of aspects of narratology in the Malgudi novels has been guided by the following works: The Form and Functioning of Narrative, Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative, and FLS: Narratology and Narrative.[3] I shall illustrate how Narayan's technique of a single, omniscient narrator, used in most of the novels, changes to multiple narrators, as evidenced in The Guide (1958) and A Tiger for Malgudi (1983). My thesis will also highlight how Narayan's literary skills have stood the test of time. It is with these objectives in view that I hope to justify my choice of Narayan's work for doctoral research.

* * * *

The fourteen Malgudi novels on which this thesis will concentrate are: Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), The Dark Room (1938), The English Teacher (1946), Mr Sampath (1949), The Financial Expert (1952), Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), The Guide (1958), The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961), The Vendor of Sweets (1967), The Painter of Signs (1976), A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), Talkative Man (1986) and The World of Nagaraj (1990).

The main body of the thesis will feature an intensive critical appraisal of the main themes and characters in the Malgudi novels. Generally, I use the eclectic, critical approach in my textual analyses, and also examine, among

others, the historical approach used by certain Indian English critics. Whilst the novels are grouped for convenience and narratological similarities, they appear, for the sake of clarity, and as a basis for an analysis of authorial development, in chronological order of publication. Brief comparisons will be made, where relevant, to the works of Narayan's contemporaries such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and V.S. Naipaul.

* * * *

What follows in this part of the Introduction is a brief outline of the salient points in Chapters One to Six of this thesis. Chapter One analyses theme and character in Swami and Friends (1935) and The Bachelor of Arts (1937). Attention will focus on themes such as childhood and youth, the conflict between orthodoxy and modernity, academic disillusionment, harmony in family relationships and Hindu astrology.

Narayan's portrayal of marriage in The Dark Room (1938), The English Teacher (1946) and Mr Sampath (1949), will receive attention in Chapter Two. In The English Teacher, largely autobiographical, the idyllic marriage of Krishnan and Susila will be reviewed. Krishnan's search for harmony, identity and self-realisation, after Susila's death, is an existential concern which will also be examined, along with the contentious issue of his psychic communication with his deceased wife. The deterioration and defilement of

marital harmony in The Dark Room will be examined through the relationship between the despotic husband, Ramani, and his seemingly docile wife, Savitri. In a similar pattern of critical analysis the theme of marital infidelity will be explored as exemplified in the relationship between Sampath and Shanti Devi, in Mr Sampath (occasionally titled Mr Sampath - The Printer of Malgudi). The disruptive influence of the film world and materialism will also be studied in this novel.

In Chapter Three, an obsession with the amassing of wealth and the theme of paternal love are highlighted in the aptly titled novel, The Financial Expert (1952). Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) reflects the themes of selflessness and self-abnegation. I shall also examine the mythopoeic nature of the novel.[4] Narayan's rare treatment of the theme of politics, exemplified in the characterization of Sriram, will be critically assessed. This chapter will also depict the influence which Gandhian ideology had on his followers.

In Chapter Four, I shall review the illicit relationship between Raju and Rosie in The Guide. My analysis will incorporate a study of Raju's evolution from a fake to an authentic swami, and certain existential issues.

In Chapter Five the theme of debased, sexual passions and immorality is highlighted in Mali and Grace's relationship in The Vendor of Sweets (1967), and that of Vasu and Rangi

in the The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961); Vasu's characterization as a *rakshasa*[5] will also be examined. In discussing The Vendor of Sweets, I shall evaluate the magnetic spell of Gandhi's religious and philosophic teachings on Jagan. In Chapter Five the theme of population development and family planning will be analysed in The Painter of Signs (1976). Traditional and unorthodox concepts of marriage and the stand adopted by the modern, working woman, will also be discussed.

In Chapter Six, I shall assess Narayan's characterization of Raja, a tiger, in A Tiger for Malgudi (1983). The themes of Hinduism and reincarnation, human corruption and man's predatory nature will be highlighted. I shall analyse the tragic undertones in The Talkative Man (1986) and focus on the themes of marital infidelity, debauchery and deception which are evident in the character of Dr Rann. The talkative man's function as narrator who enthrals the inhabitants of Malgudi with the story of Dr Rann's visit to the town, will be examined in this chapter.

Chapter Six will incorporate a discussion of Narayan's final Malgudi novel, The World of Nagaraj (1990),[6] with its recurrent theme of the conflict between orthodoxy and modernity. I examine aspects of Nagaraj's world and analyse the conflict between Nagaraj's traditional lifestyle and that of his nephew, Tim.

* * * *

A part of the Introduction is devoted to an explanation of the terminology pertinent to Indian English literature, to a discussion of English education in India, and to the presentation of a biographical sketch of Narayan, his literary forebears and some of his contemporaries. I examine the concept of Indianness[7] and the possible sources of the Malgudi novels. Malgudi, the fictional town itself will also come under focus. An important feature in the novels, that is, a pre-determined cycle of existence within which the characters function, will be examined.[8]

* * * *

It is interesting to note that diverse terms are used by critics and authors to categorise Indian English literature. There is no chronological, evolutionary development of such nomenclature. The terms 'Indo-Anglian', 'Indo-English' and 'Indian Writing in English' are commonly used. At Dhvanyaloka, the centre for Commonwealth studies in English, Professor Narasimhaiah advised me to use either 'Indian Writing in English' or 'Indian English Literature', terms which are accepted by the Sahitya Akademi. When I suggested that he found the terms acceptable because they implied a global categorisation of such writings, he concurred. He dislikes the derogatory connotation of the term 'Indo-Anglian' stating that it implies a mixture of Indian and English languages. The question of an Indian writing with an Indian sensibility which takes cognisance of the Indian ethos is part of the discussion on Indianness.

For the purposes of this thesis, I have selected the term 'Indian English literature' because I feel that it indicates clearly that it is literature written by Indians through the medium of English. It is also recommended by the Sahitya Akademi (National Akademi of Letters), in Delhi. I shall also take cognisance of other terms used by critics.

* * * *

As education is an important motif in the early Malgudi novels, I examine very briefly the historical and socio-political milieu which impacted on English education in India. A factual outline of the history of English education in India, based on selected studies, is given in this part of the Introduction. The critic Lakshmi Holmstrom highlights the *lingua franca* in India before English was introduced:

> Before the coming of the English, there were two kinds [of] schools in India: Sanskrit institutions, attended mainly by Brahmin boys and teaching classical law, literature and the scriptures, with their Muslim counterparts which taught Islamic classics in Arabic and Persian; and schools where non-Brahmins were taught in the regional languages....[9]

This system of education underwent drastic changes with the advent of foreigners on Indian soil. The viability of the orient as a lucrative trading partner enticed the Portuguese, Dutch and finally the British to India.[10] According to the historian and critic, M.K. Naik, the arrival of the British in the seventeenth century rejuvenated the waning Indian spirit, and led to the birth of, *inter alia,* Indian English literature (Naik, p. 8).

Educational reforms under the British were opposed by the 'Orientalists' who advocated the continuance of classical learning, while the 'Anglicists', in keeping with progressive trends, opted for 'a scientific and liberal education in English' (Holmstrom, p. 4). Naik confirms this.[11]

One of the crusaders for an English education was the sage, educationist and social reformer, Raja Rammohun Roy, who is regarded as 'the father of Indian literature in English'.[12] As the call for an English education gathered momentum, the issue was resolved by Macaulay, then President of the Governor-General's council, in his 'famous Minute on Education of 2 February 1835', in which he advocated the teaching of English (Naik, p. 12). Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General at the time, supported Macaulay's recommendations and passed the 'government resolution of 7 March 1835' (Naik, pp. 12-13).

In 1857 the three pioneer universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras opened and it was these institutions which were to nurture the Indian intelligentsia who would initiate progress in all facets of Indian life, including its literature (Naik, p. 13).

At present there are fourteen languages and many dialects spoken by the 843 930 861 inhabitants of India (1991).[13] During an interview with V.P. Rao, Narayan stated that some form of English must be taught to villagers.[14]

In discussing the beginnings of Indian English prose, historians and critics alike are quick to point out that Indians were already writing in English before Macaulay's Minute.[15] In Naik's discussion of early prose he cites Cavelley Venkata Boriah's translation, 'Account of the Jains' (1803), as 'perhaps the first published composition in English of some length by an Indian' (Naik, p. 113). However, Rammohun Roy wrote the first original prose piece of literary merit in 1817, an essay titled 'A Defence of Hindu Theism' (p. 14). Besides his thirty-two original essays in English on various subjects, he wrote several other pieces of historic and literary significance (pp. 15-17).

K.S. Ramamurti is another critic who highlights Rammohun Roy's achievements, and also acknowledges the role played by Indian journalists in promoting English prose. He asserts that:

> ...Indian prose in English owed its development in this country very much to the pioneers of Indian journalism. Newspapers like The Hindu, The Statesman and The Times of India, not only built up excellent standards in English writing but also cultivated a public taste for good English by the popularity they enjoyed among the educated classes.[16]

Newspapers such as The Times of India, The Sunday Observer, The Hindu and others continue to play a significant role in promoting the English language and literature.

The first novel to be published in India, written in 1854, in Bengali, was Alaler Gharer Dulal by Pyari Chand Mitra. It was the forerunner to novels in several other Indian

languages as well as in English (Ramamurti, pp. 35-38).

The first Indian to write an English novel is Bankim Chandra, 'who established the novel as a major literary form in India' with his Rajmohan's Wife which was serialised in the Indian Field in 1864 (Ramamurti, pp. 38-39). In Ramamurti's opinion this novel and Lal Behari Day's Govinda Samanta were 'the first real Indian novels', in terms of the critic's expectations of a good novel (p. 38):

> Again, if a serious concern for the business of everyday life, and for action issuing from character, an interest in man's struggle to break away from the tyranny of an existing social order, and a corresponding interest in the growth of character presented in terms of an interaction with the environment are what one expects in a good novel, one will have to consider Bankim's *Rajamohan's Wife* and Lal Behari Day's *Govinda Samanta* as the first real Indian novels.
> (Ramamurti, pp. 37-38.)

Ramamurti's views will be examined critically later in the thesis when the Malgudi novels are analysed. Professor William Walsh notes that besides Bankim Chandra, other Indian writers such as the poets Henry Derozio (1809-31), Kashiprosad Ghose (1809-73), Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1827-73), and the sisters, Aru and Toru Dutt, were pioneer Indian English writers.[17] Toru Dutt translated French verse into English, wrote a French novel (1879), and an unfinished English novel, Bianca (1878) (Walsh, p. 2). Another prominent English prose writer of the latter half of the nineteenth century is the sage, Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902) (Walsh, p. 3).

Later Indian English writers whose works are held in high esteem are the Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), and the scholar Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) (Walsh, p. 4). Walsh describes the poet Sarojini Naidu as 'a gifted woman who, when her literary talent burnt out, became a formidable figure in national politics' (Walsh, p. 5). He makes a significant observation in respect of certain twentieth-century writers:

> But it was not till the 1930's that a number of novelists began to write in English - genuine novelists , that is, for whom fiction is an end in itself and not a means for communicating other kinds of truth.
>
> (Walsh, p. 6.)

V.P. Rao also refers to writers of the 1930's in his article titled 'Arrival in Malgudi', in which he discusses the English literary works of K.S. Venkataramani, B.R. Rajam Iyer and A. Madhaviah, who had already published significant works before Narayan's Swami and Friends (1935).[18] According to Rao:

> In the early Thirties, as Narayan worked on his first novel, the literary scene of South India was lit up by its brightest star, a novelist in English, K.S. Venkataramani, who had already published a novel, "Murugan the Tiller", and other books, and his second novel-in-progress "Kandan the Patriot" was serialised in a Madras newspaper edited by a fiery patriot. The eventual publication of the novel in book form was the talk of the day.
>
> (Rao, p. 94.)

Rao adds also: 'The earliest among Narayan's precursors is B.R. Rajam Iyer who is credited with writing the first novel in English in South India, the unfinished True

Greatness of Vasudeva Sastri'(Rao, p. 95).

It is evident that the Indian English novel had begun to find its niche in early twentieth-century writings. However, scant attention was paid to the early writers, while other 'Commonwealth writers' received increasing notice (Walsh, p. 6), but Walsh singles out Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan for their praiseworthy publications (Walsh, p. 6). This thesis will focus on Narayan's Malgudi novels because, like Anthony Spaeth, I believe that 'Malgudi has become a kind of ancestral village for the whole literate world, a timeless and quintessentially Indian place painstakingly built from memory, philosophy and Narayan's unique wit' (Spaeth, p. 52).

* * * *

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayanswami was born on 10 October 1906, in Madras, of a middle class Brahmin family. Narayan explains his lineage in an interview with Ved Metha:

> We are Tamilians, from the province of Madras. And our family's ascent from a village to Madras, the capital city, took many generations. I have no sense of history, but I know that my initial "R" stands for Rasipuram, the village which must have housed my ancestors.[19]

Narayan's middle name was acquired from his father Krishnaswami Iyer, who left Madras and settled in Mysore. The names were abbreviated to R.K. Narayan on Graham Greene's suggestion in 1935.[20]

Insights into Narayan's personal and professional life are provided by his own autobiographical writing, My Dateless Diary: An American Journey (1964)[21] and My Days: A Memoir (1973),[22] as well as by various other critics and journalists who have interviewed him. His memoir reveals that the greater part of his infancy and childhood was spent in Madras with his maternal grandmother and an uncle, who had a profound effect on his upbringing.[23] He maintained close family ties at all times, and strong family influences shaped his adult life and permeated his writings (My Days, pp. 25-40).

Narayan describes his father as having had 'a commanding personality .... a stentorian voice, a sharp nose, and a lionlike posture', a description which is supported by R.K. Laxman, Narayan's brother, the cartoonist who, for over fifty years, has provided the illustrations for the Malgudi novels and other literary works[24] (My Days, p. 32). Pamela Philipose highlights the unique relationship between the brothers in her article titled ' My Brother, Myself', and quotes Laxman's comments made during her interview with him in 1990:

> Mother was a lively influence on all of us. She was a chess and bridge champion .... Father was like a Roman senator, aloof, club-going, tennis playing .... We were very respectful to our father. With mother it was great fun,.... There was one other person who had a special niche in Narayan's life. She was the grandmother he stayed with, when he was a boy in Madras. It's perhaps she who inspired that sweet old grandmother, in *Swami and Friends*.
> (Philipose, p. 1.)

Although Narayan remained in awe of his father throughout his life, he emulated him in certain respects. Like his father he read English literature avidly, poring over works by Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Rider Haggard, Marie Corelli, Molière, Pope, Marlowe, Tolstoy, Thomas Hardy -'an indiscriminate jumble; [he] read everything with the utmost enjoyment' in the well-stocked library at Maharaja's College in Mysore, where his father was Headmaster (My Days, pp. 33, 58-59).

Narayan recalls his poor performance as a scholar, his dislike of examinations and the military-like discipline exercised by the Lutheran Mission and other schools in Madras. These experiences were to be concretized later in Swami and Friends. After his school career in Madras, he joined his father at Maharaja's College. He failed in English in the University Entrance examination because of his aversion to studying for examinations (My Days, p. 53). Yet he was to become India's foremost English author of the twentieth-century, writing for almost sixty years. Whilst waiting to repeat his examination, he spent a year reading fiction and international literary magazines which acquainted him with contemporary critics and fiction writers (My Days,pp. 59-62).

These experiences inspired him to attempt writing himself. One of his first literary efforts was a ten-page piece of poetic prose, inspired by his father's sorrow on losing a close friend (My Days, p. 62). His next creation 'Divine

Music', was followed by two pieces on the stars.[25] However, Narayan thinks that his efforts as a fledgling writer are not laudable (My Days, p. 64), but they hinted at a literary career which Narayan hoped to turn into a livelihood. He was optimistic that London critics would instantly recognise his merit and when he received rejection slips, he was crestfallen (My Days, p. 66). Nonetheless, he continued to seek publication abroad.

After obtaining his B.A. degree in 1930, he thought briefly about studying for the M.A. degree in literature and becoming a college lecturer. However, a friend dissuaded him from doing so, 'arguing that this would be a sure way to lose interest in literature' (My Days, p. 72).

After trying unsuccessfully to obtain employment at the railways and at a bank to supplement his father's small pension, he went to live with his grandmother in Bangalore. When he was about to begin his first Malgudi novel, his grandmother consulted the Hindu almanac, and on an auspicious day he started writing Swami and Friends (My Days, pp. 76-77). During this period, his father secured him a post as a teacher in Chennapatna, but after two spells he decided he had had enough. On the first occasion he took leave of absence when he received an official warning from the headmaster for dismissing a class early. On the second occasion he realized that he disliked teaching drill lessons and decided to leave (My Days, (pp. 77-86). He returned to Mysore in the firm belief that writing was his vocation,

although family and friends felt that he would not be able to earn a living this way (My Days, pp. 87-89).

Whilst on a visit to his sister in Coimbatore, Narayan met Rajam and they married soon afterwards although their horoscopes were incompatible, according to Hindu astrology. (My Days, pp. 103-105, 107). The novelist drew on his real life experiences with Rajam to write The Bachelor of Arts and The English Teacher.

Narayan continued to write short stories and worked as a free-lance journalist for the Madras newspaper, The Justice (My Days, p. 108). His early years as a writer were characterized by financial and publication problems as he tried in vain to gain recognition abroad. However, Graham Greene came to his assistance and Swami and Friends was published in October 1935 by Hamish Hamilton of London. Though some reviews were favourable, sales were poor, making Hamilton reject his option to publish the second Malgudi novel, The Bachelor of Arts. Once again Graham Greene came to Narayan's assistance and Nelson published the novel in 1937 (My Days, p. 113).

The English author became Narayan's mentor and close friend until his death in April 1991, at the age of eighty-six.[26] Narasimhan Ram pays tribute to Greene and honours the friendship between the two writers in his article for the *Review* Guardian, in which he introduces unpublished extracts from Greene's one hundred letters to Narayan,

written between 1935 and 1990 (Ram, p. 21). Narayan turned down a request from Ian Mayes of the Guardian to write a tribute to his friend, stating: 'How can I write about Graham now? We have known each other for so long and our friendship is so private....'[27]

Narayan spent a year abroad before returning to Mysore in 1990. Ratna Rao Shekar, the journalist, salutes the return of 'The Muse of Malgudi', and pays a fine tribute to him in her article.[28] She comments on the long-standing friendship between Greene and Narayan, and adds that both writers ought to have been honoured with the Nobel prize for literature.[29]

Narayan's third novel, The Dark Room, 'an early testament of the "Women's Lib" movement' was published in 1938.[30] When Rajam died of typhoid in June 1939, after barely six years of marriage, his grief temporarily prevented him from writing. This tragic event led him to experiment with psychic communication with the dead, although he had been generally sceptical of spiritualism. Through a medium named Rao, he communicated psychically with Rajam, and was reassured of her well-being. This spiritual communion became a regular part of his daily routine, restored his equilibrium and heightened his perception of existential issues (My Days, pp. 131-146). His attitude towards death today reinforces his image as 'a quiet Hindu':

> I don't believe that death really is death ... It is a continuation of personality in a different medium.

> What we lose is the physical structure, but there is something else that keeps the physical structure moving and thinking and acting. It's like casting off your old clothes and getting new ones.[31]

Narayan's career as a novelist received a temporary setback during the Second World War. His articles for the Hindu decreased because he felt disinclined to write about war and politics. Narayan and a printer friend, Mr Sampath, started to publish a literary journal, Indian Thought, but it was a short-lived venture because of a lack of funds. Nonetheless, the experience provided material for another Malgudi novel, Mr Sampath - The Printer of Malgudi (1949) (My Days, pp. 148-157). When his daughter, Hema, married Chandran in 1956, Narayan accepted a Rockefeller Travel Grant and travelled through the U.S.A. from October of that year. For the first time, at the age of fifty, he left India. He travelled for almost nine months, meeting people from all walks of life[32] and wrote The Guide during a three-month stay in Berkeley, California (My Days, p. 164). Narayan encapsulates his reactions to the American ethos in My Dateless Diary (1964).

One notes the tribute paid to Narayan by a publisher at a party in New York to celebrate the publication of the American edition of Mr Sampath. He said that 'William Faulkner, Hemingway, and Narayan are the world's three great living writers' (Diary, p. 164). In 1989, Narayan returned to America to re-live part of his experiences, this time as visiting lecturer for a semester at the University of Texas,

Austin. He records this visit with his usual sparkling wit and humour in his article 'Round trip from Malgudi', written in 1990 for the *Review* Guardian.[33] Narayan's latest publication at the age of eighty-eight, The Grandmother's Tale (1993), which comprises three novellas, probably marks the end of an illustrious literary career spanning the greater part of the twentieth-century.

* * * *

Various critics of Indian English literature have rightly commented on the concept of Indianness which characterizes theme and character in Narayan's Malgudi novels. However, it is C.D. Narasimhaiah who, in my opinion, has been most convincing in his exposition of Indianness. This is what he has to say in The Swan and the Eagle (1986):

> Indian Writing in English is to me primarily part of the literature of India, in the same way as the literatures written in various regional languages are or ought to be. It can present the life of a village like Bulashah or Kanthapura, a small town like Malgudi or Kedaram, or sweep through continents and eternity itself; and so long as the operative sensibility of the writer is essentially Indian it will be Indian literature.[34]

As this thesis will reveal, the 'operative sensibility' in Narayan's novels is Indian. An evaluation of the Malgudi novels will indicate the novelist's skill in portraying Indian culture, tradition, religion, myth and philosophy in society.

Undoubtedly, the most important evidence of Indianness in

Narayan's novels is the fictional town of Malgudi, a little India within which his characters function. Although the town of Malgudi is fictional, it reflects life in a real South Indian town, and its early provincial setting is enchanting. South Indian life is depicted with its foibles as well as its charm. At the same time it will be observed that Narayan endows his characters with universal traits, allowing both Indian and foreign narratees to acknowledge them.

Malgudi is unrivalled as a setting in Indian English literature. No other Indian English writer has created a fictional world in his/her prose and continued to use it as Narayan does in his novels. Ratna Rao Shekar states that 'it was Narayan who started it all, the applause and the appreciation for the Indian world view'.[35] However, Shekar could have expanded what precisely was meant by the 'Indian world view'. My study of the Malgudi novels indicates that although Narayan's Indian world view encapsulates middle class Hindu life in South India, the traits with which he endows his characters and his themes are universal, as I shall show in due course. Malgudi is inhabited generally by affable characters whose idiosyncrasies provide much of the comedy in the novels.

Whilst most Malgudians enjoy certain material comforts, free from the disadvantages of poverty and illiteracy, some are often at war with themselves and society, pursuing illusory goals, and rebelling against traditional Hindu practices.

Narayan highlights the comedy and conflict which are implicit when they vacillate between Hindu orthodoxy and modernity, searching for their niche in life. In Narayan's Indian world view there are no conventional heroes. The protagonists in the Malgudi novels are anti-heroes who are often thwarted in their efforts to attain their goals in life. They lead ordinary lives and do not commit heroic deeds, or reach great heights in their vocations. Some of the protagonists may be described as tragi-comic figures. They have certain flaws and eccentricities that predispose them to catastrophe. Such aspects of Narayan's Indian world view will be examined in some detail.

S.C. Sanyal elaborates on this subject in his discourse on Indianness: 'A world view is required to make literature meaningful in terms of shared human experience.'[36] He emphasises myth and important themes such as 'traditional Indian asceticism' and 'the Gandhian struggle for independence and nationalism', which are used by Indian English novelists, as integral parts of the Indian world view (Sanyal, pp. xv-xvi).

As Malgudi is the vehicle which Narayan uses to convey his Indian world view to the world at large, this thesis will examine Malgudi's features, and compare Narayan's diminutive India with the world envisaged by critics like Sanyal. Other salient features of this fantasy world of Malgudi, such as its origin, its distinctive infrastructure, and its provincial setting, akin to Thomas Hardy's Wessex, will be

discussed in the textual analyses.

When one traces the sources of the novels, one realizes that the novels often incorporate biographical details reflecting Narayan's experiences in the South Indian cities and towns of Madras, Chennapatna, Bangalore and Mysore. This influenced his creation of his fictional town, Malgudi. The daily occurrences there provided Narayan with a reservoir of ideas which he channelled into his novels.

I have not located any literary works which serve specifically as source material for the plots, themes and characters of the Malgudi novels. Neither does the novelist himself speak of any sources. Occasionally, Narayan uses characters and plots from Hindu mythology and religion in a modern setting, making the myth timeless. It is evident, too, that Narayan's reading of the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dickens influenced his literary style and techniques. It is probable that his study of their literature sharpened his skills in portraiture and narration. O.P. Saxena discusses the sources of the Malgudi novels:

> There is no person, writing or agency from which information can be obtained except from R.K. Narayan's writings themselves or from the men, women and children and institutions of Madras, Mysore, Bangalore etc. It is they that provide the source of the acts, movements and effects of the novels .... Some men, therefore, must have been his 'models'. His 'models' can be called his '*sources*'.[37]

In his discussion of these 'models', Saxena first explores

Malgudi's origin and then goes on to discuss Narayan's wife, Rajam, his maternal uncle and his printer, Mr Sampath, as role-models for some of his characters in the novels (Saxena, pp. 260-264). Saxena omits to mention Swami's grandmother who had a profound influence on his life, and whom Narayan immortalised as the loving grandmother in Swami and Friends and in The Grandmother's Tale (1993). The extent to which these role-models and real life events influenced the content of the Malgudi novels will be examined in my analysis of the novels.

A noteworthy feature of the novels is a pre-determined cycle of existence to which the characters subscribe. Certain critics affirm the presence of a pattern, plan or cycle discernible in the structure of the novels. V. Panduranga Rao speaks of a 'basic plan' or 'cycle of experience [which] is the basic pattern of behaviour of the Narayan hero'.[38] Although Narayan himself does not acknowledge the existence of a 'basic plan' to which his Malgudi novels subscribe, my examination of the novels in this thesis will indicate the presence of such a pattern, particularly in the early works. I shall also appraise other views on the cyclical pattern and test their validity in my study.

END NOTES

1. The word 'local' refers to 'Indian', which in this thesis will refer specifically to a native or inhabitant of India, unless otherwise stated. South African Indians will be referred to as such.

2. Information given in this part of the Introduction in respect of Narayan's awards and achievements is taken from 'Narayan', Contemporary Novelists, p. 633.

3.1 Gerald Prince, 'Narrating', 'Narrated', 'Narrative Grammar', The Form and Functioning of Narrative, pp. 1-60, pp. 60-74, pp. 105-163.

3.2 Mieke Bal, Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative, pp. 69-85.

3.3 Gerald Prince, 'On Narratology (Past, Present, Future)', FLS Narratology and Narrative, Vol. XVII (1990), eds A Maynor Hardee, Freeman G. Henry, 1-55. See Bibliography for details of other works consulted on narratology.

4. V. Panduranga Rao, 'The Art of R. K. Narayan', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. V (July, 1968), 35.

5. M.K. Naik, 'Theme and Form in R. K. Narayan's *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*', Dimensions of Indian English Literature, p. 142.

6. In Anthony Spaeth's overview of Narayan's literary career, spanning the period 1930 to 1992 he highlights the author's achievements and states that at present Narayan enjoys " *Not* writing". He concludes: 'So Malgudi is unlikely to get any major additions in the future', 'Passages from India', Time (24 August, 1992), 53. However, as recently as 1993 The Grandmother's Tale was published.

7. Various critics speak of Indianness in Indian English literature: S.C. Sanyal, Indianness in Major Indo-Anglian Novels; C.D. Narasimhaiah, Introduction, The Swan and the Eagle; Kishori Charan Das, 'Indianness: Some Studies in the Absurd', The Rise of the Indian Novel. This concept does not refer to accent. The vocabulary used in both the spoken and written language of academics and the intelligentsia is, in the main, standard English.

8. Certain critics of R.K. Narayan's Malgudi novels indicate the presence of a pattern, plan or cycle in the structure of the novels: Dr V. Panduranga Rao,

'The Art of R. K. Narayan', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. V (July, 1968); Sanyal, 'Preamble', Indianness in Major Indo-Anglian Novels. This cycle will be discussed when the novels are reviewed.

9. Lakshmi Holmstrom, 'The English Language in India', The Novels of R. K. Narayan, pp. 1-2.

10. M.K. Naik, 'The Pagoda Tree: From the Beginnings to 1857', A History of Indian English Literature, p. 7.

11. Ibid., pp. 7-13.

12. Haydn Moore Williams, 'Indian Literature in English: Colonial and Post-Colonial: Social Change and Indian Inwardness', Galaxy of Indian Writings in English, p. 1. Naik also praises Rammohun Roy's efforts: 'The cause of English education found its ablest Indian champion in Raja Rammohun Roy', A History of Indian English Literature, p. 11.

13. 1991 Census figures quoted by Tim Mcgirk, 'India set to become the most populous nation', The Daily News, March 27, 1991, p. 20.

14. V.P. Rao, 'Tea With R. K. Narayan', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. VI, No. I (June, 1971), 82.

15. Naik, A History of Indian English Literature, p. 13. See also William Walsh's comments in 'India', Commonwealth Literature, p. 1.

16. K.S. Ramamurti, 'The Indian Novel in English - Its Genesis', Rise of the Indian Novel in English, p. 30. Like other historians quoted, Ramamurti also discusses Rammohun Roy's role as social reformer, especially of Hindu orthodoxy, pp. 29-35.

17. William Walsh, 'India', Commonwealth Literature, p. 2. Walsh notes that 'the special ease and intimacy in English' enjoyed by Indian prose writers of this period was rare in poetry, p. 2.

18. V.P. Rao, 'Arrival in Malgudi', Frontline, (February 17- March 2, 1990), 94-95.

19. Ved Mehta quotes Narayan, 'Profiles: The Train had just arrived at Malgudi Station', The New Yorker, September 15, 1962, p. 52.

20. Narasimhan Ram, 'Messages from Greeneland', *Review* Guardian, Thursday, April 11, 1991, p. 21. Ram

quotes an extract from Greene's letter to Narayan: 'Have you any objection to the Swami being left out and your being styled R. K. Narayan?
It's a silly thing to have to say, but in this country a name which is difficult for the old ladies in libraries to remember materially affects a book's sales', p. 21.

21. Narayan, My Dateless Diary: An American Journey, 1964. In his March 1988 'Foreword' to his book, Narayan explains that at the invitation of the Rockefeller Foundation, he travelled fairly extensively in the States and recorded his travels in a 'day-to-day journal'. He states that the Diary written in 1958, 'is not a well-researched historical study of America and its inhabitants, merely a record of first impressions of people and places .... a subjective minor history of a country that I love'.

22. Narayan, My Days: A Memoir (1973). In anecdotal form and with flashbacks to his infancy, youth and early childhood, Narayan records some of the struggles, successes and tragedies which he experienced.

23. Ibid. Chapters One to Five describe this phase of his life.

24. Pamela Philipose discusses R.K. Laxman's comments in 'My Brother, Myself', Sunday Observer, October 28, 1990, p. 1. Philipose describes the author and the cartoonist as 'arguably the most well-known brothers in the country' and enlists the latter's help to draw 'a speaking portrait of his elder brother', p. 1.

25. My Days, pp. 63-64. In retrospect Narayan criticises his earliest writings as being 'totally unclassifiable - neither poetry, nor prose, nor fiction .... Odd combination of moods and methods', p. 64.

26. Narasimhan Ram, 'A Friend in Malgudi', *Review* Guardian, Thursday, April 11, 1991, p. 21.

27. Ibid., Ram quotes Narayan.

28. Ratna Rao Shekar, 'The Muse of Malgudi', Sunday Mid-Day, Part 11, November 4, 1990 (Cover Feature), pp. vi-vii.

29. Ibid., p. vi. Spaeth, too, states that 'Malgudi has made Narayan a perennial candidate for the Nobel Prize - which he says he doesn't want - and earned him a reputation as one of the most skilled novelists of the 20th century', p. 52.

30. My Days, p. 115.

31. Spaeth quotes Narayan. See End Note No. 6., Time, 53.

32. Diary. Narayan met Aldous Huxley and his wife at their home in Hollywood, pp. 122-124, 132-133. Greta Garbo and Narayan shared some profound moments in New York, pp. 171,174-176. The author deems it fit to end his Diary on a nostalgic note by Garbo, p. 187.

33. Narayan, 'Round trip from Malgudi', *Review* Guardian, Thursday, August 9, 1990.

34. C.D. Narasimhaiah, Introduction, The Swan and the Eagle, p. ix.

35. Ratna Rao Shekar, 'The Muse of Malgudi', Sunday Mid-Day Part II, November 4, 1990, p. vi.

36. Samares C. Sanyal, Preamble, Indianness in Major Indo-English Novels, pp. xv-xvi.

37. O.P. Saxena, 'The Sources of R.K. Narayan's Novels', Glimpses of Indo-English Fiction, pp. 259-260.

38. V. Panduranga Rao, 'The Art of R.K. Narayan', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. V (July, 1968), 31.

CHAPTER ONE

INNOCENCE AND ILLUSION: *SWAMI AND FRIENDS* AND *THE BACHELOR OF ARTS.*

In Chapter One I aim to show the experimental nature of R. K. Narayan's first Malgudi novel, Swami and Friends (1935), and shall illustrate how, in his second novel, The Bachelor of Arts (1937), he develops his literary skills to create a novel which is decidedly superior to its precursor. My critical examination of Swami and Friends will reveal that Narayan emphasises character rather than plot, and his *dramatis personae* are with the exception of Swami, fairly flat characters depicted in simplistic terms. However, the novel does show the origins of Narayan's distinctive style of narrative and portraiture.

My evaluation of The Bachelor of Arts will reveal that the novel has a clearly-defined plot and a chief protagonist whose multi-dimensional character enhances the novel's appeal. In both novels Narayan concentrates on family-centred themes such as childhood and youth, and explores certain social concerns in a detached, comic-ironic manner. These novels are part of an autobiographical trilogy comprising: Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts and The English Teacher. I adopt an eclectic approach in my critical analysis and take cognisance of critics who adopt other approaches, which are historical, sociological or psychological. Theme and character will be examined concurrently as integral components of the novels. The

main focus of my argument in Chapter One will be that theme and character reflect primarily the innocence and illusion which characterize man's first *asrama*, and form an important part of Narayan's Indian world view.

In my examination of theme and character in R.K. Narayan's Malgudi novels, the following remarks by D.H. Lawrence will be pertinent:

> I am a man, and alive. I am man alive, and as long as I can, I intend to go on being man alive. For this reason I am a novelist. And being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog.
>
> The novel is the one bright book of life. Books are not life. They are only tremulations on the ether. But the novel as a tremulation can make the whole man alive tremble. Which is more than poetry, philosophy, science, or any other book-tremulation can do.[1]

Lawrence's *gestalt* approach to his role as a novelist, his affirmation of life and the importance of the novel in life can also apply to Narayan. Although Narayan does not compare his work as a novelist with the vocation of others, his Malgudi novels capture successfully the salient aspects of daily Indian life. Whilst Lawrence's works are Euro-centric, Narayan's are distinctly Indian. Although vastly different in their *modus operandi* and moral and philosophical attitudes to life,[2] each values the novel as a means of communication with himself and with the world at large.

In developing his narrative skills, Narayan was influenced

partly by two important factors: the traditional Indian concept of story-telling and the narrative techniques of western novels. Lakshmi Holmstrom provides an elucidation of the former:

> The traditions of story-telling included commented recitations of classical texts and, in the south, the dance-drama and the *harikatha* - the exposition of a myth with sermons and music. All these stories presented the traditional, idealized view of timeless Hindu society.[3]

It must be noted, though, that Narayan did not follow these narrative patterns slavishly. As this thesis will reveal, he developed a unique narrative style within the comic mode. The first Malgudi novel reveals how Narayan experiments with the narrative technique. Swami and Friends may be viewed as a narrative if one considers Gerald Prince's assertion that 'narrative, indeed universal and infinitely varied, may be defined as the representation of real or fictive events and situations in a time sequence'.[4] Yet its merit as a novel is limited: Narayan uses a single narrator and the narration itself is simplistic, whereas in the later novels, such as The Guide and A Tiger for Malgudi, the use of multiple narrators gives these novels a welcome complexity.

Narayan commenced writing Swami and Friends, in 1933, while on a visit to his grandmother in Bangalore:

> On a certain day in September, selected by my grandmother for its auspiciousness, I bought an

> exercise book and wrote the first line of a novel; as I sat in a room nibbling my pen and wondering what to write, Malgudi with its little railway station swam into view, all ready-made, with a character called Swaminathan running down the platform peering into the faces of passengers, and grimacing at a bearded face; this seemed to take me on the right track of writing, as day by day pages grew out of it linked to each other. (In the final draft the only change was that the Malgudi Station came at the end of the story.) This was a satisfactory beginning for me, and I regularly wrote a few pages each day.[5]

In Swami and Friends, Malgudi's infrastructure reveals certain basic, distinctive features. The River Sarayu, beautiful and tranquil, is the chief attraction in the Malgudi landscape:

> River Sarayu was the pride of Malgudi. It was some ten minutes walk from Ellaman Street, the last street of the town, chiefly occupied by oilmongers. Its sand-banks were the evening resort of all the people of the town. The Municipal President took any distinguished visitor to the top of the Town Hall and proudly pointed to him Sarayu in moonlight, glistening like a silver belt across the North.
>
> .... The *peepul* branches overhanging the river rustled pleasantly. A light breeze played about the boughs and scattered stray leaves on the gliding stream below. Birds filled the air with their cries. Far away, near Nallappa's Mango Grove, a little downstream, a herd of cattle was crossing the river. And then a country cart drawn by bullocks passed, the cart-man humming a low tune. It was some fifteen minutes past sunset and there was a soft red in the West.
>
> (Swami and Friends, p. 13.)

This extract clearly shows how Malgudi is aesthetically appealing because of its rustic beauty and the blending of eastern and western features. Sarayu flows like a pulsating thread through the early novels, but becomes less prominent in later novels. As Malgudi evolves in complexity, leisure

time activities become more sophisticated. It is evident that Narayan has transferred the lush vegetation of the Mysorean landscape to Malgudi, where Nallappa's Mango Grove, coconut groves, paddy fields and rice mill enhance the pastoral setting.[6] Malgudi's rural and civic qualities are combined successfully, and enable the *dramatis personae* to function effectively.

Whilst Malgudi's apparent orderliness and serenity appeal to the inhabitants, this atmosphere does not necessarily generate a docile temperament in Swami, the schoolboy protagonist. Swami rebels against the scathing remarks made by Mr Ebenezer, the scripture teacher, about the Hindu religion, and renounces the outmoded educational system. He is the first of a line of rebellious protagonists in the Malgudi novels. Chandran, too, in The Bachelor of Arts (1937), resists established tradition, and like Swami he displays the characteristics of an anti-hero when he flees from Malgudi as the problems of life overwhelm him.

In Swami and Friends, Malgudi's inhabitants are primarily from the middle class, but some poorer inhabitants, such as 'the coachman, lived a mile from Swaminathan's house, westward, in Keelacheri, which consisted of about a dozen thatched huts and dingy hovels, smoke-tinted and evil-smelling, clustering together irregularly' (Swami, p. 75). This eyesore in Malgudi is introduced by the novelist to provide readers, particularly those abroad with a

more complete picture of Indian life. The deprived classes in India, whose abject poverty traumatises the visitor, is part and parcel of the Indian world view which Narayan presents in Malgudi. It is within the parameters of Malgudi that Narayan allows his varied characters and themes to function. In keeping with the centrifugal pattern of themes which I have already identified in the Malgudi novels, it may be observed that childhood is the first family-centred theme which Narayan chooses to explore in Swami and Friends. Though he writes within the context of the Indian ethos, his characterization of Swami holds good for children throughout the world. In Swami, Narayan concretizes his experiences as a schoolboy, whilst living with his grandmother in Madras where he attended the Lutheran Mission school:

> It was Monday morning. Swaminathan was reluctant to open his eyes. He considered Monday specially unpleasant in the calendar. After the delicious freedom of Saturday and Sunday, it was difficult to get into the Monday mood of work and discipline. He shuddered at the very thought of school: that dismal yellow building; the fire-eyed Vedanayagam, his class-teacher; and the Head Master with his thin long cane....
>
> (Swami, p. 3.)

A critic of the 1980's, Ramesh K. Srivastava, who has researched Narayan's portrayal of children states: 'The autobiographical element is so dominant in his novels and short stories, particularly in the characters of children that his own childhood can easily be reconstructed from them'.[7] Narayan focuses on the theme of childhood for various reasons. It is probable that Narayan intends to

correlate the subject matter of this novel and The Bachelor of Arts with student life, which is the first of the traditional four *ashramas* in man's cycle of existence.[8] It is more likely, though, that in experimenting with his first two novels, Narayan deliberately moulded his *dramatis personae* and composed his themes in accordance with the chronological events in his early life.

K.T. Sunitha, a critic of the 1980's, posits a viewpoint similar to that of Srivastava in her analysis of 'The Theme of Childhood in *In the Castle of my Skin* and *Swami and Friends*'. She states that '...*Swami and Friends* begins with a portrayal of Narayan's own childhood experience couched in psychological terms of dislike for school and discipline'.[9]

In the extract quoted above Narayan captures the transition in Swami's feelings from carefree enjoyment of the weekend to an aversion to 'work and discipline' at school on a Monday. Narayan's artistry in structuring the novel lies in the balance he achieves in his exposition of the theme of childhood. Not all Swami's experiences are negative. There is evidence of harmonious relationships with his friends at the Albert Mission school, his mother, as well as with his grandmother.

Narayan reinforces the theme of childhood by focusing attention on Swami's friends and his allegiance to them. His clique comprises a motley collection of youngsters the

description of whose oddities and imperfections generates much humour. Character indeed takes precedence over plot in the novel. We note the complacency of 'Somu, the Monitor', who 'set about his business, whatever it was, with absolute confidence and calmness' so that 'no teacher ever put to him a question in the class' (Swami, p. 7). Narayan's descriptions are graphic and have a blend of humour and irony, occasionally tinged with pathos; in later novels his skills in portraiture reach for greater heights. However in Swami and Friends the innocence and naivety of children are ably conveyed.

The comic-ironic mode is sustained in the description of the class bully, 'Mani, the mighty Good-For-Nothing', who exudes such power that Swami remains in awe of him (Swami, p. 8). Narayan describes Sankar as 'the most brilliant boy of the class' who 'solved any problem that was given to him in five minutes, and always managed to border on 90%' (p. 8). However, the notion held by some of the children that he 'was a dud and that he learnt all the problems and their solution in advance by his sycophancy', exposes Sankar as a probable fraud (p. 8).

Narayan uses satire in order to convey a certain image of Rajam, the Police Superintendent's son who is the 'new-comer' to the school:

> He had impressed the whole class on the very first day. He was a new-comer; he dressed very well ....

> He came to the school in a car .... he proved to be a very good student too .... He spoke very good English, 'Exactly like a "European"'; which meant that few in the school could make out what he said.
> (Swami, p. 14.)

In this description of Rajam's attributes one notes that his western dress and speech, and his arrival at school in a car, are impressive. This characterization draws attention to the lifestyle enjoyed by those who belonged to the establishment. One notes also the ambivalent feelings of ordinary folk towards members from the group. Nevertheless, Swami, the patriot, and Rajam become firm friends, indicating that in the world of children friendship transcends all other concerns and generates harmony.

From a dramatic point of view, Swami's friends are presented as fairly static, unidimensional characters who undergo little or no development in the novel. Nonetheless, the vivid descriptions of Swami and his friends leave an indelible impression on the mind of the reader, similar to the impact created, for example, by Dickens's child characters, like members of Fagin's gang in Oliver Twist. Unlike Dickens, though, Narayan writes from a non-moralistic and non-didactic standpoint as his chief intention is to entertain rather than to reform society.

Narayan is concerned with the exploitation of his creative talents and depicting the Indian world view in the comic mode. This is a motive that was not shared by Narayan's contemporaries such as Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao who chose

to empathise with the victims of poverty, class and caste prejudices, with the intention of eradicating these evils. Coolie (1933) by Mulk Raj Anand and Kanthapura (1938) by Raja Rao reflect this standpoint.[10]

G.N. Agnihotri's comments confirm this, emphasising the deep commitment of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao to social change.[11] He states that 'R.K. Narayan ... continues to remain uncommitted up to the very end. Narayan's whole achievement depends on his capacity to remain uninvolved' (Agnihotri, p. 19).

Whilst Narayan's standpoint is one of comic detachment, his themes often reflect social concerns, as I shall show, but he expresses little desire to change or improve Indian society. One of the social problems which Narayan explores in Swami is the stultifying educational system. This thesis will demonstrate how academic disillusionment is a prominent theme in the Malgudi novels. In Swami, Malgudi's youth is subjected to an authoritarian school system in which the old guard adheres to outmoded educational doctrines. Representative of this group of educators are Mr Vedanayagam, Swami's form teacher, the Head Master and Mr Ebenezer, Scripture Master. The lack of meaningful communication between these educators and their wards and their refusal to acknowledge the needs of youth create serious problems. To Swami, school symbolises a myriad conflicting situations generated by teachers like Mr Vedanayagam:

> His reverie was disturbed. He felt a terrible pain in the soft flesh above his left elbow. The teacher was pinching him with one hand, and with the other, crossing out all the sums. He wrote 'Very Bad' at the bottom of the page, flung the note-book in Swaminathan's face, and drove him back to his seat.
> (Swami, p. 4.)

Swami, as the main character, is complex and dynamic, changing progressively in the novel, while his educators are, to use Mieke Bal's words, 'flat characters [who] are stable, stereotypical characters that exhibit ... nothing surprising'.[12] Swami is distressed when the fanatical Mr Ebenezer launches into a tirade about the Hindu gods, offering an over-simplistic interpretation of Hindu idols. Although his Hindu upbringing and his naivety colour his judgement, Swami boldly poses the following question about Jesus Christ:

> 'If he was a God, why did he eat flesh and fish and drink wine?' As a brahmin boy it was inconceivable to him that a God should be a non-vegetarian. In answer to this, Ebenezer left his seat, advanced slowly towards Swaminathan, and tried to wrench his left ear off.
> (Swami, p. 6.)

Narayan also depicts how the military-like discipline of the Albert Mission and Board High Schools instils fear in the youth of Malgudi. Instead of generating an ambience of knowledge and learning, the system dehumanises the pupils; Swami and his friends are denied the true joys of learning.

Even though the theme of academic disillusionment reflects a serious concern, Narayan's treatment of the theme does not

create a pessimistic mood in the novel. In the extracts quoted we observe how the humour defuses the tension, with the incidents never developing into tragic events. (Swami, pp. 4,6). Academic disillusionment is treated in a similar manner in The Bachelor of Arts, thus establishing a thematic link between the two novels.

In analysing themes in the Malgudi novels, one should note Agnihotri's advice, that is, to take into consideration '"achieved content" and not merely ... the thematic content of the novel' (Agnihotri, p. 19). He clarifies the nature of theme succinctly: 'Theme, thus, is not something to be examined separately from the technique of a novel, because the theme is determined by the novelist's choice of "point of view"' (Agnihotri, p. 19). I agree with this view, hence I analyse the structural organisation of the novel, the techniques employed by the novelist and the authorial standpoint, concurrently with the theme itself.

Narayan's comic-ironic style and his apolitical and non-judgemental attitude in the Malgudi novels are first observed in Swami and Friends, as the following extract shows:

> A great cry burst from the crowd: 'Bharat Matha ki Jai!' And then there were cries of 'Gandhi ki Jai!' After that came a kind of mournful 'national' song. The evening's programme closed with a bonfire of foreign cloth .... Somebody asked him: 'Young man, do you want our country to remain in eternal slavery?'
> 'No, no,' Swaminathan replied.
> 'But you are wearing a foreign cap.'
> Swaminathan quailed with shame. 'Oh, I didn't notice,'

> he said and removing his cap flung it into the fire with a feeling that he was saving the country.
> (Swami, p. 95.)

Swami is 'deeply stirred by the speaker's eloquence' and the infectious mood of the crowd whose patriotism has been aroused (p. 94). Mortified by the thought that he might be wearing 'Lancashire cloth' and not *khaddar* (p. 95), he flings his cap into the 'patriotic bonfire' (p. 96), thinking that he is rescuing his country from the oppressor. When Narayan began writing this novel in 1933, the anti-British campaign in India, was gathering momentum and the masses were agitating for independence. Yet the authorial approach is deliberately apolitical, endorsing Narayan's attitude recorded in his memoir: 'Neither politics nor the war were of any interest to me' (My Days, p. 148). The novelist records the strike and burning of British cloth with comic detachment. Neither Swami nor Malgudi's agitators are praised or chastised. Narayan focuses with characteristic humour on the idiosyncrasies of adults and youth alike. The next morning it is a crestfallen Swami who recollects his impulsive actions and fears his father's wrath. Narayan's artistry is evident in this graphic portrayal of ambivalent feelings.

The threads of the narrative are held together by several seemingly disparate incidents rather than a well-defined plot. The skilful character portrayals and the intricate pattern of relationships contribute to the novel's merit. As

Swami struggles to come to terms with his relationships within the microcosm of his family and the macrocosm of society, he is faced with moral dilemmas.

Many of the conflicts which Swami experiences arise from the contradictions within society itself. Swami interacts regularly with adults who often present a façade to the world: the anti-British agitators espouse what appears to be a legitimate cause, yet, paradoxically, other adults, such as the Head Master and teachers at the Albert Mission school, show no compassion for the strikers' actions. Through Swami's eyes Narayan reveals the dichotomy in Indian society, and employs an interesting novelistic strategy which he develops in his later works. He counterpoises the actions of the militants of the community with the deeds of the pro-British sector in Malgudi. In his later novels, Narayan continues to juxtapose antithetical characters successfully, thereby enhancing characterization and plot.

Another literary technique which is commendable in the Malgudi novels is the forging of thematic and structural links between the novels. Like an architect, Narayan builds on his blueprints for Swami and Friends, and his themes develop in complexity. The theme of parental love pervades in the first three novels, namely, Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts and The English Teacher. Swami, Chandran and Leela, respectively, are nurtured by parents whose love, however, manifests itself in

strange ways at times.

In Swami and Friends, love is implicit in Swami's relationship with his father, Mr W.T. Strinivasan, yet Swami does not have a proper appreciation of this. However, the bond between the father and his son is fragile, because it is undermined by a lack of understanding. We see an illustration of this in the scene when Swami approaches his father with his stationery list for the examinations. Father is described as a lion, unapproachable and ready to strike:

> When he was just outside the door, his father called out, 'Who is that?' There was no friendliness in the tone. 'Who is that I say?' roared father again and was at his side with a scowling face before Swaminathan could decide whether to sneak out or stop and answer.
> (Swami, p. 58.)

One notes the duality of the authorial standpoint: As 'insider'[13] the narrator adopts a childlike perspective and presents Swami's feelings compassionately, allowing the reader to empathise with him. As omniscient narrator, Narayan characterizes the Father from an adult perspective, as an authoritarian parent displaying ambivalent emotions.[14] In this portrait, Narayan satirizes his own father who had 'a stentorian voice, a sharp nose, and a lionlike posture' (My Days, p. 32). Swami's father's concern over Mr Ebenezer's anti-Hindu comments, his son's welfare at school and his performance in the examinations, signify paternal love, yet on the surface he is callous and aloof. The love between father and son is affirmed when they are

re-united at the Traveller's Lodge and the latter realizes 'how extraordinarily kind' his father really was (Swami, p. 170).

Parental love is also evident in Swami's mother's actions. She is the benevolent housewife, who not only takes care of the family's needs, but monitors Swami's study time as well. The novelist uses the scenic method of characterization for Swami's mother, describing her in brief flashes, affording the reader glimpses of her periodically. We are introduced to her in Chapter Three, and encounter her again in Chapter Seven. Her character is not fully developed in the novel but, by contrast, Swami's grandmother receives more attention.

Swami basks in the warmth of his grandmother's love as she symbolises a safe haven to which he regularly retreats: 'After the night meal, with his head on his granny's lap, nestling close to her, Swaminathan felt very snug and safe in the faint atmosphere of cardamom and cloves' (Swami, p. 21). However, Granny's loquacity and old age are not qualities which he values. When Rajam is about to pay him a visit he tells his grandmother in a forthright manner: 'when he is with me, you must not call me or come to my room' (p. 36). 'The fact is - you are, well you are too old,' he informs her with 'brutal candour' (p. 37). Skilfully, Narayan avoids sentimentality with the following statement: 'Granny accepted her lot cheerfully' (p. 37).

Swami's symbiotic relationship with his grandmother is an externalization of Narayan's personal childhood experiences in Madras. His grandmother tutored him in his schoolwork, enjoying his companionship and becoming aware of modern school life.

Swami's grandmother has another function in the novel, that is, to reflect orthodox India. Her anecdotes about traditional practices represent an other-worldliness which both attracts and irritates Swami because he is obsessed with cricket and business transactions for the Malgudi Cricket Club.

The following quotation indicates not only the author's narrative skills, but also his harmonious blending of the disparate elements in Indian society:

> 'You know what my new name is? I am Tate.'
> 'What?'
> 'Tate.'
> 'What is Tate?' She asked innocently. Swaminathan's disappointment was twofold: she had not known anything of his new title, and failed to understand its rich significance even when told ....
> 'I hope you know what cricket is.'
> 'What is that?' granny asked. Swaminathan was aghast at this piece of illiteracy....'
> 'I wonder what the boys and men of your days did in the evenings! I think they spent all the twenty-four hours in doing holy things.'
> (Swami, pp. 127-128.)

This dialogue is presented in simple and lucid language which is engaging to the reader. Narayan's proficiency in portraiture lies in depicting people authentically. Granny is portrayed with dignity and grace, and Narayan turns her

ignorance into old world charm. He creates a humorous image of Swami as the worldly-wise youngster who scoffs at his grandmother's ignorance. Grandmother's orthodoxy prevents her from assimilating western culture and tradition, and it is this tension generated by the vacillation between orthodoxy and modernity which Narayan often captures in his Malgudi novels. At the same time comedy often surfaces in the clash between old and new lifestyles.

A significant characteristic of Narayan's technique, particularly in the first three novels, is that it revolves around the cohesion of the family unit. Where such unity is lacking or disrupted, it is generally followed later by a return to normality. Sanyal identifies this pattern of behaviour as the classical pattern of Sanskrit literature: 'order - dislocation of order - reintegration of order' (Sanyal, p. xii). Swami's life is at first relatively happy with his family and friends. This phase is followed by a difficult period when he encounters problems at school and is punished. His world begins to disintegrate and he withdraws from the scene, to the Mempi Forest. In Swami's behaviour one identifies the above-mentioned pattern. When he flees from the conflicts in the Board Mission High School and hopes to resolve his problems elsewhere, he also displays the qualities of an anti-hero.

Narayan creates Malgudi with the Mempi Forest on the

outskirts of town, thus enabling the dramatic action in the plot to move from the town to its environs, contributing to the complexity of plot and character. When Swami is lost in the forest, he is petrified by the strange atmosphere. He is engulfed by darkness and hears a variety of strange animal sounds. Wild animals, scorpions and snakes appear to approach him. Reality blends with fantasy:

> He lay panting for a while, his clothes wet with sweat. He heard stealthy footsteps and a fierce growl, ... Now a leopard, now a lion, even a whale, now a huge crowd, a mixed crowd of wild elephants, tigers, lions, and demons, surrounded him. The demons lifted him by his ears, plucked every hair on his head, and peeled off his skin from head to foot .... He shrieked, scrambled to his feet, and ran.
> (Swami, p. 161.)

The wildness of the Mempi Forest suggests the turmoil in the youth's mind, and generates his traumatic experiences. Although the protagonist is a child, this aspect of the plot is similar to Shakespeare's creation of the storm that coincides with Lear's inordinate rage and subsequent disorientation. Swami's fantastical experiences in the wilderness reinforce the idea that it can never be a haven from life's problems but will remain an inhospitable environment.

Nevertheless, Swami's experiences in the forest, appear to purge his emotions. We can observe a parallel between Swami's cathartic experiences and those of Rosalind, Celia and Orlando in the Forest of Arden in As You Like It: flight is followed by trauma and catharsis. These

individuals' return to society is marked by a rejuvenated spirit. My study of this novel and the other Malgudi novels indicates that Narayan was possibly influenced not only by Shakespeare, but by Aristotle's views on tragedy and catharsis, as well as by Hindu philosophy and religion, which also embrace the concept of purification through suffering. In creating a pre-determined cycle of existence, Narayan may also be allowing his characters to work out their *karma* as ordained by Hinduism. Nonetheless, irrespective of whether Narayan is motivated by Hinduism, classicism or his reading of other English literature, he uses his oriental and occidental heritage to enhance plot, character and theme in his Malgudi novels.

Although Swami and Friends is Narayan's first novel. it is superior to Mulk Raj Anand's Coolie (1933), which is set within the same pre-independent Indian milieu. Coolie depicts a series of tragic events which characterizes the life of the chief protagonist, Munoo, a fourteen year old orphaned hill-boy from Kangra Valley. He is a victim of caste and class prejudice, and ultimately it is only death which offers an escape from his misfortunes. As social reformer, Anand concentrates on the theme of reform in both Coolie and The Untouchable (1938), and sacrifices his art by adopting a narrow perspective on life, unlike Narayan who displays a broader outlook and reaffirms the vitality of life. Furthermore, Narayan's comic irony allows the narratee to empathise with Swami, enhancing the novel's appeal.

In the second Malgudi novel, The Bachelor of Arts (1937), Narayan shows greater skills. This novel has a well-defined plot and diverse, complex characters who challenge orthodox Indian society and politics, and question man's identity within this matrix. The Bachelor highlights man's transition from the first traditional *asrama* in life, that of student to householder. V.P. Rao categorizes Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937) and The English Teacher (1945) as a trilogy which is

> ....supported among other things by their autobiographical intimacy (an impression, chiefly, of Narayan's portrayal of family life in these novels), [therefore] we may conclude from these three tales of boyhood, youth, and manhood that Narayan tells here the parable of Man from the Indian point of view. We can follow Man progressing from one to the next of the four *asramas* of human life, from childhood to renunciation.[15]

The family-centred theme of childhood in Swami and Friends gives way to the theme of youth in The Bachelor. Narayan portrays H.V. Chandran as a student who strives to free himself from illusion and to establish his own identity. Student and family life are salient aspects in the novel, and Chandran aspires towards harmonious relationships within these two spheres.

Chandran's varied collection of friends comprises college students whose universal traits are easily recognisable. Ramu's portrayal contrasts with Chandran's characterization. Unlike Chandran, who works diligently,

Ramu 'had not attended a single test in his life' (The Bachelor, p. 23). These two youths enjoy a good relationship with each other but they do not readily interact with some adults, such as Professor Ragavachar and Professor Brown.

Among the collection of colourful personalities in the novel are: Veeraswami, the revolutionary whose radicalism is evident in his activities within the Nationalist Movement, and Mohan, the poet and philosopher who seeks an audience for his twenty-five poems at an Historical Association meeting at the College (The Bachelor, p. 47).

Chandran is the first complex protagonist in the Malgudi novels. He is cast in the mould of the tragi-comic anti-hero whose experiences in some respects resemble those of the author.[16] In the opening chapter of the novel, Narayan depicts Chandran in the comic-ironic mode. He has been chosen as Prime Mover in the college debate on the topic that 'historians should be slaughtered first' (The Bachelor, p. 1). The absurdity of the proposition and the seriousness with which Chandran prepares his speech, is a deliberate ploy on the part of the novelist to create a psuedo-intellectual ambience. The narratee is entertained by the humour in the description of the 'intellectual' at work (p. 2). Narayan sets the atmosphere for a recurrent pattern of comic descriptions in the novel, which are tinged with irony.

Chandran's 'piece of self-realization' is hollow and illusory (The Bachelor, p. 2). He is filled with self-importance,

misconceptions and false values which often characterize youth, and he basks in the adulation of the audience at the college debate: 'He went on thus for about twenty minutes, inspired by the applause with which the audience received many of his cynicisms' (p. 4). His self-centred nature is exemplified by his impatience as he listens to the others. Self-opinionated and cynical as he is, he is on the whole an affable youth.

Narayan's dual approach as insider who sees the world through Chandran's eyes, and as omniscient narrator, enables him both to explore the various emotions which besiege Chandran and to describe the debate from the point of view of a detached onlooker. Thus the reader is given details of Chandran's emotions. It is ironic that Chandran, who feels he has a superior intellect, should dismiss the rest of the debate as inconsequential. His appearance at the debate, dressed like an English gentleman in a 'chocolate-coloured tweed coat', is ironic too, as he criticises the 'English' lifestyle of people like Professor Brown, Principal of the College, who opened the evening's proceedings. Naik highlights the irony in the novel in Narayan's dual perspective: 'Several episodes reveal the enormous self-importance and self-centredness of callow youth' (Naik, p. 11). He cites the college debate scene to illustrate his point.

Although Chandran is an accomplished orator who wins the debate for his team, he is not characterized as the ideal

Malgudi college student or one whose intellect supersedes that of his peers. Narayan reveals the flaws in Chandran's character:

> He looked at the speaker on the platform. He kept gazing at Professor Brown's pink face. Here he is, Chandran thought, pretending to press the bell and listen to the speeches, but really his thoughts are at the tennis-court and the card-table in the English Club. He is here not out of love for us, but merely to keep up appearances. All Europeans are like this. They will take their thousand or more a month, but won't do the slightest service to Indians with a sincere heart.
>
> (The Bachelor, p. 5.)

It is ironic that Chandran, who is prejudiced towards all Europeans, should be judgemental of their lifestyles. Chandran has not risen above the petty biases of his time. The narrator satirizes the stereotyped ideas which some students had of European workers in colonial India. Nonetheless, Chandran's cynicism is strange for a young college student.

Another facet of his character is his deep psychological need to be reassured constantly of his academic ability. Thus he glows with pride when Natesan and Mohan compliment him on his success. The hero's cup is full, and the authorial comment that follows gently mocks the self-importance of both Chandran and Mohan. 'They were as excited as if it were the Finance Bill before the Legislative Assembly in Delhi' (The Bachelor, p. 10). The humour emphasises the delusions of grandeur which these college students entertain in respect of their intellect.

Chandran's growth from youth to manhood is characterized by illusions which often frustrate him and fill him with despair. In terms of Hindu philosophy, Chandran displays the nature of man who has to extricate himself from the physical world of *maya* or illusion and elevate himself to a spiritual plan devoid of such phenomena. However, his actions are only partially successful in attaining this goal because he cannot differentiate between the substance and the shadow.

Narayan accentuates the illusory nature of Chandran's world by introducing the Select Picture House into Malgudi. This town's topography changes progressively to include a tertiary college and the Select Picture House, which provides Malgudi's inhabitants with a new source of entertainment. The following extract describes the impact which the cinema has on Chandran:

> Chandran was none of your business-like automatons who go to a cinema, sit there, and return home. It was an aesthetic experience to be approached with due preparation. You had to chew the betel leaves and nut, chew gently, until the heart was stimulated...go to the cinema, smoke more cigarettes there, see the picture, and from there go to an hotel near by for hot coffee at midnight, take some more betel leaves and cigarettes .... This was the ideal way to set about a night show.
>
> (The Bachelor, p. 13.)

One notes the irony evident in the actions of the citizens of the fictional world of Malgudi who escape into a fantasy world at the cinema. The film plots symbolise *maya*, and are akin to Chandran's illusory actions. Narayan

continues to use film plots as symbols of man's delusions in Mr Sampath, The Printer of Malgudi (1949), and A Tiger for Malgudi (1983).

In creating real-life places like the Select Picture House and the Albert Mission College, Narayan's Malgudi becomes a more convincing town, whose individual features become engraved in the narratee's mind. This enables the reader to relate more readily to the town and its inhabitants.

Nihal Fernando adopts a psychological and sociological approach in his evaluation of Malgudi and its inhabitants. He states that 'Narayan's skill as a realist is strikingly apparent in his evocation of place', and applauds Malgudi's 'concrete' topography.[17] I agree with Fernando's comment as this thesis reveals Narayan's artistry in developing Malgudi's concreteness. Narayan's graphic descriptions of the River Sarayu, Albert Mission College and Lawley Extension become engraved in the narratee's mind. Fernando adds:

> ... Narayan also defines Malgudi through another, more abstract means - namely, through the evocation of its distinctive sociocultural milieu. Though less tangible than the town's physical attributes, this aspect of Malgudi is nevertheless a crucial component of the town's overall identity or atmosphere.
> (Fernando, p. 75.)

The special nature of Malgudi's socio-cultural ambience is evident when Chandran plans to marry Malathi. The theme of marriage predominates in the novel, and Narayan focuses attention on various problems which plague Indian marriages.

The following extract illustrates the point:

> It was on one of his river ramblings that he met Malathi and thought that he would not have room for anything else in his mind. No one can explain the attraction between two human beings. It happens.... He would have willingly settled there and spent the rest of his life watching her dig her hands into the sand. But that could not be done. There were a lot of people about.
>
> (The Bachelor, pp. 54-55.)

Chandran falls in love with Malathi, oddly as he watches her from a distance. The mores of Indian society prevent Chandran from courting Malathi and socializing with her before marriage. Narayan's approach to romance in this novel is consistent with the following sardonic comments which he makes in a critical essay:

> In an English novel, for instance, the theme of romance is based on a totally different conception of man-woman relationship from ours. We believe that marriages are made in heaven and a bride and groom meet, not by accident or design, but by the decree of fate, the fitness for a match not to be gauged by letting them go through a period of courtship but by a study of their horoscopes; boy and girl meet and love develops after marriage rather than before.[18]

In a society where culture and tradition determine that arranged marriages are the norm, Chandran is forced to fantasize about love, rather than experience it. The young graduate's university education is to no avail when he encounters orthodox practices. Narayan is not suggesting, however, that the norms of society should be accepted submissively. Chandran rebels against some of the incongruities in Indian concepts of marriage. He is

obsessed with thoughts about Malathi's age, and although Narayan does not moralize about child marriages, he ensures that the world at large is aware of this controversial Indian practice:

> How old was she? Probably fourteen. Might be even fifteen or sixteen. If she was more than fourteen she must be married. There was a touch of despair in this thought.
>
> (The Bachelor, p. 55.)

When Chandran ponders over Malathi's parentage, he questions the foundations upon which Indian society had moulded itself:

> Suppose, though unmarried, she belonged to some other caste? A marriage would not be tolerated even between sub-sects of the same caste. If India was to attain salvation these watertight divisions must go - Community, Caste, Sects, Sub-sects, and still further divisions. He felt very indignant. He would set an example himself by marrying this girl whatever her caste or sect might be.
>
> (The Bachelor, p. 56.)

Narayan satirizes a society in bondage to an inflexible caste system. Yet he does not offer a pragmatic approach to this problem. Neither does he break with tradition and allow Chandran to marry someone from another caste. Although he allows his protagonist to deliberate on these matters, the authorial approach remains intact. Jayant K. Biswal comments on Malgudi's ambivalent nature which The Bachelor encapsulates:

> Malgudi awakening to the excitement of the new civilization and yet retaining its rigid caste divisions, its innumerable social taboos is vividly portrayed in *The Bachelor of Arts*.[19]

Although Malathi's parentage is acceptable ('she was the daughter of Mr D.W. Krishna Iyer, Head Clerk in the Executive Engineer's office' p. 67), 'social taboos' thwart Chandran's marriage plans: a man could not approach a prospective bride's family with a marriage proposal; this was her family's prerogative. The following conversation between mother and son highlights the conflicting views of old and young, the former dictated by orthodoxy and the latter by modernity:

> 'Chandar, why won't you consider any of the dozens of girls that have been proposed to you?'
> Chandran rejected this suggestion indignantly.
> 'But suppose those girls are richer and more beautiful?'
> 'I don't care. I shall marry this girl and no one else.'
>
> (The Bachelor, p. 69.)

His mother is delineated as the matriach who determines Chandran's marriage plans according to 'Custom and Reason' (p. 70). Her tirade against any breach of tradition and custom contrasts with his father's 'evasive and non-committal' attitude (p. 70). He pleads with Chandran: 'I don't know anything about these things. I must speak to your Mother'(p. 69). Father is docile, yet loving, and acts as a foil to his domineering wife. He should not be judged too harshly for abrogating his responsibility: he is, after all a prototype of the typical Indian father. He views his wife not only as the *Lakshmi*[20] in the household, but also as the one who upholds Hindu custom and tradition,

appeasing the gods to secure happiness and prosperity for her family. Narayan skilfully juxtaposes these contrasting characters, who complement one another, thus contributing to the structural unity of the novel.

William Walsh makes an interesting comment on the part played by women in Indian families when he draws attention to the tension between middle class heroes and 'that deep source of power, the family: where the women rather than the old represent "custom and reason" and know "what is and what is not proper"'.[21] Whilst Walsh's contention holds true for The Bachelor of Arts, in Swami and Friends, Grandmother, though she is old, upholds Hindu culture and orthodoxy.

When Chandran rejects his mother's adherence to custom and tradition, he states firmly: 'To the dust-pot with your silly customs' (p. 70), such behaviour, according to Fernando, 'is quite unorthodox and entirely consistent with his westernized sensibility and his overall exasperation with the Hindu lifestyle' (Fernando, p. 81). Strangely, Chandran's rebellion is not sustained when Hindu astrology thwarts his plans. He is not strong enough to reject convention. It is clear that although Chandran fights old-fashioned practices, there is a facet of his character which acknowledges the 'heavy inherited burden' of custom and tradition and complies with its dictates (Walsh, p. 13):

> His special pride in the conducting of his romance so far was that he had not committed the slightest irregularity at any time .... he wanted everything to

> be done in the correct, orthodox manner.
> (The Bachelor, p. 81.)

Chandran's ambivalence is mirrored in his mother's actions when the question of a dowry arises. Contrary to her earlier standpoint that 'A Head Clerk's daughter was not what she had hoped to get for her son' (p. 69), she states: 'What I would personally care for most in any alliance would be character and integrity' (p. 77). Her inconsistency stems from expediency: she would sacrifice status at this stage for her son's happiness. Still she hankers after a match that would be financially rewarding. This is evident in her response to Sastrigal's news of the proposed dowry:

> '....I think they are prepared to give a cash dowry of about two thousand rupees, silver vessels and presents up to a thousand, and spend about a thousand on the wedding celebrations. These will be in addition to about a thousand worth of diamond and gold on the girl.'
> Chandran's mother was slightly disappointed at the figures. 'We can settle all that later.'
> (The Bachelor, p. 78.)

When Narayan focuses attention on the dowry, he raises another controversial subject for debate both in India and abroad, namely, marriages for economic reasons. The mother's attitude reflects her hypocrisy. Narayan gently satirizes the Hindu community where financial and materialistic concerns determine the acceptability of a bride.[22] Although he does not resolve the question of dowries in The Bachelor of Arts, he has said enough to stir the critical spirit of the narratee, who, presumably will make his own judgement.

The novel reveals another powerful factor which influences Hindu marriages: the compatibility of horoscopes and how this determines the joining of families. Agnihotri highlights Chandran's major problem which is 'the tyranny of astrology, when his horoscope does not agree with that of Malathi whom he wants to marry' (Agnihotri, p. 22). Chandran is traumatised by the bad news, and although a second opinion is sought, Malathi's father is adamant that such an alliance would mean an untimely death for his daughter.[23] The forces of orthodox Hinduism reign supreme and Chandran's rebellion dissipates.

The drama in the novel is heightened a fortnight after his ill-fated letter to Malathi, when he hears a 'crescendo in *Kalyana raga*' coming from her house, and is told that she is to marry her cousin (The Bachelor, p. 91). However, Narayan averts any tragic actions in the novel. He appears to follow the next step in the classical pattern of Sanskrit literature, 'dislocation of order', when he plots Chandran's actions after his disappointment. Chandran lacks the moral fibre to remain in Malgudi and accept this disappointment. Rather, he chooses to escape from the situation. Like an anti-hero, he flees from Malgudi and seeks solace in Madras.

Thus far my analysis of the novel has shown that character, and the themes of marriage, orthodoxy as opposed to modernity, parental love and academic disillusionment are interwined artistically, contributing towards the novel's *gestalt*. Narayan must be criticized, though, for

paying scant attention to the wave of nationalism and the independence movement which characterized India in the 1930's and 1940's. His Indian world view is limited at this stage and it is only in 1955 that he tackles the subject in Waiting for the Mahatma.

Another theme, academic disillusionment, has its genesis in a social problem which occurred in pre-independent India and is prevalent even today. Both the educated and the uneducated often found it difficult to obtain gainful employment. Malgudi's college graduates struggle to find their niche in a society where the economic and socio-cultural climate is at odds with their western education. Chandran is fortunate because his middle class family does not compel him to seek employment. He reads for pleasure for nine months whilst his friends try to find employment. His friend Ramu is representative of the generation of listless, College graduates:

> After the results were announced Ramu disappeared. He went away to Bombay in search of employment, and drifted all over Northern India without securing any. Chandran received only one card informing him that Ramu had joined the law course in Poona.
> (The Bachelor, pp. 53-54.)

Mohan, who fails to obtain a college degree, works as 'the Malgudi correspondent of the *Daily Messenger* of Madras' and Veeraswami starts 'a movement called the Resurrection Brigade' in 'an attempt to prepare the country for revolution' (pp. 62, 63). Ironically, these college

students become misfits in a society where Indian middle class youth aspire towards the attainment of a western education. Agnihotri comments that the educational system 'creates more educated unemployed youths who are a problem to themselves, to their parents and to their country' (Agnihotri, pp. 17-18). This is an issue that is relevant even today.

Narayan focuses attention on another social concern which has its roots in religion, and continues to plague Indian society: certain individuals who cannot cope with their problems try to become swamis. After his flight from Malgudi Chandran adopts the lifestyle of a *sanyasi*. His hopes that Madras will provide the panacea he seeks are illusory. Chandran, who was worldly-wise in Malgudi, is in danger of being exploited by Kailas, the rich villager whom he meets at the hotel at which he stays in Madras. Kailas visits Madras regularly to enjoy its seamier side of prostitution. He tries to introduce Chandran to a hedonistic lifestyle, and although Chandran does not succumb to the temptations of urban life, he struggles with his self-determination and questions his identity.

His perception of reality, however, is still distorted when he flees from Madras to Mylapore, where he shaves his head, dons an ochre-coloured robe and relinquishes his worldly possessions. This is an escapist action which characterizes him as an anti-hero:

> His dress and appearance, the shaven pate and the ochre loincloth, declared him now and henceforth to be a *sanyasi* - one who had renounced the world and was untouched by its joys and sorrows.
> (The Bachelor, p. 107.)

The comic-ironic authorial standpoint is evident in the extract quoted.[24] Ideally, the description would fit the true *sanyasi*, but Chandran has not undergone any spiritual changes or progressed towards self-realization. He deludes himself when he thinks that the outward trappings of a *sanyasi* can change his rebellious mind and spirit. He has not attained the level of selflessness and self-abnegation which characterize the true *sadhu* or holy man. Chandran's search for his real identity is in vain. Narayan's exploration of man's search for his authentic identity is an existential issue which is pursued further in The English Teacher (1945). Chandran is also the embryo from which Narayan is to develop the swami as depicted by Raju in The Guide (1958).

Chandran's role as a *sadhu* affords him the opportunity for introspection. He questions the reasons for his 'degradation' (p. 111). He comes to a painful understanding that what he had felt for Malathi 'was a silly infatuation' (p. 111). His self-appraisal, though, is limited. His ego makes him absolve himself from blame and unjustifiably apportion blame to Malathi for the failure of the proposed alliance. His self- evaluation points out the folly of renunciation. Still this hasty change of lifestyles amuses

the narratee. Although he feels 'resurrected' (p. 114) when he discards the ochre robe, he returns to Malgudi, subdued, and 'settled down to a life of quiet and sobriety. He felt that his greatest striving ought to be for a life freed from distracting illusions and hysterics' (p. 123).[25]

When Chandran returns to Malgudi he is cynical about life. However, his new philosophy, that 'Love and Friendship were the veriest illusions', which he discusses with Mohan when they are re-united, does not stand the test of time (p. 123). When he later receives a marriage proposal from a family in Talapur, he responds immediately. He falls in love with Susila at first sight: 'He saw her face now. It was divine; there was no doubt about it. He secretly compared it with Malathi's, and wondered what he had seen in the latter to drive him so mad' (p. 161). It is ironic that Chandran reacts in exactly the same way to both women when he first encounters them. Is falling in love the second time also not an illusion? Or is it infatuation which changes to love when fate ordains that astrologically, the alliance is compatible? These questions are implicit in the novel.

Chandran finally accepts his lot in life and succumbs to a pre-determined cycle of existence, but he has attained happiness only after his cathartic experiences. Rebellion, flight, exposure to temptation and renunciation have purged his mind and spirit. The plot ends on a note of uncertainty. When Chandran does not hear from his wife for

six days and suspects that she might have a 'high fever' he sets off for Talapur immediately (p. 166). Although the plot ends atypically, because Chandran and his wife are not depicted as living together happily thereafter, like the characters in popular romantic stories, it does indicate a realistic trend in Narayan's writing and the development of his literary skills. Narayan structures the ending of this novel in such a manner that it creates a link with the next Malgudi novel. The hint that Susila had possibly contracted malaria is a prudent ending. Narayan's prescient comments on Susila's illness serve as an antecedent for Susila's fate in The English Teacher, in which she dies tragically after contracting typhoid. Artistically, Narayan prepares the narratee for Susila's fate in The English Teacher.

END NOTES

1. D.H. Lawrence, 'Why The Novel Matters', English Critical Texts: 16th Century to 20th Century, eds Enright and Chickera, pp. 288-289.

2. See Chapter Two for a comparison of The Rainbow and The English Teacher.

3. Lakshmi Holmstrom, 'The English Language in India', The Novels of R. K. Narayan, p. 1. The critic also draws attention to Raja Rao's use of the 'harikatha' tradition in Kanthapura, p. 31.

4. Gerald Prince, 'Narrating', Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative, p. 1.

5. R.K. Narayan, My Days: A Memoir, pp. 76-77.

6. See R.K. Narayan, The Emerald Route.

7. Ramesh K. Srivastava, 'Portrayal of Children in R.K. Narayan', Six Indian Novelists in English, p. 58.

8. H.M. Williams, 'Precarious Innocence: Patterns in the Novels of R.K. Narayan', Perspectives on R.K. Narayan, ed. Atma Ram, p. 1. Williams correlates Malgudi's growth with the evolution of its characters: 'The novels so far trace the half-lamented "growing-up" of Malgudi from pastoral simplicity to contemporary complexity, a "growing-up" parallelled by Narayan's treatment of the growth of his Indian characters from childhood to old age, through the traditional four ashramas student, householder, hermit, sanyasi.' Narayan's main characters appear to pass through the four stages outlined by Williams. See also V.P. Rao 'The Art of R.K. Narayan', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. V (July, 1968), 30.

9. K.T. Sunitha, 'The Theme of Childhood in In the Castle of my Skin and Swami and Friends', World Literature Written in English, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, Ontario (Autumn 1987) 292.

10. See Chapter Two.

11. See Dr G.N. Agnihotri, 'R.K. Narayan, The Pure Artist', Indian Life and Problems in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, pp. 83-109.

12. Mieke Bal, Narratology: Introduction to the theory of Narrative, p. 81.

13. M.K. Naik, 'The Early Novels: Irony as Technique', The Ironic Vision: A Study of the Fiction of R. K. Narayan, p. 5.

14. See also Naik, pp. 4,5.

15. V.P. Rao, 'The Art of R.K. Narayan', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. V (July, 1968), 30.

16. See My Days, pp. 67-72, 103-107.

17. Nihal Fernando, 'Between Cultures: Narayan's Malgudi in *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts*', A Sense of Place in the New Literatures in English, ed. Peggy Nightingale, p. 75.

18. R.K. Narayan, 'English in India: The Process of Transmutation', Aspects of Indian Writing in English, ed. M.K. Naik, p. 21. Little has changed today in India. During my visits I observed that although a small percentage of educated, urban youth who meet at tertiary institutions or at the workplace, fall in love and have a registry wedding (either with or without parental consent), the vast majority follow the traditional pattern in marriage. An eligible male receives a proposal in marriage from members of a prospective bride's family; compatibility of caste and horoscopes are checked and a dowry is negotiated, which if successful, leads to festivities followed by the traditional Hindu wedding.

19. Jayant K. Biswal, 'The Malgudi Milieu', A Critical Study of the Novels of R. K. Narayan, p. 11.

20. In 'Vara Laksmi Vrata', Hindu Fasts and Festivals, Sri Swami Sivananda states: 'Maha Lakshmi is the abode of auspiciousness, prosperity and wealth' p. 152. Swami Sivananda comments on the role of this deity: Mother Lakshmi not only bestows wealth and all sorts of material prosperity, but also imparts divine wisdom to all Her devotees', p. 154.

21. William Walsh, 'India', Commonwealth Literature, p. 12. The critic also draws attention to the tension between the 'psychologically more active' middle class heroes and the family (p. 12).

22. Although the dowry system has been outlawed in India, both urban and rural communities often continue this practice, incurring financial debts. The cyclical nature of dowries is also evident when parents set aside a dowry received on a son's marriage, for a daughter's dowry when she marries. Even in well-educated circles, a dowry is not unexpected.

There are also other serious manifestations of this system such as female infanticide to obviate the problem of a dowry, later in life. See Shailaja Bajpai, 'The Lesser Sex', Indian Express: Magazine, Sunday, October 28, 1990, 1. For information on foeticide see Sharmilla Chandra, 'Sex Determination Tests: Licence to kill'. Source as for Bajpai. Narayan's aversion to discussing sex and sex-related matters precludes him from including these subjects in his Malgudi novels. There is no evidence in the Malgudi novels of neglect of females nor of any misogynism. With the exception of The Dark Room (where an abused wife is the subject matter), the rest of the novels steer clear of sexist prejudices and abuse.

23. Narayan re-creates the deep sense of loss at the time of his wife Rajam's death.

24. Narayan's comment is a gentle satire of another social concern in India. Many Indians, both young and old, select the lifestyle of a *sadhu* for diverse reasons such as poverty, disappointments in life, love or marriage.

25. Walsh states: 'The primary aim of all these characters is to achieve, in the words of Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*, "a life freed from distracting illusions and hysterics"'. Walsh's comments qualify Chandran's motivation in the novel, but as I have noted, the protagonist is not entirely free from illusion, even at the end of the novel.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BURNING TO ASHES OF KAMA - GOD OF LOVE: *THE DARK ROOM, THE ENGLISH TEACHER* AND *MR SAMPATH - THE PRINTER OF MALGUDI.*

> "Why are the women characters in your stories so spineless? Is the wife in your *Dark Room* a typical Indian wife? She seems to be only a slave of Ramani, not his wife."[1]

These questions, which were posed by Texas University students to R.K. Narayan, reflect contentious issues not only in The Dark Room (1938), but also in other Malgudi novels in which women characters feature prominently. One of my aims in this chapter is to delve into the controversies suggested in the quotation cited above and examine the position of the Hindu housewife in Narayan's Indian world view. I shall discuss how the authorial emphasis changes after the first two Malgudi novels, and how in The Dark Room (1938), The English Teacher (1945) and Mr Sampath - The Printer of Malgudi (1949), Narayan develops his female characters to become worthy counterparts of the males with whom they are juxtaposed.

I aim also to demonstrate how these novels best represent the second *asrama*, that of the householder, in man's cycle of existence. I focus on the theme of marriage and analyse marital discord and marital bliss which are highlighted by Narayan. I shall identify the cosmic influence of the Hindu trinity, namely Lord *Brahma*, the creator, Lord *Vishnu*, the preserver and Lord *Shiva*,

the destroyer. My evaluation of these novels will reveal how they are linked further by existential issues. My study identifies thematic connections that contribute to the structural unity of the Malgudi novels.

I shall show how The Dark Room, the third Malgudi novel, reflects an important departure from the comic-ironic mode of the first two novels. Narayan empathises with the Hindu housewife, Savitri, who, in my view, displays anti-heroic qualities. In this portrayal Narayan experiments with tragi-comic characterization.

I note certain similarities between the plot of The English Teacher, and that of The Bachelor of Arts, and I shall, in addition, illustrate how the former is superior to the latter in style and content. A critical analysis of Krishnan and Susila's idyllic marriage will follow. Attention will also focus on Krishnan's psychic communication with his deceased wife, and the controversy which this aspect of the novel raises.

In my critical analysis of Mr Sampath, I investigate Srinivas's search for self-identity as well as the disruptive influences which the film world and materialism have on some characters, evaluating their function in the world of Sunrise Pictures. I illustrate how marital infidelity and debased sexual passions destroy love and the sanctity of marriage.

I shall adopt an eclectic approach in my analyses, and shall examine theme and character not only in relation to their historical context but also in relation to the present. The main focus in Chapter Two will be that in the householder phase, marital relationships are fragile; love is transient and is easily destroyed by both man and fate.

The Dark Room (1938), was written during an exploratory phase in Narayan's literary career. Narayan states that he was 'a realistic fiction-writer in English' at the time.[2] He creates a female protagonist whose character is multi-dimensional and who is involved in tragi-comic action. The narrator transcends the autobiographical phase of the earlier novels and chooses an unusual subject matter from Indian society - the problems of an uneducated Hindu housewife who is financially dependent on her husband. Although this novel may have limited appeal for readers abroad, it has certainly found favour with Indian housewives who identified themselves with Savitri's predicament.

Narayan selects an apt title for his narrative, as The Dark Room has a dual function: it alludes to the tragic undertones in the novel and symbolises the gloom and misery which Savitri experiences when there is domestic discord. K.R.S. Iyengar elucidates the original function of the dark room:

> 'The dark room' used to be as indispensable a part of an Indian house as a kitchen, and was a place for

> 'safe deposits', both a sanctuary - and a retreat; but modern houses are apt to dispense with the 'dark room'.[3]

Narayan accentuates the secondary purpose of this room as a 'retreat' to which Savitri escapes when she is under stress. This is what V.P. Rao has to say on the traditional role of the dark room:

> Narayan's appreciation of a woman's plight as wife (symbolized by the dark room where wives traditionally sulked in a South Indian home) and her importance in the ineluctable but poetic role of mother makes his treatment of Savitri most sympathetic.[4]

Savitri also sulks in the dark room when she cannot cope with reality, and Narayan's treatment of her is empathetic. This limits the novel's merit but I am loath to regard the novel as a 'failure' (Rao,'Art', p. 32). Rather, I shall show that Narayan skilfully explores alternative narrative strategies in this novel. Savitri's 'plight as wife' is portrayed in the opening scene of the novel when Ramani questions her integrity as a mother:

> She said, "Lie down, Babu. You are not going to school today."
> Ramani said, "Mind your own business, do you hear?"
> "The boy has fever."
> "No, he hasn't. Go and do any work you like in the kitchen, but leave the training of a grown-up boy to me. It is none of a woman's business."
> (<u>The Dark Room</u>, p. 1.)

Rapport between the spouses deteriorates and marital discord becomes more frequent. Narayan demonstrates his skill in portraiture by counterpoising antithetical traits

in his characters. In the extract just cited Ramani's attitude is brusque and overbearing, and he relegates Savitri's role as a mother to that of a domestic worker. According to Meena Shirwadkar, Savitri is characterized, in the *Pativrata* tradition which presents women in 'the Sita, Sati, Savitri image'.[5] The title of the novel is linked to Savitri's image as a tormented woman. M.K. Naik comments on the significance of the title and its relevance to Savitri's name:

> If the title "Dark Room" is to be considered ironically symbolic in view of the fact that the protagonist is Savitri (literally, 'She of the Sun') and that sulking in the 'dark room' in the house is her only answer to her predicament, the novel provides little justification for any interpretation along these lines.[6]

As a being 'of the Sun', Savitri radiates love and energy as long as marital harmony prevails. When she is faced with domestic problems she withdraws into the dark room and wallows in its gloom. Savitri's characterization is partly ironic when we consider the Hindu interpretation of her name, that is, 'of the Sun'. Narayan's intention is to illustrate how a wife's spirit can be stifled in an unhappy marriage, as well as to demonstrate the tyranny of an insensitive husband. The title is therefore apt.

Ramani and Savitri are portrayed as a well-to-do middle class Brahman couple whose marriage is influenced partly by economics. Ramani who capitalizes on his wife's financial dependence on him, is often despotic towards his family, and

'eccentric and lawless in his taste' for food (p. 2). By contrast, Savitri is portrayed as the archetypal Hindu housewife, inhibited by her lack of education and sophistication. She has certain flaws in her character which make her partly responsible for the disintegration of her marriage. Her low self-esteem increases her vulnerability to her husband's autocratic attitude. This is evident in her response to Ramani's tirade at mealtimes:

> "Never knew people could be so niggardly with cucumber, the cheapest trash in the market. Why not have cut up a few more, instead of trying to feed the whole household on a quarter of it? Fine economy. Wish you'd show the same economy in other matters."
> (The Dark Room, p. 3.)

Savitri's reaction is counter-productive. She 'never interrupted this running commentary with an explanation, and her silence sometimes infuriated her husband' (p. 3). Psychologically, her persistent silence is a defence mechanism intended to assuage her husband's wrath. Nonetheless, this strategy, fails as she provokes her husband to further anger as the following passage shows:

> "Saving up your energy by being silent! Saving it up for what purpose? When a man asks you something you could do worse than honour him with a reply."
> (The Dark Room, p. 3.)

Savitri's silence and her sulking are weaknesses in her character which make her actions defeatist. Any attempt to offer 'an explanation' is thwarted by Ramani's retort:

"Shut up. Words won't mend a piece of foul cooking" (p. 3). Through Ramani, Narayan satirizes Hindu husbands for whom love is immaterial.

Marital discord is also engendered by Ramani's antiquated attitude towards Savitri. He tries to suppress her individuality by not allowing her to voice her opinions, even on the children's upbringing. He regards her as a mere possession. However at the Palace Talkies he was '... very proud of his wife. She had a fair complexion and ... a distinguished appearance. He surveyed her slyly, with a sense of satisfaction at possessing her' (The Dark Room, p. 27).

The emphasis on possession is evident when Savitri contemplates leaving home because of her husband's infidelity. Lacking formal education and economic independence, Savitri is helpless to retaliate as an educated, working woman would. Ramani, on the other hand, enjoys the comforts of material wealth and the power this accords him in the household. His position as Secretary of the Englandia Insurance Company boosts his self-confidence.

Unlike Chandran and Krishnan in The Bachelor of Arts and The English Teacher, respectively, who are sensitive to the needs of family and friends, Ramani's feeling of superiority and his sadistic behaviour towards his wife and children alienate him from his family. He also shows scant respect for the traditional customs that his wife observes.

On *Navaratri*[7], when Ramani attacks Babu for tampering with the electricity to illuminate the dolls' pavilion, Savitri defends Babu and allows her maternal instincts to override her fear of her husband's brutality: 'At this point Savitri dashed forward to protect Babu. She took him aside, glaring at her husband, who said, "Leave him alone, he doesn't need your petting"' (p. 48). When she squats and cries, he accuses her of 'holding a stage-show' (p. 48). Savitri reacts by seeking refuge once again in the dark room: 'She turned her face to the wall and shut her eyes' (p. 49).

Savitri's efforts to celebrate *Navaratri* are thwarted by her husband, and she is deprived of the power that emanates from the goddess, *Durga*. This *Navaratri* scene reflects the fragility of marital relationships. It moves the narratee to empathise with Savitri and to despise Ramani. Narayan forsakes the comic detachment which characterized his narrative skills in the first two Malgudi novels, and appears to be sentimental about Savitri's plight. This detracts from the merit of The Dark Room. Furthermore the gloomy atmosphere in the novel makes one question the function of this novel in the chain of Malgudi novels, if it is not part of the comic continuum. The author himself answers this query at the end of an interview with V.P. Rao:

> We took leave of each other for the second time and Narayan said, 'How do you like *The Dark Room*?' I repeated what I had written.
> 'I too don't like it. But you know many housewives

> wrote to me liking it. It seems it is the pattern of the housewives.'[8]

The Dark Room does have a place in the overall scheme of the Malgudi novels partly because of its appeal to the Indian housewife. Another factor which rescues the novel from failure is Narayan's skill in presenting parallel relationships. By means of a mirror technique, Narayan portrays Ponni and Mari's marriage as a paradoxical union of two warring individuals. Savitri's two close friends, Janamma and Gangu also display opposing qualities: Janamma, who typifies the domesticated housewife, abhors Gangu who is the epitome of the liberated, married female in pre-independent India. Thus one notes the recurrent pattern in which contrasting characters are knitted together for dramatic impact.

Narayan also achieves structural unity in the novel by counterpoising the old and new worlds of pre-independent India. He focuses on the conflict between orthodoxy and modernity thus forging a thematic link with other Malgudi novels. Shanta Bai, in The Dark Room, represents modernity, and Ramani is attracted to this glamorous Bachelor of Arts graduate. She functions in opposition to Savitri, who is portrayed in the *Pativrata* tradition, and is the seductress whom Ramani cannot resist. When she is interviewed for the position of insurance agent she pleads: "If you find me suitable for your office, I will be for ever grateful to you" (p. 67). Her remarks flatter Ramani and

appeal to his desire for mastery over those around him: 'A thrill went through Ramani's being; this beautiful creature grateful to him! He swelled with importance ...'(p. 67). Narayan experiments with his characterization when he presents Shanta Bai as an 'unconventional' woman (p. 79). Her character is ill-defined, and Narayan does not develop it fully to realize the potential of an educated, modern woman. J.K. Biswal's comments on the novel are relevant at this point:

> Characters in this novel are strikingly different from those of the earlier novels. The orthodox Indian family, the mother and the children, are caught in a vicious juncture of the Old and the New. No less also is the discomfiture of Ramani, who is caught between a family and a flirting mistress.[9]

Narayan draws his comedy largely from man's vacillation between the 'old' and the 'new'. Shantha Bai's portrayal as a romantic lover in the new world is stunted, and does not go beyond the following exclamation: "Aren't the stars in the sky beautiful? How delightful the night air is when it rushes on one's face!" (The Dark Room, pp. 83-84).

However, her education and modernity contrast with Savitri's servility and narrow adherence to the conventional lifestyle of a Hindu housewife. The significant role that education plays in the novel is encapsulated in the following comment by Susan Croft:

> The tragedy of *The Dark Room* would never have happened had Savitri been educated enough to withstand the challenge of her husband's ambition, or had Shanta Bai not been educated enough to apply for

the job in the Insurance Company.[10]

The conflict in Savitri's marriage deepens when Ramani continues his relationship with Shanta Bai. In one of Savitri's rare moments she asserts herself and confronts him about his infidelity: "This sort of thing has to stop, understand?" (p. 109), but this has no effect on Ramani. Defiantly, Savitri takes up the cudgels on behalf of all Hindu housewives in a similar predicament:

> "I'm a human being,".... "You men will never grant that. For you we are playthings when you feel like hugging, and slaves at other times."
> (The Dark Room, p. 110.)

When Ramani goads Savitri into leaving, she rebels against tradition and questions her existence:

> "Do you think I am going to stay here? We are responsible for our position: we accept food, shelter, and comforts that you give, and are what we are .... No, I'll starve and die in the open, under the sky, a roof for which we need be obliged to no man."
> (The Dark Room, pp. 112-113.)

Narayan moves from the personal to the general when discussing Savitri's problem as Savitri's plight acquires a national dimension. Her rebellion is prompted by a strange force which she does not understand fully. She begins to acquire an ethereal quality which prompts her to accost Ramani with the following accusation: "You are dirty, you are impure. Even if I burn my skin I can't cleanse myself of the impurity of your touch" (p. 112). When Savitri attacks Ramani's integrity he responds viciously: "Very

well. Take your things and get out this moment" (p. 113).

In this climactic scene, Ramani's irrational and impulsive actions destroy his and Savitri's marriage. Savitri's retort is tinged with pathos. Narayan is consistent in his characterization of Savitri. She has become the puritan who divests herself of her material possessions in a melodramatic manner:

> "Things? I don't possess anything in this world. What possession can a woman call her own except her body?" .... She removed her diamond earrings, the diamond studs on her nose, her necklace, gold bangles and rings, and threw them at him.
> (The Dark Room p. 113.)

When Savitri 'turned round and walked out, softly closing the door behind her' she acts decisively and courageously (p. 114). Her character begins to develop and although she resembles 'a typical Indian wife' in some respects, her rebellion and flight are atypical. She flees to the sombre riverside. 'Sarayu was flowing in the dark, with a subdued rumble' while 'Savitri sat on the last step with her feet in the dark moving water' contemplating suicide (The Dark Room, p. 115). In a series of flashbacks, Savitri questions her identity within the cosmos. Her introspection raises the following questions:

> "Am I the same old Savitri or am I someone else? Perhaps this is just a dream. And I must be someone else posing as Savitri because I couldn't have had the courage to talk back to my husband .... I couldn't have had the courage to walk through the

streets at midnight."
(The Dark Room, pp. 115- 116.)

Similarly, in Mr Sampath, Srinivas contemplates his identity within the universe. Besides focusing on Savitri's identity Narayan imbues her with certain celestial traits. He is preparing his narratee for the next female protagonist - Susila, in The English Teacher, who displays certain supernatural qualities. However, Savitri's ethereal qualities do not assist her to ward off her self-destructive thoughts. Her attempted suicide is prompted by her homily: "No one who couldn't live by herself had a right to exist" (The Dark Room, p. 120). However, Narayan averts a tragedy when Savitri reconsiders her action once she is in the river: "... no, no, I can't die. I must go back home. I won't, I won't" (p. 121). She is rescued by Mari, the burglar, who takes her to Sukkur Village, which is populated chiefly by low caste inhabitants.

Savitri's character continues to develop away from middle class society whilst she lives amongst poorer people in Sukkur village. Her new philosophy towards life is reflected in her statement to Mari's wife, Ponni: "I am resolved never to accept food or shelter which I have not earned" (p. 157). However, her determination is short-lived. After her first day as charwoman in the village temple, she is filled with loneliness and terror. She chastises herself for her weakness: "What despicable creations of God are we that we can't exist without a

support. I am like a bamboo pole which cannot stand without a wall to support it...." (p. 189).

Before long Savitri's strong family ties and her longing for material comforts make her return home. Her actions contrast with that of her namesake who is

> ... the ancient Hindu archetype of the constant wife whose legend appears in the *Mahabharata*. The Savitri of the ancient legend is a paragon of virtue and courage who confronts even Death to save her husband Satyavan and is finally victorious in the encounter. (Naik, p. 19.)

A tragic figure, Savitri returns to her husband who is at first happy to see her, but continues to be unfaithful. She recognises her defeatist action: "A part of me is dead" (p. 208), but remains powerless to change the situation. This anti-climactic ending conforms to the recurrent pattern (discussed in the Introduction), of 'order - dislocation of order - reintegration of order' in the Malgudi novels, though her action may best be described as a return to normality rather than 'order'. This 'cynical conclusion'[11] joins the various threads of the novel together, but it saddens the reader.

Like Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts, Savitri's character is not allowed to realize its full potential for self-determination. The purgation of her emotions has been a brief exposure to the harsh realities of life, outside middle class society. She does not free herself from *maya*, but remains a slave not only to Ramani, but

to life's illusions. Narayan re-introduces these themes in The English Teacher, in which Krishnan tries to free himself from life's deceptions and achieves spiritual ecstasy and self-realization in his psychic communion with his deceased wife, Susila.

Raja Rao's Kanthapura, published also in 1938, reflects Gandhian ideology sweeping through the country at the time. Narayan, on the other hand, ignored this subject matter until 1955 when Waiting for the Mahatma was published. Kanthapura differs in style, technique and subject matter from The Dark Room, but bears comparison because of its close representation of socio-political concerns, such as Gandhian ideology and its distinctive style of narrativity. Rao concentrates on the *harikatha* tradition of story-telling in the folk-epic style, and uses an old woman to narrate a tale reflecting the conflict between the villagers' orthodoxy and the ideology of the new political movement propagated by Gandhiists such as Moorthy. Orthodoxy and modernity are common themes in the pre-independence Malgudi novels which, by contrast, are thematically apolitical. It was only in 1955 in Waiting for the Mahatma that Narayan explored Gandhian ideology.

In the fourth Malgudi novel, The English Teacher (1945), Narayan refines his narrative skills and creates a tragi-comedy which is superior to its precursor in style and technique. In The Dark Room Narayan is testing the waters,

he experiments with concepts such as existentialism and life and death. These concepts are explored fully in The English Teacher, a novel characterized by poetic-prose which is used to highlight marital love and harmonious marital relationships, both in the temporal and spiritual worlds. It is part of the autobiographical trilogy to which I refer in Chapter One, and has its origins in the 'householder' phase in Narayan's life. This study will show how he draws from his experiences as a young, married man.

The fourth Malgudi novel has the pithy type of title which Narayan normally uses for his novels. He draws attention immediately to the main focus in the novel, the anti-heroic protagonist, thus continuing with his direct and transparent style of fiction writing. The title hints at Narayan's poetic-prose style of writing in the novel, becuase it informs us that the protagonist is a teacher of English literature. Certain critics offer interesting comment on Narayan's titles. Croft has this to say:

> Nearly all his books designate the "hero" in the title, either by name - Swami and Friends, Mr Sampath - or by profession - The Bachelor of Arts, The English Teacher, The Financial Expert, The Guide, The Vendor of Sweets.
>
> (Croft, p. 25.)

Contrary to Croft's opinion, I believe that Krishnan is characterized as an anti-hero. His achievements in life are limited and his psychic communion with the dead is a substitute for other real life activities such as teaching,

and developing a proper relationship with his daughter Leela. The critic goes on to state that 'the profession is always preceded by the definite article, thus particularizing the character' (Croft, p. 25). I agree with this statement as Krishnan is not characterized as a representative of a type, but rather as an individual who is deeply interested in English literature and who is committed to the sanctity of marriage. His individuality is later emphasised through his psychic communication with the dead. K.S. Ramamurti is another critic who emphasises the importance of titles:

> While the titles of Narayan's novels, like those of most Indian novelists writing in English, are very symbolic and suggestive, they are also artistically related to the themes and structures of the respective works in a manner which seems to be unique.[12]

These points are exemplified in the title <u>The English Teacher</u>. Krishnan is the dedicated English teacher who enjoys teaching literature at the Albert Mission College His character is multi-dimensional, and he is portrayed as mainly the romantic husband who is deeply in love with his wife. Krishnan's intellect is evident in the opening chapter of the novel in which Narayan emphasises the theme of self-identity. Like Savitri in <u>The Dark Room</u> and Srinivas in <u>Mr Sampath</u>, Krishnan questions his individuality and his very existence:

> The urge had been upon me for some days past to take myself in hand. What was wrong with me? I couldn't

> say, some sort of vague disaffection, a self-rebellion I might call it .... eating, working in a manner of speaking, walking, talking, etc. - all done to perfection, I was sure, but always leaving behind a sense of something missing.
> (The English Teacher, p. 1.)

Krishnan's introspection, his 'remorseless self-analysis' and 'brooding' (p. 3) are similar to Hamlet's self-questioning. They are both complex individuals whose philosophical nature craves for a profound meaning to their existence. Krishnan is dissatisfied with his role in life although everything is 'done to perfection'. The uneasiness and discontent, which have no definite source, are also reminiscent of the introductory remarks made by Portia and Antonio in The Merchant of Venice.[13] Krishnan's restlessness is a premonition of the tragic events which are to follow in the novel. Furthermore, his 'vague disaffection' with his identity may reflect, in Srinivas's words man's desire, to reach 'an ever-receding perfection' (Mr Sampath, p. 6). These existential issues are sustained in the psychic communication described in the second half of the novel.

Narayan bases Krishnan's esoteric experiences on his personal paranormal encounters with the spirits of the dead after Rajam's death. In Rao's interview with Narayan in 1971, the latter acknowledged the link between his personal life and that of Krishnan. Thus it is strange that in his interview with Susan Croft in 1983, he denied that there was any correlation between his occult experiences and

Krishnan's psychic communication. An important similarity between Narayan and Krishnan is the latter's intellect. Unlike any of his male predecessors in the Malgudi novels, Krishnan is endowed, like Narayan, with a challenging intellect. He is also characterized with a keen aesthetic sense. He sees the world through a set of poetic images. At five o' clock in the morning, as he makes his way towards Sarayu he notes:

> The eastern skyline was reddening, and I felt triumphant. I could not understand how people could remain in bed when there was such a glory awaiting them outside.
>
> (The English Teacher, p. 6.)

Krishnan's sensual and spiritual needs seek gratification in poetry and nature. He would rather write 'a hundred lines of poetry' daily than prepare English lecture notes for college students (pp. 7,9). However, his love of Shakespeare's works surpasses any reservation he has about teaching English literature. As he reads *King Lear* in class he is carried away by 'its sheer poetry' (p. 11). K.S. Ramamurti emphasises Krishnan's role as a teacher: '... he remains a teacher, a teacher of English from first to last and finds his work as a teacher the only source of self-fulfilment' (Ramamurti, p. 48). Like most poets he shares a close bond with nature, and its beauty invigorates him. It is not surprising that he grows a jasmine bush outside the boy's hostel. Its symbolism of purity, beauty and divinity is developed further in the

second half of the novel. The jasmine's 'struggle for existence' suggests Susila's fight for life when she is struck by typhoid (The Eng. T., p. 20).

The serious tone of the extracts cited prepares the reader for the tragic events that occur later. Narayan has changed from a comic-ironic mode, as in Swami and The Bachelor, to a more philosophic style of writing. He uses irony and satire sparingly because Krishnan is portrayed as a sincere and polite individual with a fine intellect. He becomes deeply committed to his wife and child when they join him in Malgudi. When Susila arrives at Malgudi station she takes control of the arrangements. Krishnan is agitated about transferring mother, child and luggage safely from the train to the platform in seven minutes (p. 33), but she executes the move with ease:

> She merely smiled and said: "I will carry the baby down. You will get these boxes. That wicker box, bring it down yourself, it contains baby's bottle and milk vessels." She picked up the child and unconcernedly moved on.
> (The English Teacher, p. 35.)

Susila's calmness, self-confidence and quiet efficiency are characteristics that she also displays in her domestic life. When she comes to live with her husband in Malgudi, the theme of marriage comes into focus. She epitomises the perfect Hindu wife and mother in the Malgudi novels: 'someone who seemed to understand perfectly where every rupee was going or should go, and managed them with a determined hand' (The Eng. T., p. 42). Her obsession

with minuscule details on the grocery list and her involvement in materialistic pursuits generally contrast with Krishnan's philosophical nature and generosity of spirit. However, Narayan's concentration on domestic details through Susila, in the first half of the novel, detracts from its merit. Nonetheless, Susila complements her husband's literary disposition with her love of reading. She has a refined mind which appreciates literature, especially metaphysical poetry. Krishnan dedicates an extract from Wordsworth's poem to Susila:

> "She was a phantom of delight
> When first she gleamed upon my sight:
> A lovely apparition, sent
> To be a moment's ornament."
> (The English Teacher, p. 52.)

One notes the dramatic irony here. Later Susila is to appear as a 'phantom' and a 'lovely apparition', which will uplift Krishnan's spirits and restore marital harmony. Krishnan and Susila exemplify a supremely happy couple who, through their marital bliss, see serenity in Nature:

> A fresh morning breeze blew. I took in a deep breath and said: "Do you know how I used to love the early morning walk along the river when I was in the hostel .... There is a magic in the atmosphere ...." I was highly elated. The fresh sun, morning light, the breeze, and my wife's presence, who looked so lovely - even an unearthly loveliness - her tall form, dusky complexion, and the small diamond ear-rings - Jasmine, Jasmine .... "I will call you Jasmine, hereafter," I said.
> (The English Teacher, p. 61.)

Narayan's poetic prose elicits praise from Iyengar: 'The story of their wedded life is a prose lyric on which Narayan

has lavished his best gifts as a writer' (Iyengar, p. 367). The first half of the novel is an affirmation of family life and wedded harmony which changes dramatically to sorrow, death and an alienation from earthly concerns in the second half of the novel. Nonetheless, the poetic style is sustained throughout the novel. En route to Lawley's New Extension to view a house, Krishnan and Susila are supremely happy, and Susila becomes 'Jasmine' in Krishnan's mind, beautiful and chaste.

They view a house which has an attractive rural setting. A jasmine creeper graces the front arch of the house and its fragrance permeates the atmosphere. Krishnan is exuberant when he discovers that the house is ideal for their needs, and tells the contractor: "I would love to call this the Jasmine Home, its perfume greets us even as we enter" (The Eng. T., p. 69). Ironically, the visit proves to be tragic for Susila. The serene atmosphere is short-lived when she contracts typhoid on her visit to the lavatory.

On the return journey, from New Extension, Krishnan and Susila stop to worship at the newly-built *Srinivasa* temple. Krishnan watches her transformation spell-bound. She acquires a divine quality in the shadowy temple hall, while the priest makes the offering: 'She opened her eyes for a moment. They caught the light of the camphor flame and shone with an unearthly brilliance' (pp. 74-75). Susila is cleansed spiritually and one notes the tragic irony in

her comment: "Only now do I feel quite well again" (p. 75). This visit serves as purgation before death. The novelist continues to endow Susila with spiritual qualities, which are easily identified by her husband. I believe that this novelistic ploy prepares Krishnan and the narratee for Susila's re-appearance, after her death, as a spirit.

The Eng. T. is the most successful Malgudi novel to depict domestic harmony in the householder phase. It is appropriate at this stage to compare this narrative with another novel which epitomises marital bliss, The Rainbow (1915) by D.H. Lawrence. The following paradigm illustrates the differences in the Indo- and Eurocentric approaches. In Anna and Will Brangwen's relationship, marriage is characterized by a blood relationship symbolised by a root. Yet there is a mutual striving towards individuality and independence. Krishnan and Susila's love is symbolised by a jasmine which unites husband and wife in both life and in death. Narayan is averse to writing about sexual intimacy, whilst Lawrence is explicit. One notes the equilibrium in Krishnan and Susila's relationship in contrast with Anna and Will's relationship in which the former offers herself as a sacrifice in marriage. The dominant symbol of the rainbow in Lawrence's novel and that of the jasmine in The Eng. T., illustrate the attainment of a perfect relationship between husband and wife.

Susila's death does not end their union as the couple is

reunited through psychic communication, recorded later in the novel. The tragic turn of events in the novel is recorded emotively, and the authorial intrusion replaces the characteristic, detached standpoint. Narayan transfers his personal tragedy graphically to the novel. Details of Susila's illness and death are recorded painstakingly, and this section of the novel becomes Narayan's personal documentation of his wife Rajam's illness and death. Rajam contracted typhoid whilst she and Narayan were inspecting a house they intended purchasing in Lawley Extension. As Narayan writes his novel in the first person, roles are switched easily and Krishnan becomes Narayan and Susila, Rajam. At the funeral, it is the author re-living his own grief: "I am blind, dumb and dazed" (The Eng. T., p. 113). Narayan recollects here the trauma of Rajam's death and the devastating impact it had on him. He records this period of his life in his memoir. (See My Days, pp. 131-133.) Once again Lord Shiva has annihilated the temporal love between husband and wife.

The poetic-prose style in the novel continues after Susila's death, though it acquires a certain poignancy and provides a sympathetic background for Krishnan's grief. Narayan does not allow Krishnan to be consumed by grief; rather, he makes him seek solace from beyond the temporal world. The scenes which depict the medium and Krishnan's psychic interaction with the spirits are imbued with a lyrical quality:

> The casuarina looked more enchanting than ever. Purple lotus bloomed on the pond surface. Gentle ripples splashed against the bank. The murmur of the casuarina provided the music for the great occasion. We took our seats on the pyol of the little shrine. My friend shut his eyes and prayed:
> "Great souls, here we are. You have vouchsafed to us a vision for peace and understanding. Here we are ready to serve in the cause of illumination."
> (The English Teacher, p. 136.)

This scene reflects the protagonist's search for harmony and self-identity on a transcendental plane. C.D. Narasimhaiah criticises this aspect of the novel stating that 'Narayan turns to the occult as a substitute for the profoundly spiritual', and he comes to the conclusion that this is 'Narayan's serious limitation in this novel'.[14] One may argue in support of Narasimhaiah that although Narayan's psychic communication with his deceased wife, Rajam was authentic, it was perhaps not 'profoundly spiritual'. Narayan had merely learnt and practised esoteric communication; he had not developed spiritually, in terms of his own self-realization. Furthermore, because comic prose is Narayan's *forte*, he finds no room for the 'profoundly spiritual' in his works.

Krishnan's first occult experience bristles with comedy: the medium writes at a frenzied pace as his hand 'seemed to be possessed of tremendous power' (The Eng. T., p. 136). He runs the risk of dislocating his wrist as 'sheet after sheet was covered thus with scribbling, hardly clear or legible' (p. 137). The atmosphere is neither sombre nor morose and the comic action undercuts the seriousness of Krishnan's

contact with the phantoms, and the comedy entertains the narratee. When Krishnan establishes contact with Susila, the dichotomy between the past and the present, and between life and death, is blurred and their marriage is restored, albeit on a supernatural plane.

Krishnan realizes that life and death are interlinked, revealing their oneness in the cosmos. Krishnan's perception of life and death changes, in keeping with the constantly fluctuating cosmos. In Narayan's Indian world view *Nataraja's* cosmic dance has initiated this metamorphosis. These changes soothe Krishnan's troubled mind and he enjoys bliss. These points are exemplified in the following remarks by Krishnan: 'This was enough. The greatest abiding rapture which could always stay, and not recede or fall into an anti-climax like most mortal joys' (The Eng. T., p. 139).

These metaphysical experiences have positive undertones. The message from Susila is reassuring: "she is as deeply devoted to her husband and child and the family as ever. She watches over them and prays for their welfare" (p. 140). This supernatural contact is an exaltation of the power of love in marriage which transcends life and death. William Walsh comments on Narayan's unusual accomplishment in realistic fiction: 'In developing the second theme Narayan daringly attempts one of the most extraordinary feats in realistic fiction. He persuades the reader to accept Krishnan's efforts to bring his wife back from the

dead.'[15] Even if the reader is sceptical about these metaphysical events, the suspense and excitement of the psychic contacts sustain his/her interest and assist to make Krishnan's experiences acceptable.

The atmosphere generated in the first scene prevails at subsequent occult meetings. At the next sitting, Susila communicates directly with Krishnan and firmly establishes her identity as an apparition. She, too, is "trying to master the art of communication" (p. 141). However, the conversation between the couple is not at first stimulating as it revolves around domestic details and material possessions, such as Susila's letters, which Krishnan had burnt, and her sandalwood casket. This characterization is consistent with Narayan's earlier description of Susila concentrating on household matters when she was alive. Lakshmi Holstrom views Narayan's portrayal of Susila in a different light:

> In the first place, Susila as a spirit contradicts the picture we are given of the Susila in the first part of the book. On earth she is literal-minded, has no use for extravagances and is deeply religious in an unaccomplished way.[16]

Holstrom's analysis of the living Susila's character is correct, but I disagree with her contention that her characterization is contradictory, and feel that Narayan maintains unity in this portrayal of character. Susila's actions in life and in death complement each other. Her character continues to evolve as a spirit and acquires a

certain complexity, evident in a later sitting with Krishnan. When he asks: "How do you spend your time usually?" Her reply encapsulates the nature of spiritual existence within the framework of eternity:

> "Our life is one of thought and experience. Thought is something which has solidity and power, and as in all existence ours is also a life of aspiration, striving, and joy. A considerable portion of our state is taken up in meditation, and our greatest ecstasy is in feeling the Divine Light flooding us...We've ample leisure."
> (The English Teacher, p. 158.)

In this and in subsequent contact Susila's intellect challenges Krishnan's . She becomes the educator and the English teacher becomes the pupil. This psychic communion may be explained in terms of Hindu metaphysics. Krishnan's esoteric communication with Susila follows a structured pattern which educates and rejuvenates him. Yet one notes a corresponding withdrawal from life's activities and concentration on the occult experiences. His psychic development is geared towards 'Raja Yoga' (Rao, 'Art', p. 32).

Swami Sivananda describes this branch of yoga as the 'king of all yogas'.[17] Krishnan's disassociation from worldly activities is commensurate with the fifth step in Raja Yoga, *Pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses) (Sivananda, pp. 4, 14). The authorial strategy is for Krishnan to transcend the borders between illusion and reality and to attain the final step in Raja Yoga, namely, *samadhi*, the

'Superconscious State or union with God' (Sivananda, p. 4). Susila's motive is distinct: "I promise that you will feel my presence as you have never felt it yet" (The Eng. T., p. 159).

To the critic or reader who is familiar with parapsychology, the occult experiences described would be credible. It is Susila's final appearance in the novel which bears special scrutiny. I think that there is no ambiguity about Susila's appearance before Krishnan, in the climactic scene. The atmosphere for her final appearance has been carefully built up in the novel. When the fragrances from the 'heavy rose and jasmine garland' (which he had received from the college farewell function), wafted across his bedroom: 'The atmosphere became surcharged with strange spiritual forces' (The Eng. T., pp. 226, 227). 'The past, present and the future welded into one' (p. 227). Krishnan's psychic development has made his mind receptive to Susila's physical appearance. They have conquered the 'law of life' and Krishnan's earlier belief: 'A profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life. All else is false' (p. 218).

Thus Krishnan's call, "Susila! Susila, my wife" meets with the desired response: 'When I opened my eyes again she was sitting on my bed looking at me with an extraordinary smile in her eyes' (p. 228). Krishnan offers Susila the garland like a bridegroom, and she plucks a flower for her hair.

These actions symbolise marriage and love. *Kama*, the god of love, has triumphed. The cyclical pattern of 'order - dislocation of order - reintegration of order' is observed in Krishnan and Susila's cycle of experience. The terrestrial and spiritual worlds are united:

> The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved. It was a moment of rare, immutable joy - a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death.[18]
>
> (The English Teacher, p. 228.)

My evaluation of the text points to the following rationale for this extraordinary ending: This climax may be viewed as a logical conclusion to Krishnan's progressive psychic development towards Raja Yoga. Susila is the divinity towards whom Krishnan's self-realization is geared. Yet it would be unwise to ignore the following remarks made by Naik:

> But it must not be forgotten that the second half of *The English Teacher* is neither pure autobiography nor a scientific treatise on spiritualism but a work of fiction, and must be judged as such.
>
> (Naik, p. 28.)

If one does not become involved in Krishnan's yogic experiences, the ending may be viewed as melodramatic and anti-climactic. One would have expected the various strands of the novel to lead to Krishnan's acceptance of Susila's death and his re-adjustment to life without her. Nonetheless, whatever approach one may adopt, Narayan's success is irrefutable in creating a *gestalt* which is

entertaining and intellectually stimulating.

Narayan continues to examine existential issues in the fifth Malgudi novel, Mr Sampath (1949). This narrative concludes the group of early novels which is characterized by the householder phase, in which the theme of marriage is also exemplified. Whereas marital bliss and domestic harmony predominate in The Eng. T., marital infidelity receives special attention in Mr Sampath. Like The Eng. T., the plot of Mr Sampath changes in the middle of the novel: The publication of *The Banner*, a Malgudian newspaper, at the Truth Printing Works is portrayed in the first section, and the filming of 'The Burning of Kama' by Sunrise Pictures, is described in the second half. These actions dominate the novel, therefore I shall examine the extent to which they impact on Srinivas and Sampath's careers and on their domestic affairs.

The characters in Mr Sampath are a part of the new Malgudi which Narayan captures with characteristic humour. In the opening scene of the novel Srinivas, the editor, describes the town's maladies in *The Banner*. He writes

> ...a regular feature entitled "Open Window", which stood for the abolition of slums and congestion. It described the tenements, the pigsties constructed for human dwellings in the four corners of the town by rapacious landlords. It became an enemy of landlords.
>
> (Mr Sampath, p. 6.)

The prevailing peaceful atmosphere of the earlier novels

gives way to one of tension and despair, which is symptomatic of the town's transformation. Narayan retains his comic detachment, and allows his editor, Srinivas to satirize the opportunistic landlords who are products of modern Malgudi. Narayan focuses attention on other contentious issues which are signs of the changing times. Malgudi's housing problems have been precipitated by population influx and the Municipality's inability to cope with the problems. Through Srinivas Narayan satirizes this situation: 'If the privacy, which the tenants had secured through a 'legal injunction' had been violated, it would have been anticlimactic, because only 'tenements' and 'pigsties', a 'spectacle' not worth beholding, would have come to light (Mr Sampath, pp. 5, 6,) Malgudi's 'nerve-racked neighbours' contribute to the tension at night (p. 7).

In Dickensian style Narayan portrays another image of his little India:

> Overnight, 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 labour gangs ... spread themselves out .... women cooking food on the roadside, men sleeping on pavements - these became a common sight in all parts of Malgudi. The place was beginning to look more and more like a gypsy camp.
>
> (Mr Sampath, p. 26.)

Malgudi's restlessness is generated partly by the villagers who carry over their communal lifestyles to the town. Scenes such as these probably prompted Naik to describe the

change from The Eng. T. to Mr Sampath as follows:

> From serious supernatural fantasy to comic extravaganza is a far cry, but it is precisely this transition that Narayan has attempted in *Mr Sampath*. But the novel is not a pure comic extravaganza either, since it is as schizophrenic a work as *The English Teacher*.
>
> (Naik, p. 30.)

Naik's scathing remarks indicate that he has no faith in Narayan's occult experiences, as well as in Narayan's comic mode in the novel. Although Mr Sampath has certain shortcomings, its thematic and structural links with other novels, and its satire of the film world, afford it a worthy place in the Malgudi chain of novels. One of these links is Narayan's satire of the inefficiency of Malgudi's municipality. As editor of *The Banner*, Srinivas's idealism motivates him to advocate change in Malgudi. He attacks the Municipality for its ineptitude in tackling problems:

> The possibilities of perfection seemed infinite, though mysterious, and yet there was a terrible kind of pig-headedness in people that prevented their going the right way. *The Banner* thus had twin work to do: on the one hand, attacking ruthlessly pig-headedness wherever found, and on the other prodding humanity into pursuing an ever-receding perfection.
>
> (Mr Sampath, p. 6.)

Although the Municipality deserves the criticism it receives, one gets the impression that Srinivas is somewhat sanctimonious in his attitude towards Malgudi's problems.

Furthermore, his thoughts on the nature of perfection are ironic because his career and domestic life are only mildly satisfying. His brother questions the 'all too ambitious task' he sets himself in *The Banner*, and berates him for his belligerence: "You are showing yourself to be a pugnacious fellow. Almost every line of your paper is an attack on something.... what is the matter with you?" (p. 24).

Srinivas's character is flawed. One notes his ego and unethical journalistic practices exemplified in the following statement: 'He admired his brother for detecting the similarity in all the contributions: all of them were written by himself' (pp. 24-25). However, his action stems from over-zealousness rather than a desire to deceive. P.S. Sundaram censures Srinivas for philosophising and not acting: 'Is it for him to talk of the futility of action, of reform?'[19] Although Srinivas adopts an overbearing attitude towards Malgudi's Municipality, he displays civic consciousness, in drawing attention to them.

His character is multi-faceted. As a philosopher he examines existential issues: "*My* children, *my* family, *my* responsibility - must guard *my* prestige and do *my* duties to *my* family - Who am I?" (Mr Sampath, p. 13). Like Savitri, Srinivas questions his identity, as well as the position of the family man in the cosmos. When the landlord cautions him about a ghost in the

house, he comments wryly: "And even if it stays on, I won't mind. I don't see much difference between a ghost and a living person. All of us are skin-covered ghosts, for that matter" (p. 17). Srinivas's thoughts about man's existence are influenced by the religious epics, the *Upanishads*. Thus he muses: "Life and the world and all this is passing - why bother about anything? The perfect and the imperfect are all the same" (p. 30). His growing cynicism is also evident later when he posits the following viewpoint:

> If only one could get a comprehensive view of all humanity, one would get a correct view of the world: things being neither particularly wrong nor right, but just balancing themselves. Just the required number of wrongdoers as there are people who deserved wrong deeds....
>
> (Mr Sampath, p. 63.)

Whereas the last statement is a rider to his belief in 'a balance of power in human relationships' (Mr Sampath, p. 63), the rest of his assertions (quoted from pp. 30 and 63) appear to contradict his earlier belief in an 'ever-receding perfection'. His intellect makes him acknowledge an external controlling force which is incomprehensible to him: 'There is perhaps some technique of existence which I have not understood' (p. 36).

His attempts to foster domestic harmony in his roles as father and husband are thwarted by his own inadequacies. He found 'domestic duties an extra burden', and realizes with despair that: 'At every turn he found he was violating some principle or other of domestic duty' (Mr Sampath, p. 36).

His frustrations are aggravated by his wife's orthodoxy and obsession with proper codes of conduct. Thus he resigns himself to an imperfect marital relationship.

When Srinivas joins Sunrise Pictures as script-writer for 'The Burning of Kama', he acts inconsistently for one who continually seeks harmony and perfection in life. The incongruity in Srinivas's character makes me feel that his characterisation is problematic. His actions are often contradictory to his convictions about seeking perfection in life, which ring hollow when he joins the illusory world of film-making with its promise of great financial rewards. Narayan appears to overlook these inconsistencies in his characterization of Srinivas.

Although Sampath too, is enticed by the excitement and lustre of the film world, he is dedicated to his work at *The Banner* , and one notes his initial selflessness in accepting little or no remuneration, according to circumstances at the Truth Printing Works. Sampath and Srinivas are portrayed as two distinct individuals who share a symbiotic relationship and yet are counterpoised in the novel for dramatic effect. The following extract articulates these points: 'His help was invaluable to Srinivas. He [Srinivas] felt he was being more and more bound to him by ties of gratitude' (Mr Sampath, p. 21). Sampath's pride in his work and his assertiveness prompt him to claim: "Well, you think, *The Banner* is yours. It isn't. I view it as my own" (p. 21).

Sampath's vibrancy and industry are other attributes which make him threaten continually 'to overflow on to the editorial side' (p. 25). Once the treadle became idle, he continually demanded copy from Srinivas saying: '"Editor! Matter!" ... [Srinivas] worked under a continuous nightmare of not being able to meet his printer's demand' (Mr Sampath, p. 27). The critic Biswal's comments on Sampath highlight his versatility in the new Malgudi:

> Sampath's rapid change over of roles from a printer to a film director to Siva and to many other unknown possibilities not only speaks of a dynamic personality, but of an elastic society that can offer many avenues to display one's potentialities.
> (Biswal, p. 17.)

An integral part of Malgudi's 'elastic society' is Sunrise Pictures, and although it allows the townsfolk an opportunity to realize their potentialities, it also affords them the chance, ironically, to display their eccentricities. The film studios function as a magnet for the odd assortment of individuals who are drawn to Malgudi by dreams of grandeur and wealth. Together with the two male protagonists in the novel they become involved in the filming of 'The Burning of Kama'.

During the filming of 'The Burning of Kama', the authorial emphasis falls on social themes such as the disruptive influences of the film world and materialism. Sampath becomes obsessed with the idea of immense wealth emanating from film productions. He turns conman when one

of his financiers, the landlord, dies, and he suppresses information about an investment. Somu, the financier and film producer who desires 'to serve Art and provide ... people with healthy and wholesome entertainment', is also motivated by financial gain (Mr Sampath, p. 91). For the first time Narayan introduces several secondary characters who share the main action in the plot with its two protagonists. In brief sketches he presents De Mello, Somu and VLG. His reductive characterization, especially of De Mello, is noteworthy:

> A young man in shirt sleeves, clad in white drill trousers, of unknown province or even nationality, whose visiting card bore the inscription "De Mello of Hollywood" was the brain behind the studio organisation.
>
> (Mr Sampath,p. 92.)

Narayan emphasises the hollowness of the film production by placing at its head, a nonentity. This description elicits the following criticism from Naik:

> The words "of unknown province or even nationality" are significant. Imagine even a minor character in any of the major Malgudi novels belonging to an unknown province or even nationality, so rooted is each of them in its local habitation. Others involved in the making of the film ... are portrayed equally sketchily.
>
> (Naik, p. 34.)

I support Naik's viewpoints and feel that Narayan's introduction of a variety of characters into what Iyengar describes as a 'menagerie' is an experiment. Ravi is one of those characters in whom Narayan explores man's folly,

because he changes his roles constantly: He is the bank clerk- cum- artist who is hired to work in the accounts department at Sunrise Pictures. VLG, the portly 'over the hills' Shiva actor and devotee and 'a puny youth with a big head and sunken cheeks and long hair', who enacts Kama's role, are, in Srinivas's words, a 'horrible pair' (Mr Sampath, pp. 142, 143). Although the 'chimerical quality'[20] of these characters is evident, Narayan's descriptions may be intentional. Narayan satirizes the roles played by Srinivas's landlord, Ravi, Somu, De Mello, VLG and Shanti Devi, the film actress, whose actions contribute to the comedy at Sunrise Pictures.

Walsh praises Narayan's literary works, but states that 'The exception is *Mr Sampath*, a treatment of the zany film industry, which is both uncertain in intention and queerly hump-backed in shape'.[21] Narayan's intention is most likely to satirize the embryonic film industry. He exposes unprofessional Indian actors and actresses who make a mockery of film production. Yet one notes that although De Mello may be a character in the novel, he is a nonentity in the real world, as the description implies. His visiting card though establishes him as a special film world personality.

The filming of 'The Burning of Kama' turns out to be more farcical than comical. Although the intention to base the film plot on a myth is noble, this objective is not

achieved because the plot is distorted. Had the film followed the plot of the original myth closely, its value would not have been compromised. Narayan feels that myths have a relevant function in the modern world because of the moral lessons and codes of conduct which they have to offer modern man. What he objects to is the distortion of myth. According to Shyam M. Asnani: 'The use of myth in literature is significant for its quality of timelessness.'[22] Narayan incorporates aspects of myths in certain novels, but in Mr Sampath the myth is used ironically. This myth is chosen for the film plot because of its romantic and religious appeal. However, certain anomalies arise when the film producer and film director tamper with Srinivas's original film script. He witnesses myriad illusions in the filming activities and becomes 'a mere spectator' of 'the mangling that was going on with his story' (Mr Sampath, p. 178). Srinivas is mesmerized by the ambience at the film studios, and this quells his anger at liberties taken with his script. In this respect, Narayan's satire of the film world is justified.

The film is a dramatic interlude in the novel and reveals the veneer of sophistication of the novices who enact its main roles. In the myth itself, when Lord *Shiva* reduces *Kama* to ashes for arousing his passions towards Parvathi, the symbolism is emphasised. However, in the film version, the myth is distorted and, ironically, the main action arouses rather than sublimates passion.

Sampath, who enacts the part of Shiva when VLG deserts the film set, is infatuated with the divine goddess, Parvathi, played by Shanti Devi. These actions violate the myth which loses its 'timelessness'.

Shanti Devi has evolved from Shanta Bai in The Dark Room, and is the archetypal seductress in the film world. When Srinivas is introduced to her:

> He saw before him a very pretty girl, of a height which you wouldn't notice either as too much or too little, a perfect figure, rosy complexion, and arched eyebrows and almond-shaped eyes - everything that should send a man, especially an artist, into hysterics.
>
> (Mr Sampath, p. 139.)

However, Srinivas is unnerved by her handbag made of a cobra hood, which symbolises her serpent-like qualities. Shanti Devi falls outside the *Pativrata* tradition of women in Indian English fiction. She is the unconventional mother who becomes an actress. Sampath falls in love with her and Ravi becomes obsessed with her. Her illicit relationship with Sampath flourishes on the film set and marital harmony turns to marital discord when he abandons his wife and children. Neither character is able to differentiate between the shadowy film world and reality.

One notes also a disruption of traditional Indian values which affirm the sanctity of marriage. These points validate Iyengar's comments on the 'last group of novels'.[23]

> Innocence has given place to experience: the nuances of humanity are lost in the rattle of civilization: the imperatives of tradition are exceeded by the impact of change, and stability and certainty are no more.
>
> (Iyengar, p. 373.)

The film world promotes marital infidelity and debased sexual passions which are also exemplified in Ravi's behaviour at the film studios. His inability to distinguish between illusion and reality stems from his psychotic personality. When he witnesses a scene in which Parvathi and Shiva (played by Sampath) are about to embrace, he is seized with jealousy. Narayan's comic irony is at its best in this scene, and he uses the cinematic 'zooming in' technique to highlight the action:

> Shiva went forward, step by step; Parvathi advanced, step by step: he was still in a trance with his eyes shut, but his arms were open to receive her. Shanti's brassiere could be seen straining under her thin clothes. She bent back to fit herself into the other's arms. The Mexican melody worked up a terrific tempo. All lights poured down their brilliance. Scores of people stood outside the scene, watching it with open-mouthed wonder.
>
> (Mr Sampath, p. 188.)

This climactic film scene is destroyed by Ravi's 'piercing cry' (p. 189). He rushes on the set 'between Shiva's extended arms and Parvathi' and knocks Shiva aside (p. 189). 'Next minute they saw Parvathi struggling in the arms of Ravi, who was trying to kiss her on her lips and carry her off ....' (p. 189). Pandemonium ensues when Ravi wreaks havoc in the film studios and ruins the entire production. Sunrise Pictures' lofty ideals to entertain

Malgudi's citizens comes to nought.

The film studios add a new dimension to Narayan's Indian world view as the films are used to symbolise the illusory nature of man's existence. They also negate the characters' search for self-identity in the first section of the novel. Whilst Ravi's fate is tragic - he loses his sanity - Sampath's fate is tinged with pathos. Instead of fulfilling Narayan's comic, though 'orthodox definition of a [film] hero - fearless, strong, and noble...[who] knocked down his opponents with bare fists; ...[and] withstood an attack from a dozen persons at the same time'[24] his behaviour on and off screen is anti-heroic. Shanti Devi deserts him after their traumatic stay at the bungalow in Mempi Hills. Thus Sampath is thwarted in his plans to have two wives: " a perfect one for the house and a perfect one outside for social life" (Mr Sampath, p. 179). This is the trend in the new Malgudi; however, Narayan follows Hindu convention and tries to preserve the sanctity of orthodox marriages. Marital infidelity is not allowed to triumph in this novel. Walsh's comments on 'the special flavour of Malgudi, a blend of oriental and pre-1914 British, like an Edwardian mixture of sweet mangoes and malt vinegar', aptly describe Malgudi's identity in this novel.[25]

It is only Srinivas who 'succeeds in extricating himself from this tangle of passions [in the novel] through his discipline and training'.[26] This is because of the

valuable lessons which *The Banner* has taught him. His unsuccessful attempts to re-start *The Banner* reflect the note of uncertainty on which the novel ends. The film fiasco has ended, but *Kama*, the god of love, is yet to be resurrected from the ashes. *Nataraja* continues his cosmic dance and Malgudi's tranquillity is partially restored when the tale of two comedies ends. Through his characterization of Savitri, Krishnan and Sampath, Narayan illustrates how ordinary individuals reach out beyond their microcosmic worlds to the world at large in order to flee from adversity or to obtain greater fulfilment in life. Although these protagonists are not entirely successful in obtaining their objectives because of their flawed characters and their illusions, their efforts to improve their lot in life, are valiant. When they are thwarted in their attempts to attain their goals, they accept with resignation what Fate has ordained for them. The universality of their actions illustrates Narayan's ability to allow readers throughout the world to identify and empathise with his characters.

END NOTES

1. R.K. Narayan, 'Round trip from Malgudi', *Review* Guardian, Thursday, August 9, 1990, p. 19. Narayan recalls these questions posed to him, when he taught his Malgudi novels at the University of Texas in Austin. He taught 'Religion and Caste in the Indian Novel' to undergraduate students and 'Indian Writing in English' to post-graduates.

2. R.K. Narayan, My Days: A Memoir, p. 99.

3. K.R.S. Iyengar, 'R.K. Narayan', Indian Writing in English, p. 371.

4. V.P. Rao, 'The Art of R.K. Narayan', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. V (July 1968), 32. Further references are quoted in the text prefaced by 'Rao, Art'.

5. Meena Shirwadkar, 'Woman in Anglo-Indian and Indo-Anglian Fiction', Images of Woman in the Indo-Anglian Novel, p. 49. She adds that 'The early novels show wife in her traditional role, mainly as a housewife and child-bearer, and the writers are preoccupied with her suffering'. The cause is 'mostly, the husband's faithlessness or indifference, a harsh mother-in-law, or the stigma of childlessness' p. 49.

6. M.K. Naik, 'The Unsuccessful Experiments: Irony Subordinated', The Ironic Vision, p. 18.

7. The late Sri Swami Sivananda explains the nature of this festival in 'Durga Puja or Navaratri', Hindu Fasts and Festivals. This festival is observed twice a year by Hindus in India. 'It lasts for nine days, in honour of the nine manifestations of Mother Durga.', He states that '... the one basic aim of this celebration is to propitiate Shakti, the Goddess in Her aspect as power, to bestow upon man all wealth, auspiciousness, prosperity, knowledge (both sacred and secular), and all other potent powers' pp. 8-9. Thus Ramani taunts Babu for meddling in 'the dolls' business', a ritual for women and girls mainly (The Dark Room, p. 47).

8. V.P. Rao, 'Tea with R.K. Narayan', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. VI, No. 1 (June 1971), 82. Narayan's remarks are in response to Rao's criticism of the novel.

9. J.K. Biswal 'The Malgudi Milieu', A Critical Study of the Novels of R.K. Narayan, p. 16.

10. Susan E. Croft, 'Interview with R.K. Narayan', R.K. Narayan: A Critical Spectrum, ed. Bhagwat S. Goyal, p. 28.

11. Iyengar, p. 372.

12. K.S. Ramamurti, 'The Title of R.K. Narayan's "The English Teacher"', The Literary Endeavour, Guest ed. Vimala Rao, Special Volume III, Nos. 3 and 4 (January-March 1982, April-June 1982), 45.

13. R. Naidoo, 'Justice And The Shakespearean Woman: "The Merchant of Venice" and "Measure for Measure"', A Critical Study of Women Characters In Selected Comedies By Shakespeare, pp. 146-147. In "The Merchant of Venice", Portia and Antonia are melancholic at the beginning of the play, but can find no valid reason for their sadness.

14. C.D. Narasimhaiah, 'R.K. Narayan: The Comic as a mode of study in Maturity', The Swan and the Eagle, p. 146.

15. William Walsh, 'Beginnings', R.K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation, p. 57.

16. Lakshmi Holstrom, 'Analysis of R.K. Narayan's Novels: Development of Themes', The Novels of R.K. Narayan, pp. 47-48.

17. Sri Swami Sivananda, 'Raja Yoga', Yoga Lessons for Children, p. 2. He states: 'Raja Yoga is an exact science dealing with the mind and the problem of how to bring it under perfect control. Raja Yoga pin-points the source of man's sorrow - his own mind - and deals with it directly. Hence it is called "the king of all Yogas"' p. 3. He refers to the eight steps in Raja Yoga formulated by Rishi Patanjali: 1. Yama (practice of restraint) 2. Niyama (religious observances) 3. Asana (steady posture) 4. Pranayama (control of the breath) 5. Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses) 6. Dharana (concentration) 7. Dhyana (meditation) 8. Samadhi (the Superconscious State or union with God), pp. 3 - 4. A close examination of The English Teacher reveals that, with the possible exception of the second step (religious observances), Krishnan passes through these various gradations which culminate in his 'Superconscious state of union with God', epitomised in this case by the divine Susila. The basic Hindu belief that a spark of the Supreme Being rests within each individual, is significant here.

18. This statement inspired the American title for the novel: Grateful to Life and Death.

19. P.S. Sundaram, 'The Ambivalence of R.K. Narayan', Explorations in Modern Indo-English Fiction, p. 145. Sundaram applies Srinivas's motivation to present day social conditions in India which need urgent attention: 'Srinivas is by profession a journalist who would like to wield his paper *The Banner* less as a flag than as a broom to sweep the many cobwebs that have taken possession of every nook and corner of our land' p. 145.

20. Gerald Prince, 'On Narratology (Past, Present, Future)', FLS: Narratology and Narrative, eds Hardee and Henry, Vol. XVll (1990), 55.

21. William Walsh, 'Sweet Mangoes and Malt Vinegar', The Listener (March 1962), 380.

22. Shyam M. Asnani, 'The Use of Myth in R.K. Narayan's Novels', The Literary Endeavour, Special Volume lll, 18. See End Note 12.

23. Iyengar refers to Mr Sampath, The Financial Expert, The Guide, The Man-Eater of Malgudi and The Sweet Vendor.

24. R.K. Narayan, 'On Films', A Story-Teller's World, p. 50. In the novel Narayan gently satirizes the embryonic film industry of the 1940's, which according to Narayan in 1990, produces 275 pictures each year representing a capital of 400 million rupees, and has 600 million patrons annually. (See Film Enquiry Committee Report, pp. 51-52.)

25. Walsh, The Listener, 380.

26. Rao, 'Art', p. 34.

CHAPTER THREE

SAVIOURS AND GREAT SOULS: *THE FINANCIAL EXPERT* AND *WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA.*

> As...[Margayya] went through the town that day he was obsessed with thoughts of money. His mind rang with the words he had said to the villagers: "I'm only trying to help you to get out of your money worries." He began to believe it himself. He viewed himself as a saviour of mankind.
> (The Financial Expert, p. 27.)

An integral part of Narayan's artistry in the Malgudi novels is his skilful forging of thematic and structural concerns between novels, thereby contributing to their cohesiveness as a group. In the extract quoted above, Margayya's thoughts reflect social concerns which Narayan introduced in Mr Sampath, and which he explores fully in The Financial Expert (1952), from which the quotation comes. In Chapter Two I noted that the activities at Sunrise Pictures highlight the disruptive influence of materialism, a theme which Narayan develops further in The Financial Expert. Margayya, the 'financial expert', is obsessed with amassing wealth, and ambition distorts his perception of his role in Malgudi society. He believes he is 'a saviour of mankind'. The theme of the redemption of mankind is common to The Financial Expert, Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), and The Guide (1958) and it will receive due attention in this Chapter as well as in Chapter Four.

My study also indicates that these three novels are interlinked through frequent references to India's Vedic wisdom, revered throughout the ages. Spiritual and

philosophical principles espoused in, for example, the Bhagavad-Gita, appear to have a marked bearing, either intrinsically or ironically, on the chief characters' actions and fate, as I shall show. However, Narayan's use of these teachings is subtle rather than obstrusive.

In my study of The Fin. Exp., I focus on prominent themes which reflect multifarious issues within the characters' personal and social orbits. Materialism, paternal love and the conflict between orthodoxy and modernity are themes which I examine. These themes are intertwined, to create a novel whose subject matter is entertaining and stimulating. I also evaluate Margayya's character and his relationships with his wife Meenakshi, his son Balu, his business associate Dr Pal and his rural and urban clientele in his money-lending ventures. My evaluation of The Fin.Exp. as a whole will affirm Narayan's mastery over plot, character and action within the comic-ironic mode.

Part of the novel's merit lies undoubtedly in its epic proportions. In a cyclical manner it covers approximately nineteen years of Margayya's life. Narayan highlights the various episodes in the protagonist's life, and connects them through thematic, causal and architectural links. His skills as a writer continue to evolve and in The Fin. Exp. he changes his approach to characterization. Narayan's novels acquire a new dimension - an in-depth psychological exploration of character. Thus The Fin. Exp. (1952) may be categorized as a psychological novel, which, according to

Raymond Williams's 1959 study of 'Realism and the Novel', is 'the direct study of certain states of consciousness, certain newly apprehended psychological states, [which] has been a primary modern feature'.[1]

It is these 'states of consciousness' which Narayan explores in his multi-dimensional characterization of Margayya as money-lender, husband and father. The protagonist's positive and negative traits in his character are intertwined skilfully to create a vibrant and versatile individual. This view contradicts Iyengar who says: 'Perhaps, the main defect of the novel is that the chief characters are little better than caricatures....'[2]

The title of the novel is important to Narayan's conception of Margayya since it signifies, in an ironic way, a man whose ingenuity enables him to build a financial empire, but lacks the wisdom to sustain it and to maintain a wholesome balance in life. Margayya has his origin in real life. In his Introduction to The Fin. Exp., Narayan cites a story about a troublesome peon at his workplace:

> We found in the course of time that this man was carrying on shady financial transactions among the staff.... Money is in short supply generally.... We have established a sort of cooperative banking in order to help those in genuine need. This man I speak of involved himself in the transactions of this bank, and no one could get a single rupee out of it unless he purchased the goodwill of this odd character with the promise of a commission on the loan which might be finally sanctioned. The whole establishment stank with evil practices, thanks to this man, whom we nicknamed *Dhur Margayya - 'One Who Shows the Way to Evil'*.[3]

Narayan noted the potential that this story had for comedy, and he promptly transformed fact into fiction. Margayya of The Fin. Exp., is imbued with all the craft and cunning of his counterpart. Narayan omitted 'Dhur' as he preferred to write at the time about engaging confidence tricksters and rogues, rather than truly evil characters *per se*. It is only in the ninth Malgudi novel, The Man-Eater of Malgudi, that the central character, Vasu, is portrayed as epitomising evil.

Narayan's intention is evident in the opening paragraph of the novel. He sketches a portrait of an affable rogue who arrests the narratee's attention and keeps him intrigued:

> From time immemorial people seemed to have been calling him "Margayya". No one knew, except his father and mother, who were only dimly recollected by a few cronies in his ancestral village, that he had been named after the enchanting god Krishna .... He himself must have forgotten his original name .... "Marga" meant "The Way" and "Ayya" was an honorific suffix: taken together it denoted one who showed the way. He showed the way out to those in financial trouble.
>
> (The Financial Expert, p. 1.)

One notes the novelist's typically lucid style and his introduction of salient motifs in the opening paragraph of the novel. Margayya is a self-proclaimed financier who rescues the villagers from their monetary problems.

Ultimately, he is financially ruined, and many clients lose their investments. Narayan focuses on life's ironies when Margayya, originally named Krishna after the Hindu

deity, pursues his materialistic goals in an unethical and immoral manner. It is noteworthy that in the Bhagavad-Gita, Lord Sri Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, instructs Arjuna, his devotee, in the science of self-realization, partly through a process which will 'deliver mankind from the nescience of material existence'.[4] Thus the ironic significance of Margayya's original name comes into sharp focus in this novel. Later, Narayan draws attention to the irony of fate and the effect which it has on the financier. This is evident when the financial expert is unable to find a solution to his own problems when his empire crashes.

The money-lender's ventures begin as a complementary service to the main business transactions of the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank. One notes the ironic twist in the parallel between the entrepreneur working under the banyan tree, whose enterprises thrive in his own free-market system, and the limited success of the efforts of the former Registrar of Companies to explain 'co-operative principles to peasants in the village at one end and to the officials in charge of the files at the Secretariat end' (The Fin. Exp., p. 1). 'Realism as opposed to idealization or caricature', is significant in the description of the money-lender at work (Willams, p. 200). His procedures violated 'the principles of co-operation' because 'he didn't believe in advocating thrift: his livelihood depended upon helping people to take loans from the bank opposite and from

each other' (The Fin. Exp., p. 2). This *modus operandi* reflects the astuteness and craft of a 'banker' with a pragmatic understanding of his clients' financial needs. Yet Margayya is one of those ordinary characters in the Malgudi novels whose lifestyle Rajeev Taranath describes succinctly:

> From average to the extraordinary and back again to a more poignant state of average - this seems to be the recurrent movement in terms of interacting characters in the majority of Narayan's novels.[5]

This 'movement' gains momentum when the disruptive influence of materialism leads to moral aberrations: Margayya exploits the villagers' gullibility and shrewdly elicits details of their financial transactions at the bank. Thus 'he kept more or less parallel accounts of at least fifty of the members of the bank' (The Fin. Exp., p. 3). At the core of his financial transactions is his avarice. He has an all-consuming passion for wealth. In Narayan's Indian world view, traditional values which emanate from the Hindu religion, philosophy and culture are sacrosanct. The novel depicts the cyclical rise and fall of Margayya's fortunes when he violates these values. In creating the plot of his novels Narayan observes the specific set of values which becomes his guidelines for his fiction. In discussing Narayan's achievement in literature, Shiv K. Gilra draws attention to this point, and to the novelist's

> ...surface simplicity, [which] however, cannot hide the placid profundity of a creative vision which has

> its roots deep in the timeless values of life. They constitute his frame of reference to which he keeps returning continually for sustenance and inspiration and which draws its strength from an inexhaustible source - Indianness.[6]

Margayya's values run counter to traditional Malgudi society. Nonetheless, he becomes an ascending star, a 'Master' to his coterie of clients. His disparaging remarks about fools and 'nincompoops' (The Fin. Exp., p. 4), and his condescending air, appear not to offend the villagers, some of whom are poverty-stricken. Even the middle classes are financially handicapped when faced with 'births, deaths, weddings and, above all festivals, [which] are budget-upsetting, as they always involve feasting and religious rites' (A Story-Tellers World, p. 11). Margayya capitalises on the villagers' need for money at these times and becomes a 'saviour' to them.

His devious schemes of creating financial needs even where they do not exist and generating capital for himself, are further testimony to the deleterious effect which materialism has on him. In his role as financial consultant to Mallana and Kanda, his unscrupulousness and his wily nature come to the fore. Yet R.K. Dhawan notes his 'humanitarian concern for his brethren'.[7] I disagree with this point of view because Margayya is self-centred, profit-making being at the heart of all his financial transactions, as the following extract shows:

> "....You will clear half your present loan by paying

> seventy five rupees and apply for a fresh one. Since you don't want it, give it to Kanda. He will pay you seven and a half per cent. You give the four and a half per cent to that father in law" (Margayya always referred to the Co-operative Bank with a fresh sobriquet) "and take the three per cent yourself. He will pay back the instalments to you. I will collect and give them to you."
>
> (The Fin. Exp., p. 7.)

Narayan's comic irony is evident in the seeming logic of Margayya's argument; the intricacies of the proposition are lost on both parties because they are simple, rural folk. 'Like a master magician, he casts a spell on all those who approach him',[8] and Mallana and Kanda feel mutually indebted to him.

Another facet of Margayya's character which exemplifies an active psyche is the continual questioning of his self-identity. The quest for identity is one of the main motivations of the Narayan protagonist. The following excerpt from the Bhagavad-Gita indicates its possible influence on aspects of Narayan's writings as it illustrates the Hindu quest for identity, evident in Margayya's characterization:

> Out of so many human beings who are suffering, there are a few who are actually inquiring about their position, as to what they are, why they are put into this awkward position and so on .... Humanity begins when this sort of inquiry is awakened in one's mind ....
>
> (Bhagavad-Gita, p. 7.)

Through internal focalization, Narayan reveals the varied emotions which Margayya experiences as a result of an

identity crisis, not unlike Shylock who is mocked by the Christians for his usury. Margayya is angry and mortified when he is treated contemptuously by Arul Doss, the peon, and the English secretary, both of whom are employed at the Co-op Bank. Margayya's introspection makes him aware of his inferior status: he is 'viewed as a public enemy' by the bank, and he 'felt that the world treated him with contempt because he had no money' (The Fin. Exp., pp. 13, 14). Further humiliation comes from his poor self-image: "I look like a wayside barber with this little miserable box under my arm" (p. 19).

At this stage one may ask whether Narayan deliberately ridicules Margayya because he belongs to the class of ordinary citizens to whom the novelist is not enamoured. Kirpal Singh's main criticism of Narayan's satire is based on the belief that 'the average and the ordinary become the butt of relentless ridicule'[9] in Narayan's novels. I believe that the novelist's satire of Margayya is generally gentle and is frequently undercut by the comic elements in the protagonist's character. The comic descriptions are often suffused with pathos, making the narratee empathise with the character rather than laugh at him.

One empathises with Margayya, for example when he confides in his wife Meenakshi that the bank Secretary is justified in snatching his papers from his box whilst he concluded his financial transactions under the banyan tree:

> "He has every right because he has more money, authority, dress, looks - above all, more money. It's money which gives people all this. Money alone is important in this world. Everything else will come to us naturally if we have money in our purse."
> (The Fin. Exp., p. 21.)

Margayya erroneously regards financial wealth as a panacea for all ills. He lacks the spiritual maturity to dispel these illusions and rise above monetary concerns. The disruptive influence of materialism is also evident in the discordant relationship his family has with his brother's household.[10] He and his brother share a single house, yet there is a barrier between them - symbolised by 'a partition wall [which] divided it into two from the street to the backyard' (The Fin. Exp., p. 9). Narayan portrays some of the absurdities which arise from the joint-family system and depicts the ambivalent relationship between the families. This motif of divided assets recurs in the novel when Babu, on attaining his majority, demands his share of the ancestral property and Margayya offers him a half rupee coin, an action which leads to disastrous consequences.

Further evidence of Margayya's illusory beliefs is his notion that he is 'a saviour of mankind'. This misconception is symptomatic of his dislocation, and is typical of certain Malgudi characters who are imbued with a desire to save their fellow-men, either from moral and spiritual degeneration, (like Somu in Mr Sampath, p. 191) or from the vicissitudes of fortune. In Waiting for the Mahatma, Narayan focuses on the philosophy of one of the

great saviours in Indian history, Mahatma Gandhi, and explores the Great Soul's ideology through a zealous follower of his teachings, Bharati. Her commitment to 'suffering and self-motification'[11] in order to serve the poor and the untouchables contrasts sharply with the pretensions of 'saviours' like Margayya and Dr Pal in The Fin. Exp. In the eighth Malgudi novel, The Guide, Narayan explores the saviour motif at various levels of complexity: 'Railway Raju' evolves from imposter to saviour of the village and ultimately to what would appear to be a saint.

As in The Vendor of Sweets, one aspect of Margayya's character which is unpretentious, and devoid of artifice, is his love for his son, Balu. The theme of paternal love is skilfully intertwined with Margayya's obsession with money-making, as the following extract illustrates:

> "If I have money, I need not dodge that spectacle dealer. I need not cringe before that stores man. I could give those medicines to my wife .... That son of mine, that Balu - I could give him everything." His mind gloated over visions of his son. He would grow into an aristocrat.
>
> (The Fin. Exp., p. 29.)

A stylistic feature of the extract quoted is the internal monologue, which Narayan uses successfully throughout the novel to structure Margayya's character. The excerpt articulates the premise that money has the power to change one's social status. Margayya's love for Balu makes him envisage his son moving through the highest echelons of society, aided by his money. Foolishly Margayya and

Meenakshi spoil Balu. Nonetheless, parental love is one of the powerful incentives which propels Margayya into lucrative financial schemes and it is because of it that the parents resort to indulgence and bribery, factors which help to turn the infant into a 'little monkey' and a 'devil' who, during one of his tantrums, flings Margayya's ledger into the gutter in front of the house (The Fin. Exp., pp. 40, 41). Margayya's lax attitude towards Balu is one of the flaws in his character. C.N. Shrinath comments on Margayya's character as being 'comic but not without a tinge of sadness. The strength of Narayan's comic art is to present even a rogue from a human angle and thereby shed light on his likeable weakness as well'.[12]

Narayan's comic-ironic description of Balu is commendable. At the age of six, Margayya proudly 'took the young man in a decorated motor with pipes and drums through the Market Road' to school 'with diamonds sparkling on his ear lobes, and a rose garland round his neck' (The Fin. Exp., p. 105). The Indianness evident in this description of a traditional, cultural practice by affluent parents is part of Narayan's artistry in depicting the Indian ethos faithfully and non-moralistically for his foreign readers. However, the pomp and splendour of this ceremony is nullified by Balu's poor academic performance: his first progress card is marked with a zero, and his scholastic performance remains pathetic.

The importance of a good education is an important theme in

the Malgudi novels, and Margayya tries passionately to ensure that no cost is spared for Balu's education. Expediently, in order to monitor his son's academic progress, he become the Secretary of the School Board and endeavours continually to teach the lad 'civilized ways' (The Fin. Exp., p. 111). However, in spite of everything, including home tutors, Balu, at seventeen, remains a dullard and fails the S.S.L.C. examination twice. He turns out to be a petulant and slothful youth showing little respect for his parents. He is scornful of his father's aspirations for him. Margayya envisaged his son as an 'aristocrat' and hoped that he would graduate from Albert College and go for 'higher studies to Europe or America' (p. 108). An increase in Margayya's fortunes is marked paradoxically by a deterioration in Balu's character, and a breakdown in family relationships.

Margayya's character begins to change as he becomes obsessed with making money. Narayan uses another technique very effectively to illustrate Margayya's phenomenal rise to fame and fortune; through a series of causal links the cardinal events in Margayya's life are related, and they start moving in a cycle, turning on an axis provided by the protagonist's quest for wealth. His money-lending activities under the banyan tree are hampered when Balu flings his ledger into the gutter, and Margayya is unable to retrieve money owed to him. At this stage he seeks advice from a priest, and at the same time he invokes assistance

from the Hindu deity, Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. The scenes which describe Margayya's preparations for the period of *Japa*, during which time he would pray exclusively to the goddess Lakshmi, and his diligent execution of the rituals for the *puja*, or ceremony, as they are ordained in the *shastras*, are devoid of irony and satire.

> He had a string of mango leaves tied across the doorway. He took from a nail in the hall the picture of the goddess Lakshmi, put up a short pedestal and placed the picture on it: the four-armed goddess, who presides over wealth, distinction, bravery, enterprise, and all the good things in life.
> (The Fin. Exp., p. 58.)

One must be mindful of O.P. Saxena's remarks that Narayan

> ...does not cast himself in the role of a deeply spiritual Indian who has to demonstrate the superiority of the East to the West, Sanskrit learning to all other learning. The pictures he draws reveal India, not through propaganda, but by sheer fidelity to things as they are....[13]

The narrative voice in this extract is that of Narayan, the 'quiet Hindu', who in one of his rare literary moments expiates on a traditional Hindu religious practice, namely Lakshmi worship, which is observed throughout the Hindu diaspora. The scenes of Lakshmi worship in the novel affirm Narayan's desire to be non-judgemental and non-moralistic. Details are recorded with precision and in a style whose surface simplicity allows the reader to grasp the essence of the ritual immediately. Whilst the narration retains its credibility for Hindus, the heterogeneous groups of readers worldwide are both intrigued and entertained by the comic

elements in Margayya's search for a piece of antelope skin. He requires, too, petals of a red lotus burnt to a 'pitch-black' paste and mixed with ghee 'made of milk drawn from a smoke-coloured cow', for a dot on his forehead (The Fin. Exp., pp. 59-60).

In Narayan's Indian world view family constitutes the nucleus of society and Hinduism is at the core of family life. The authorial intention in Margayya's propitiation of the goddess Lakshmi is to counterbalance his worldy ways. It gives his character an holistic appeal, which adds to the novel's merit. Naik, however, views the Lakshmi worship scenes from a different standpoint. He argues:

> ...it is obvious that Margayya's story could not have been told on a realistic plane alone. To bring out the full force of the theme of the irony of fate, Narayan instills into the narrative a distinctly fabular element ....[14]

Naik has little faith in the power of the ritual itself to change Margayya's fortunes. He elects to view this aspect of the novel as a fable rather than one based on religion, and feels that it is a deliberate part of Narayan's strategy to highlight fate's ironic twist. Whether one regards the *puja* as authentic or not the ritual appears to turn the tide of fortune in Margayya's favour. Whilst searching for a red lotus in a wood on the northern outskirts of Malgudi he meets Dr Pal, who claims to be a journalist, sociologist, psychologist and author. His book, "Bed-Life

or the Science of Marital Happiness", is not the clinical treatise on sex and marriage that it purports to be, and is branded by most critics of The Fin. Exp., as 'pornography'.[15] Margayya's fears of being bitten by a cobra in the wood acquire a symbolic meaning when Dr Pal turns out later to be the serpent who 'stings' Margayya.

The increasing use of symbols is in fact a significant feature in the novel, and an important aspect in the evolution of Narayan's craftsmanship. The partition wall in the family house; the open drain[16] which 'devours' Margayya's ledger, signifying not only the hollowness of politicians' pre-election promises but also the bottomless pit into which Margayya will plunge when his fortunes plummet, and the 'cobras'[17] lurking in the wood, are all symbols which Narayan uses subtly to enhance plot and characterization. Symbolistic writing is explored more fully in The Guide, The Man-Eater of Malgudi and A Tiger for Malgudi.

Margayya is like the snake-charmer who is fascinated by the 'cobra' which will 'strike' him eventually. Dr Pal is characterized as the cobra which will attack Margayya ultimately. He has a split personality - a modern day Dr Jekyl and Mr Hyde. He, too, is imbued with a desire to serve mankind, albeit in a sensual manner:

> "....I want to illustrate some of the parts. I want it to be of practical benefit....I want it to

> serve as a guide book to married couples. My aim is to create happiness in the world."
> (The Fin. Exp., p. 68.)

His intention to 'serve' married couples is ironic, because he corrupts the newly-wed Balu and wreaks havoc in the life of his family. The characterization of Dr Pal is a gentle satire on the crop of psychologists, sociologists and psycho-analysts whose dubious theories on sex and marital happiness were in vogue at the time. The novel also features a recurrent pattern of antithetical characters for dramatic effect. Dr Pal's modernity, for instance, contrasts sharply with Margayya's orthodoxy, yet both men are drawn together as the subconscious needs of one complement those of the other. Dr Pal's psychoanalytical approach to human behaviour is tested successfully on Margayya when he shrewdly sells him his book, a manuscript based on 'clinical research', and reputed to be worth 'One Lakh of Rupees', for twenty-five Rupees. This action negates his claims to altruism.

Iyengar observes that there 'is a certain chain of nemesis in the intersecting relationships between Dr Pal and Margayya, the apostles respectively of sex and money' (Iyengar, p. 377). Retributive justice is meted out to them. Margayya will later assault Dr Pal because he has corrupted Balu and this assault will prompt Dr Pal to punish him by damaging his reputation as a banker.

Long before this, however, Margayya forms a successful

partnership with Madan Lal at the Gordon Printery. Together they print and publish 'Bed-Life', re-titled 'Domestic Harmony', sales of which soar, making Margayya a powerful and wealthy man, and according him the social status he had hankered after for so many years. Thus he hopes to eradicate the stigma which haunts him, his descent from corpse-bearing forebears. These fears recede into the background when he becomes preoccupied with doubling his financial resources. His thriving business makes him contemplate, rather, the mystique of capital growth:

> There was probably no other person in the whole country who had meditated so much on the question of interest .... the greatest wonder of creation. It combined in it the mystery of birth and multiplication .... It was something like the ripening of corn. Every rupee, ... contained in it the seed of another rupee .... It was something like the firmament, endless stars and within each star ... [an] endless firmament ... [which] borded on mystic perception.
>
> (The Fin. Exp., pp. 116-117.)

The plant imagery in the extract serves a twofold purpose. Not only does it presage the rapid development of Margayya's financial empire, but also signifies Balu's parallel progression from infancy to adulthood. Margayya's obsession makes him equate money with the celestial bodies in the universe, within which he identifies his timeless existence. His views on his existence appear to reflect Vedic thought: 'Our very existence is in the atmosphere of non-existence. Actually we are not meant to be threatened by non-existence. Our existence is eternal...'

(Bhagavad-Gita, p. 7). However, his conservatism does not allow him to reconcile such 'sublime thoughts' with the idea of a modern office (The Fin. Exp., p. 117). His ambivalent nature is revealed when, expediently, the book business becomes 'alien' once 'Domestic Harmony' has outlived its purpose; the book now appears to be "Awful stuff....Most vulgar and poisonous [so] it will do a lot of damage to young minds" (p. 118). Margayya decides to sell his share of the book to Madan Lal for 'a lump sum payment' (p. 122). Lakshmi Holstrom also notes Margayya's contradictory principles:

> Margayya allows for corruption in the making of money but he is deeply distressed by any association with sexual immorality or loose living. There is a conflict of values here that runs all through the book.[18]

The central character's sense of morality is hollow. Before long Margayya joins forces with Dr Pal again to set up a new money-lending business in Market Street for people with 'surplus cash' (The Fin. Exp., p. 126). 'Surplus cash' is a euphemism for the large sums that wartime blackmarketeers had accrued and deposited into Margayya's bank through the assistance of his agent Dr Pal.

The meteoric rise in Margayya's fortunes is juxtaposed with the deterioration of his family life. Balu's refusal to write the S.S.L.C. examinations for the third time and Margayya's unrealistic expectations of him set both characters on a collision course. Meenakshi, who is

characterized as the archetypal, subservient, Hindu housewife, does little to defuse the situation. She watches 'silently with resignation and fear, the crisis developing between father and son' (The Fin. Exp., p. 136). Like Savitri in The Dark Room, 'she understood that the best way to attain some peace of mind in life was to maintain silence' (The Fin. Exp., p. 137). Balu's action of tearing up his S.S.L.C. Register and flinging it into the gutter, is symbolic of his rejection of an outmoded education system. Few people receive a good education, which should make them well-adjusted and successful citizens. This is Narayan's indictment of Indian society.

The novelist's portrait of Balu is created along anti-heroic lines which are similar to his father's characterization. Balu's 'death' in Madras and his 're-birth' reflect the cycle of events which characterize his life and parallel the wheel of life,[19] a belief to which Margayya subscribes. The wheel of life keeps turning when Balu marries Brinda, the daughter of a wealthy tea estate owner in Mempi Hills. Margayya's corrupt nature is revealed when he resorts to bribery so that the horoscopes would be declared to be compatible, when in fact they are not. Margayya 'was going to take no nonsense from the planets, and... he was going to tell them how to dispose their position in order to meet his requirement' (The Fin. Exp., p. 185).

Margayya's arrogance makes him challenge the powerful impact

of astrological predictions, considered to be sacrosanct in Hinduism, and he is duly punished for disturbing the natural order. Balu's predilection for a life of ease and luxury makes him fall prey to the hedonistic lifestyle to which Dr Pal introduces him, hence his marriage suffers.

In a dramatic scene, which is like a theatrical interlude in the novel, Margayya attacks Dr Pal when he sees Balu alighting from his Baby Austin in the early hours of the morning, after indulging himself with 'theatre girls'. Margayya is outraged by Dr Pal's corruption of Balu. This scene reveals the deleterious effect which urban, modern life could have on its citizens, because of its changing value systems:

> He dashed to the other door of the car near the driving seat, thrust his arm in, got Pal by the scruff of his coat and dragged him out as Balu ... was saying "good night!" ... Dr. Pal staggered out....Margayya took off one of his sandals and hit him with it;.... Pal.... was blinded by pain, and blood oozed from the cuts on his face. The girls within the car screamed.
> (The Fin. Exp., pp. 211-212.)

Margayya is incensed and strikes Dr Pal for influencing Balu to behave immorally. One understands his impulsive reaction to the scene, though it does precipitate his downfall. As a consequence of the assault Dr Pal influences Margayya's clients to withdraw their money from his bank and, like Shylock, Margayya is hoist with his own petard.

> One after another they came with their receipts. Margayya returned their cash without a murmur. The

> street became congested with people converging on his house; people hung about his steps and windows. He bolted the front door and dealt with them through the window.
>
> (The Fin. Exp., p. 215.)

'By four o' clock all the cash in the house was gone' (p. 215), and Margayya becomes insolvent. When Balu and his family return to the family hearth, because his house has been attached, the central characters' lives have come full circle.[20] Rajeev Taranath states that Margayya 'identifies his real self only after passing through the stages of glory and deflation. At the end of the novel... [he has] an altered and enriched kind of awareness' (Taranath, p. 311). It's debatable whether the protagonist dispels his illusions and attains self-realization at the end of the novel. He tells Balu to return to the banyan tree with the tools of his old trade 'and anything may happen thereafter .... "I am showing you a way"' (The Fin. Exp., p. 218). Balu is to re-start Margayya's money lending business in the hope that it would be successful once again.

One wonders whether Margayya's plans portray a return to the old ways which have been characterized by illusion. I believe that Narayan deliberately ends the novel on an ambiguous note. Margayya's identity crisis and his greed for money are unresolved issues at the end of the novel, implying that the Narayan anti-hero, ever hopeful, will continue to search for his niche in life. The conclusion confirms man's inability to escape from this cycle.

Margayya learns a lesson in humiliation when his fortunes change and he is back to his humble beginnings. His character development has been stunted because his goals have been illusory, but he will learn to make compromises, accepting life gracefully with the level of self-determination he has attained. His attitude vindicates Narayan's statement that The Fin. Exp. was 'a book written in joy and hopefulness in that lonely splendour of ...[his] home in Yadavagiri'.[21]

Some notable critics have hailed The Fin. Exp. as one of Narayan's best novels. During Narayan's 'American Journey' (1955-1956) as guest of the Rockefeller Foundation, eminent publishers in New York acknowledged the novel's merit, for example, at a party to honour the novelist, publisher "A" stated: 'I like your *Financial Expert*. It is your best book.'[22]

Back in India K.R.S. Iyengar notes the novel's merit. He says it 'is,in its own sphere, quite an achievement' and adds that, 'It is clearly and even sparklingly written, it is mildly satirical, and it is unexcitingly interesting and entertaining' (Iyengar,p. 376).

Dr C.N. Srinath comments on the superior structure of The Financial Expert: 'one is struck by the ingenuity of craftsmanship in projecting the rise and fall of the protagonist Margayya in five sections corresponding to the five acts of an Elizabethan tragedy' (Srinath, p. 7). In

his study 'The Masterpieces: Irony as Moral Discovery', M.K. Naik informs the narratee of the general consensus of opinion that '<u>The Financial Expert</u> (1952), together with <u>The Guide</u> (1958) and <u>The Man-Eater of Malgudi</u> (1962) constitute the cream of Narayan's fiction .... because irony ... develops from merely a useful technique into an all-embracing vision of life' (Naik, p. 44).

In <u>Waiting for the Mahatma</u>, Narayan's vision of life is philosophic, rather than ironic. Self-identity and self-development are the objectives of Sriram, the protagonist, in <u>Waiting for the Mahatma</u> (1955). Narayan deals with this theme within the context of the action. Bharati, the congress worker exemplifies the dedicated Gandhist, whilst Mahatma Gandhi himself features as a character in the novel.

This novel is important for two reasons: first, Narayan, generally a novelist uncommitted to any cause, cult or philosophy, spotlights Mahatma Gandhi's teachings without compromising his non-partisan stand, and second Mahatma Gandhi's teachings and the activities of the Nationalist Movement are contextualized within the political milieu which characterized the Gandhian era. Thus also for the first time in the Malgudi novels, Narayan focuses on the theme of politics, according it a secondary position, as sympathetic background to Sriram and Bharati's relationship and their activities as Gandhiists. The merit in <u>Waiting</u>., is the balanced interplay of these themes and the holistic appeal of the novel, which accords it a praiseworthy

position in Indian English literature of the post-Gandhian epoch.

Samares C. Sanyal defines the Gandhian age itself as 'the period between the two world wars',[23] and explores the effect these wars had on the Indian sub-continent:

> The twentieth century Indian novelists were deeply affected by the consequences of the wars. This was a great experience because the national consciousness was awakened and liberty and independence were great ideals worth fighting and dying for. No Indian writer of those days could avoid reflecting this emotional experience in his work. This upsurge became more and more marked as the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and gradually spread all over India.
>
> (Sanyal, p. 115.)

Narayan is a notable exception: unlike the novelists referred to in the extract quoted, he did not make Indian politics the main thrust of his novels of the 1930's and 1940's, probably because he felt that this focus might compromise his preference for comic detachment and place him in the realm of socio-political, reformist writers such as Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and K.S. Venkataramani, whose commitment to a cause and to didacticism detracted from their art. It was only in 1955, almost eight years after Indian Independence that Narayan explored in some depth Gandhian ideology and Nationalist politics which helped to precipitate the end of British rule in India. The novelist ensures, though, that these issues do not overwhelm his desire to concentrate on the type of realism in art, which Raymond Williams explains as follows: 'The most

ordinary definition was in terms of an ordinary, contemporary, everyday reality, as opposed to traditionally heroic, romantic or legendary subjects.'[24]

Thus Narayan does not accord the 'traditionally heroic' Mahatma Gandhi, pride of place in Waiting, but, rather, he reserves this position for his average, middle class anti-hero, Sriram. Narayan's characterization of Gandhi is best explained by the author himself in an interview with V.P. Rao:

> 'Considering your *Waiting for the Mahatma*, were you greatly influenced by Gandhi?'
> 'No, He was a rare man. But I don't agree with his political or economic thinking. But, - Truth ... and he was absolutely transparent.'[25]

As the passage makes clear, Narayan did not agree with Gandhi's political or economic views, but he was impressed by Gandhi's search for the truth in life, and he allows this admiration to come through in his novel. I shall first examine Narayan's approach to Gandhian philosophy. At the outset one may question the aptness of the title since it does not refer pointedly to the protagonist himself. The title introduces the concept of 'waiting' by man, in relation to Time, in its varied facets: temporal, universal and infinite. 'Waiting' characterizes not only Malgudi's citizens who await the Mahatma's arrival, but also marks the roles played by both central and minor characters in the novel.

Narayan is a reliable narrator and the Mahatma's philosophy

which is based on Vedic wisdom chronicled in The Bhagavad-Gita, is depicted authentically and sincerely. Gandhian ideology and teachings are not depicted ironically or satirized. Narayan's humour lies in highlighting the idiosyncrasies of some of Gandhi's followers, who do not understand the Gandhian way of life. Narayan does not focus on Gandhian ideology *per se*, but uses the Great Soul's philosophy referentially in his plot, themes and characters.

Gandhi features as one of the main characters in the novel and is depicted from a dual standpoint: On a national level he is the philosopher and political leader who revolutionizes Indian thought. During the transition to independence he is portrayed as a saviour and peace-maker. On a personal level he is a mentor and friend to Bharati and Sriram, guiding them as disciples and finally sanctioning their marriage to each other. His life in the novel is depicted within a specific time-frame as he works feverishly to accomplish his tasks, unconsciously, before death.

Narayan structures his plot with continual reference to the powerful influence of Time. This motif is introduced in the twenty year practice undertaken by Sriram's grandmother, when she deposits his father's military pension in a Trust Account at the Fund office. This action links Sriram with his deceased father and exemplifies the joining of the past with the present. Sriram and his grandmother are wealthy middle class Malgudians who live at Number 14,

Kabir Street, the ancestral home which 'maintained a continuity, a link with the past .... There the family lineage began centuries ago and continued still...' (Waiting, p. 4). Sriram has to wait a long period before he can declare his love for Bharati, and they await the Mahatma's permission to marry. When he functions as a Gandhiist and later as a terrorist he stays at 'a deserted shrine on a slope of the Mempi Hill' (Waiting, p. 63). This links the time-frame of his microscopic existence within the macroscope of infinite time: the shrine symbolises the glory of ancient India which, ironically, is juxtaposed with pre-independent India's turbulence and turmoil, for which Sriram's terrorist activities are a metaphor.

Narayan demonstrates the link between the Vedic concept of man's eternal existence with Time's infinity, as exemplified in Granny's life. Her 'death', 'rebirth' and her waiting for death with several other old people who spend their last years in Benares, and who look 'forward to the final fire and the final ablution in the sacred Ganges' (Waiting, p. 138), represent the *karmic* cycle of Time in the infinite universe. The time-motif is also exemplified in Mahatma Gandhi's urgent mission as *Satyagrahi* and 'saviour' to the Harijans; his actions are controlled by 'his watch [tucked] at his waist into a fold of his white *dhoti*', (p. 44), signifying a race against his untimely death. These are some of the

events set into time-frames on a personal level, and are concomitant with time on a national scale, evidenced in India's waiting for liberation.

In the opening chapter of the novel, Sriram is described as an indolent Kabir street youth who whiles away his time. His early life is like a daydream: he is just a 'spectator' on the periphery of society:

> This window became such a habit with him that when he grew up he sought no other diversion except to sit there, sometimes with a book, and watch the street. His grandmother often reproached him for it. She asked: 'Why don't you go and mix with others of your age?'
> 'I am quite happy where I am,' he answered briefly.
> (Waiting, p. 3.)

When he obtains his inheritance on his twentieth birthday, he becomes egotistical. There are echoes of the disruptive influence of materialism from The Fin. Exp., Narayan satirizes Sriram who clutches his newly-acquired Savings Pass Book, pompously, and accompanies his grandmother, with whom he lives, to the Fund Office.

Narayan continues his single, third person narration in Waiting., and enhances narrativity in this novel through a series of internal monologues once again, to provide an unrestricted point of view. This is evident in the following extract which describes Sriram's first meeting with Bharati, the girl who is to change his life radically:

> As he approached the Market Fountain a pretty girl came up and stopped him.

> 'Your contribution?' she asked, shaking a sealed tin collection box.
> Sriram's throat went dry and no sound came. He had never been spoken to by any girl before; she was slender and young, with eyes that sparkled with happiness. He wanted to ask, 'How old are you? What caste are you? Where is your horoscope? Are you free to marry me?'
>
> (Waiting., p. 13).

The questions that race through Sriram's mind reflect important aspects relating to Hindu marriages. Narayan reveals the comic elements in Sriram's immediate attraction to Bharati, Gandhi's disciple. Narayan's world view expands to reveal a broader perspective which incorporates monumental events in Indian history. Narayan portrays Gandhi as a saintly figure whose stature as a 'saviour' and 'hero' in Indian society and politics, is sustained in the novel. Paradoxically, he is able to identify himself with Malgudi's citizens, gathered on the sands of the River Sarayu where they have been 'awaiting the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi' (Waiting, p. 15). As the following extract shows:

> Mahatma Gandhi stood on the dais, with his palms brought together in a salute. A mighty cry rang out, 'Mahatma Gandhi-ki-Jai!' Then he raised his arm, and instantly a silence fell on the gathering. He clapped his hands rythmically [sic] and said: 'I want you all to keep this up, this beating for a while.' People were half-hearted. And the voice in the amplifier boomed, ' No good. Not enough. I like to see more vigour in your arms, ... It must be like the drum-beats of the non-violent soldiers marching on to cut the chains that bind Mother India.
>
> (Waiting, p. 16.)

Narayan recollects vividly Mahatma Gandhi's visit to the Indian sub-continent years before. His style is lucid and

direct, and his characterization of the Mahatma is devoid of satire. The novelist refrains from any authorial comments on the Mahatma's speeches. The Mahatma's serious talks at Malgudi contrast with the comic descriptions of Sriram's simplistic interpretation of Gandhi's philosophy.

The salient points in the Mahatma's speeches - nationalism, discipline, Absolute Truth, Non-Violence, universal love, *Satyagraha* and spinning are not fully comprehended by Sriram whose sole function for coming to the meeting is to be close to Bharati; however, he begins to internalise certain aspects of the Mahatma's philosophy by applying excerpts from the speech to his own emotions. To the Mahatma's injunction 'be sure you have in your heart love and not bitterness', Sriram responds: 'Definitely it's not bitterness. I love her' (Waiting, p. 20). Gandhi's presence casts a magical spell on all, but Sriram's motive in remaining close to the Mahatma is to gain access to the girl with whom he has fallen in love.

The theme of love dominates the novel. The dialogues between Sriram and Bharati are unromantic and set the tone for the constraints to be placed on their relationship. Bharati does not encourage his attentions as she considers herself to be first and foremost a Gandhist with a mission in life. Sriram is 'piqued' by Bharati's cold attitude and reproachful tone when she questions his unauthorized presence at the Mahatma's camp. When he says: 'I will tell

them I am your friend and that you took me in,' she replies by echoing a cardinal tenet of Gandhi:

> 'None except absolute truth-speakers are allowed to come into Mahatma's camp. People who come here must take an oath of absolute truth before going into Mahatma's presence.'
>
> (Waiting, p. 36.)

The concept of 'absolute truth' has its roots in the Bhagavad-Gita, in which

> the living entity has been described as nonmaterial spirit soul capable of elevating himself to self-realization by different types of yogas .... Krsna consciousness is the highest form of all Yoga. By concentrating one's mind upon Krsna, one is able to know the Absolute Truth completely, but not otherwise.
>
> (Bhagavad-Gita, p. 364.)

The Truth, however, has little significance for Sriram at this stage. He is stung by Bharati's authoritative attitude and later repeats his earlier observation: 'You are too sharp-tongued,'and adds 'It is a wonder they tolerate you here, where peace and kindness must be practised' (Waiting, p. 37). Bharati replies by referring to another Gandhian principle:

> 'I am practising kindness, otherwise I should not be speaking to you at all .... We must have permission to talk to people at this hour.... Don't imagine that because it is Mahatmaji's camp it is without any discipline. He would be the first to tell you about it if you raised the question with him.'
>
> (Waiting, p. 37.)

The extract cited reflects the strict code of conduct which prevails at Gandhi's camp and the disciplined lifestyle of

his followers. Sriram and Bharati's relationship is to develop in the novel along lines dictated by Gandhian teachings; these will form the frame of reference for their relationship. At this point it would be wise to take cognisance of comments by H.L. Agnihotri, a critic who examines the function of Gandhian ideology in the novel:

> So far as Gandhi is concerned, Narayan's treatment of the subject is mostly referential and not emotive. The references to the freedom struggle recall Gandhi and his ideology but the novelist is largely concerned with the oddities and eccentricities of Gandhi's followers and their incapacity to understand the Mahatma fully.[26]

We can agree with Agnihotri because Narayan uses Gandhian philosophy as a basis to develop Bharati and Sriram's relationship. Agnihotri's comments indicate that Narayan does not explore Gandhian ideology *per se*, but rather, the response of ordinary citizens like Sriram, to the Mahatma's teachings. I agree with his views and feel that his depiction of other characters, chiefly Sriram, shows the comedy evident in their attempts to assimilate Gandhian philosophy.

Dr Sudarshan Sharma states that for writers 'The best way out is to keep Gandhi in the background and show the influence of his ideology only indirectly'.[27] Narayan does not do this. Gandhian ideology is reflected regularly in his disciples' lives, and although Gandhi, as a character, recedes into the background at times, Bharati is in regular contact with him. His teachings permeate the

lives of most people who come into contact with him. Thus Sriram and Bharati identify with Gandhi's philosophy and dedicate their lives to serving humanity. Furthermore, Gandhi has a well-established self-identity as, through renunciation, he frees himself of his *karmic* bonds. On the other hand, Sriram lacks a proper identity. He feels, unconsciously, that Bharati holds the key to his self-identity and his love for her grows stronger.

Sriram's decision to convert to the Gandhian way of life is incidental because it is a means to a desirable end. He is prepared to adopt the Gandhian lifestyle and to serve mankind: 'Why don't you take me as your pupil? I want to do something good. I want to talk to poor people' (p. 29). A part of Sriram's charm is his lack of artifice. He tells Bharati simply and directly: '... I like you, and I like to be with you' (p. 39). The Mahatma recognises his earnestness and sincerity, and Bharati becomes his 'guru', during his apprenticeship as a Gandhi disciple. These causal links between events reflect a philosophical order in the novel.

Sriram may not be classed as one of the great lovers in Indian English fiction yet, courageously, he renounces his comfortable lifestyle to serve mankind. He is motivated too, by a desire to be with the woman he loves. Narayan transforms Sriram's character through the passage of time from a lazy, aimless youth to a Gandhian follower who

attains a measure of self-determination only after he has traversed over many illusory paths. This view of Sriram underscores Agnihotri's comment that '... the novel boils down to an ironic portrait of the impact of the Gandhian thought on an average Indian, Sriram, whose nationalistic zeal is born not out of any ideological convictions, but of infatuation for Bharati...' (Agnihotri, p. 53). One notes the sensitive nature of their relationship. Bharati is the strong-willed and disciplined Gandhist who is attracted to Sriram probably because there is a certain air of helplessness and purposelessness about him. She epitomises self-confidence and vibrancy, characteristics which make her take charge of Sriram's life and redirect it along acceptable channels. Once again, Narayan juxtaposes antithetical characters.

O.P. Bhatnagar postulates predominantly psychoanalytical theories of the relationship between the themes of love and Gandhian ideology. He dismisses interpretations of the novel which give precedence to either of the themes and place these themes in background and foreground positions and adds:

> It is in fact a serious novel defining love as a composite of non-violence and freedom both in its individual and collective implications.[28]

He goes on to state that Bharati 'has no character of her own. She only symbolises the Gandhian model of love, non-violence and freedom' (Bhatnagar, p. 67). I concede that

Bharati 'symbolises the Gandhian model', but my appraisal of the novel indicates that she is a vibrant character with an individualized personality. Her vivacity is devoid of any pseudo-sophistication, yet displays a fascinating 'otherworldliness' in terms of the Gandhian way of life. One notes her intelligent and devout execution of duties in the Scavengers' camp in Malgudi, and in New Delhi at the refugee camps for orphaned children during the Hindu-Muslim riots. To Sriram she is a 'termagant', an authoritarian yet humane figure, like his grandmother, and someone with whom he establishes a psychological bond. These factors attest to Narayan's characterization of Bharati as a distinct individual.

Sanyal's summative comment that she is the 'spokesman of idealism' encapsulates her role in the novel (Sanyal, p. 137). This viewpoint is supported by Dr Harish Chandar Raizada, who states: 'A very notable feature of the novel is the portrayal of Bharati, a young girl of Gandhiji's entourage who is brought up on Gandhian ideals which she practises in her life unswervingly.' [29] At a macroscopic level, she is a unique character in the Malgudi group of novels. For the first time Narayan creates a central female character who is neither typical Hindu housewife nor seductress. She is akin to Susila in virtue. Her selflessness, self-abnegation and self-mortification are not badges which she wears like an ascetic. She is a pragmatist, who also succeeds in assisting to transform an

ordinary Malgudi citizen into a Gandhist. These attributes of character are unparalleled in the Malgudi novels and attest to Narayan's talent for individuation.

Bharati's honesty and sincerity may be compared with the hypocrisy of Mr Natesh, Malgudi's Municipal Chairman, who takes charge of Mahatma Gandhi's visit to the town. In his characterization of Mr Natesh, the novelist satirizes the pretensions of pseudo-Gandhi followers who confuse outward appearances with reality. In his ostentatious home, Neel Bagh, he has contrived expediently to create a Gandhian atmosphere. He had

> ... substituting khaddar hangings for the gaudy chintz that had adorned his doorways and windows,.... [and had secured] 'all the available portraits of our national leaders',.... discreetly managed to get a picture of Krishna discoursing to Arjuna on Bhagavad-Gita, knowing well Gandhi's bias towards Bhagavad-Gita. He had kept on the windowsill and in a few other places a few specimens of *Charka* (spinning wheels).
>
> (Waiting, pp. 28-29.)

The narrator's comic irony entertains and his cinematic 'zooming-in' technique portrays Mr Natesh in Neel Bagh, like an actor in a film studio. His home acquires the aura of a film set, which does not deceive the perceptive Mahatma who, without entering its confines, elects to stay at the sweeper's colony in Malgudi. Narayan's comic-ironic description of the Municipality's almost magical transformation, post haste, of the filthy colony into a habitable place for the Mahatma, 'with lamps and green mango

leaves tied across lamp-posts and tree branches', reveals its double standards. In Narayan's Indian world view, the scene represents in objective terms the polarities of opulence and poverty: a contrast in which the tragic elements are softened by the narrator's humorous and witty commentary.

Mr Natesh's self-deception may be compared with Granny's transparency, evident in her principled, albeit misguided stand against Gandhian teachings. Her characterization exemplifies the conflict between orthodoxy and modernity, a recurrent theme in the Malgudi novels. She represents orthodox India and clings tenaciously to Hindu cultural, ritualistic and caste practices. Through Sriram's eyes Narayan depicts, with comic detachment, her inflexibile attitude towards the caste system:

> Granny was so orthodox that she would not let the scavenger approach nearer than ten yards, and habitually adopted a bullying tone while addressing him. Sriram also took a devilish pleasure in joining the baiting and finding fault with the scavenger's work, although he never paid the slightest attention to their comments.
>
> (Waiting, p. 19.)

'For her the Mahatma was one who preached dangerously, who tried to bring untouchables into the temples, and who involved people in difficulties with the police' (Waiting., p. 41). Gandhi's teachings threaten her identity, an identity which has been preserved from time immemorial in the well-entrenched caste system, regarded as sacrosanct by

her generation. Her ultimate belief that she is betrayed by Sriram is really a psychological transferral of her own orthodox society's 'betrayal' of her: her status as one who has 'returned from the dead' precludes her re-entry into Malgudi on the basis that 'The whole town will be wiped out by fire or plague' (p. 41). She is forced into exile in Benares.

Granny's dramatic 'death' and 'rebirth' do not herald changed viewpoints but signify, rather, Narayan's fascination with man's *karmic* existence, a motif he continues to explore in the Malgudi novels. One notes the paradox in Granny's new life in Benares where, ironically, she awaits death. Narayan mildly satirizes the 'otherworldliness' of Granny's orthodox generation, which remains unaffected by the modernity which begins to intrude into all aspects of Indian life.

Sriram, on the other hand, represents the new way of life in Malgudi and, significantly, his conversion to Gandhism is not portrayed idealistically. The author's adherence to 'social realism'[30] in the novel is evident when he explores the misconceptions and perversions of Gandhian ideology when it is introduced in Malgudi. During Sriram's stay at the shrine he goes 'through a process of self-tempering' internalising, and actively practising Gandhian principles in the surrounding villages, where he is angered by the ignorance and disrespect for the Mahatma's

teachings. His 'life instincts' make him follow the Mahatma's injunctions (Bhatnagar, p. 61). He spins and he reads the Bhagavad-Gita, and attempts to exercise self-restraint as his love for Bharati deepens. During his process of self-discovery, under Bharati's tutelage, he becomes adept at spinning, and he is able to don the symbolic khadi clothes.

However, a change of attire is not paralleled by a complete metamorphosis of mind and spirit. He remains 'immature and slow-witted' (Sanyal, p. 33). This is evident in his internal dialogue during one of Bharati's visits: '"Probably she likes me very much, waits for me to take her hand and tell her what I have in mind"; and then she would yield to him' (Waiting, p. 67). He does not understand that Bharati continues to function according to a strict code of ethics which she will not violate even if she is in love with him. Her self-discipline enables her to wait for the Mahatma to sanction their request to marry. The authorial initiative in handling the theme of love is distinctive. Sriram's love for Bharati does not develop conventionally. Through a process of self-restraint and increasing self-awareness, Sriram learns that national concerns take precedence over personal interests. Thus his character acquires a certain stoicism, which challenges Narayan's characteristic anti-heroic protagonists in the Malgudi novels. However, the comic mode prevails as Narayan

highlights Sriram's foibles during his conversion to Gandhism.

Narayan enhances narrativity in this novel by balancing the number of active and stative events. Sriram's work as a Gandhist and later, as a political activist, enhances the plot. When he is sent into the villages to propagate the Nationalist Movement's 'Quit India' campaign, the narratee is amused by his dilemma which centres around fashioning the letter "Q" so that it did not consume too much paint. Politics is given credibility for the first time in the Malgudi novels in Waiting (albeit as a secondary theme).

The Nationalist Independence Movement, the pro-British Loyalists campaign and revolutionary, radical political activity, are facets of the political milieu of the Gandhian era which Narayan concretizes with historical accuracy and authenticity. Politics, *per se*, does not predominate in the novel but instead, like Gandhian ideology, is used referentially to enhance characterization and plot. Adeptly, Narayan intertwines various shades of political opinion, providing the foreign narratee with a balanced, holistic picture of the power struggle during the Gandhian epoch. Granny adheres to an outdated political system, whilst Sriram, initially at least, and Bharati are patriotic moderates who also function as *Satyagrahis*. Bharati allows herself, unflinchingly, to be incarcerated as a political prisoner in response to the Mahatma's call to all underground workers to court arrest.

Narayan satirizes the political noviciate, Sriram, whose gullibility is evident when he is manipulated by Jagdish, the photographer-cum-anarchist who 'claimed he had a formula for paralysing Britain in India' (Waiting, p. 96). This underground political activist influences Sriram to perpetrate acts of urban and rural terrorism in the name of patriotism. The novelist focuses on Jagdish's fraudulent nature when he fabricates an incomplete message to the Indian army, purportedly from Subhas Chandra Bose, in exile in Tokyo. Jagdish, who states evasively that he was doing 'more or less the same work' (p. 96) as Bharati, deliberately perverts Gandhian principles in his radicalism and indoctrinates Sriram, who is mesmerized by his authoritative demeanour:

> In association with Jagdish and under his expert guidance ... he set fire to the records in half a dozen law courts in different villages; he derailed a couple of trains and paralysed the work in various schools; he exploded a crude bomb which tore off the main door of an agricultural research station....
> (Waiting, p. 113.)

These terrorist activities indicate the 'death instincts' in Sriram and Jagdish which predominate at this stage of their lives (Bhatnagar, p. 61). Bharati's absence makes Sriram desperate and foolhardy, and he violates some of the basic tenets of Gandhian philosophy: truth, non-violence and universal love. Later, he becomes a fugitive from justice, but is subsequently incarcerated for his terrorist activities. Narayan attains unity in the novel through these causal links.

Jagdish's shallow political stand is unmasked later, immediately after Independence. His actions have been motivated by self-aggrandisement and sensationalism, evident when he proudly displays his photo albums which document a romanticised account of the Independence struggle, a distortion which Sriram, newly released from prison, finds unacceptable. The narrative voice is characteristically non-judgemental and non-moralistic in the scenes which describe political activities. It retains its engaging comic-ironic tone, focusing on the idiosyncrasies and comic flaws in the average man's character, as he becomes enmeshed in the web of political activities which swept through the Indian sub-continent. The narratee is left to evaluate the activities of the freedom fighter and the terrorist.

When Narayan describes the tragic Indocentric events which accompanied the Independence Day Celebrations, his tone becomes serious and sombre. He ignores the celebrations, focusing on the rioting. His style changes to a straightforward narration of events, suffused with pathos and poignancy. When Bharati and Sriram are reunited in New Delhi, the former informs him of the warring factions and Gandhi's work in the 'burning villages' during the rioting in Calcutta and East Bengal:

> He said that if a country cannot give security to women and children, it's not worth living in. He said it would be worth dying if that would make his philosophy better understood .... Each day we walked five miles through floods and field, silently .... he

> spoke to those who had lost their homes, property, wives, and children. He spoke kindly to those who had perpetrated crimes - he wept for them, and they swore never to do such things again.
>
> (Waiting,p. 166.)

This extract validates Raizada's assertion in respect of Narayan's characterization of the Mahatma:

> R.K. Narayan who is the most artistic of Indian writers in English and avoids all reference to contemporary political problems in his works, has given a comprehensive and living portrait of Mahatma Gandhi in his famous novel Waiting for [the] Mahatma (1955).
>
> (Raizada, p. 139.)

Noteworthy, too, is Narayan's balanced account of the events surrounding Independence, which reveal euphoria being replaced by human tragedy and suffering on a massive scale. The narration is non-partisan and objective:

> Human beings have done impossible things to other human beings. It's no use discussing whether this community committed greater horrors or the other one. Bapuji forbade us to refer to anyone in terms of religion as Muslims, Hindu, or Sikh, but just as human beings.
>
> (Waiting, p. 166.)

Narayan focuses on the Mahatma's stature as saviour and peacemaker. He attempts to defuse religious conflicts in the refugee camps by giving refugee children the names of birds and flowers. Narayan's account of events is authentic yet sensitive and this is confirmed by K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri's statement in their commentary on 'The Partition as a Side Issue in Indian-English Novels': 'The tumult on the eve of India's independence has

been vividly and suggestively depicted by R.K. Narayan in his novel, Waiting for the Mahatma....'[31].

It is against this kaleidoscope of national events that the Mahatma finally grants Sriram and Bharati permission to marry. The Mahatma's role on a national level is counterbalanced throughout the novel when he functions in his private capacity on a personal level:

> I will be your priest, if you don't mind. I've been a very neglectful father; I'll come and present the bride. Tomorrow, the very first thing; other engagements only after that.
>
> (Waiting, p. 172.)

Narayan's consistency in his characterization of the Mahatma and other characters is evidence of his artistry as a novelist. The Great Soul's premonition of death makes him obtain an assurance from the couple that they would not postpone their marriage for any reason. When Narayan ends his novel with the Mahatma's assassination the next morning, rather than with an account of Bharati and Sriram's marriage, he pays tribute to the Mahatma, although his principles of universal love and non-violence appear to have been negated by revolutionaries like Jagdish. His death is to be accepted as an inevitable part of man's *karmic* existence. Narayan remains faithful to his non-judgemental authorial standpoint to the end of the novel: no one is censured for the Mahatma's death, and neither is it sentimentalized. The Mahatma makes his mark in the novel because 'he figures here not as an idea or a myth or a

symbol as he does in some writers but as a sympathetic, benevolent human being'.[32]

At this stage the following paradigm will assist to contextualize Waiting amongst the Indian English political novels of the Gandhian age.[33] In Raja Rao's Kanthapura Gandhian ideology and national Indian politics are also important concerns in the novel. However, Rao's approach to these subjects differs markedly from Narayan's authorial standpoint in Waiting. In Rao's novel one of the main characters is the narrator, an old woman who symbolises orthodox India, and who at first, like the villagers, resists the political changes sweeping the country. Like Sriram, Moorthy is a Gandhist who advocates revolutionary change and succeeds in converting the villagers to his ideology. His *modus operandi* though, differs from that of Sriram. In Waiting, as noted, the Mahatma's teachings are used as a frame of reference, whilst Gandhian ideology makes up the fabric of Kanthapura, almost exclusively.

One notes Rao's none - too - subtle manner in portraying social evils such as the caste system: characters such as 'coffee-planter Rammaya' and 'Potter Chandrayya' reflect society's hierarchy (Kanthapura, pp. 11, 148). Rao's dogmatic approach and ornate, stylized prose detract from the novel's merit. However, Naik ignores the novel's ostentatious prose style and states that

> Kanthapura is, ... a highly successful attempt to probe the depths to which the nationalistic uprising penetrated, the new patriotic upsurge fusing completely with the traditional religious faith and in the process rediscovering the Indian soul.
> (Naik, p. 119.)

One observes that nationalism, Gandhian ideology and patriotism are key issues in Waiting., lending themselves to comic-ironic treatment and psychological probing themes which continue to intrigue Narayan, in The Guide, the eighth Malgudi novel, where these issues, together with that of the swami, are dealt with especial skill.

END NOTES

1. Raymond Williams, 'Realism and the Novel', Partisan Review, No. 26 (Spring 1959) 202.

2. K.R.S. Iyengar, 'R.K. Narayan', Indian Writing In English, p. 376.

3. R.K. Narayan, 'Introduction to "The Financial Expert"' Story-Teller's World: Stories, Essays, Sketches, p. 10.

4. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Introduction, The Bhagavad-Gita As It Is, translated by His Divine Grace, p. 7.

5. Rajeev Taranath, 'The Average As The Positive - A Note on R.K. Narayan', Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English, eds M.K. Naik, S.K. Desai, G.S. Amur, p. 309.

6. Shiv K. Gilra 'Narayan's World of Values', Perspectives on R.K. Narayan, p. 38. Narayan's recurrent technique of allowing theme and character to function significantly within the microcosm of the family lends credibility to Gilra's additional comment: 'The centre of Narayan's world of values as of his fictional world is the family', p. 43.

7. R.K. Dhawan, 'The Hunt for Wealth: "The Financial Expert"', Perspectives on R.K. Narayan, p. 122.

8. Ibid.

9. Kirpal Singh, 'The Ordinary and Average As Satiric Traps: The Case of R.K. Narayan', Explorations in Modern indo-English Fiction, p. 134, ed. R.K. Dhawan. He criticizes Narayan's 'comic vision' stating that beneath its 'veneer', 'one detects an extreme mistrust of life ... a need somehow to prevent the average and the ordinary from triumphing' (p. 135). This view is also questionable. My study of Narayan's comic art reveals his acceptance of life in its totality: the flawed and the perfect, the good and the evil, and the foolish and the wise, facets which are juxtaposed in the matrix of society. This attitude was confirmed in my interview with Narayan. He indicated firmly, but gently, that he was not interested in changing Indian society and that he was quite happy with it.

10. See also Haydn Moore Williams, 'R.K. Narayan And R. Prawer Jhabvala: Two Interpreters of Modern India', Galaxy of Indian Writings in English, p. 46. He comments on Margayya's family living 'in a state of war or armed truce with the rest of ... [his] family', and that 'family harmony flickers only fitfully', p. 46.

11. R.K. Narayan, Waiting for the Mahatma, p.48.

12. C.N. Srinath, 'R.K. Narayan's Comic Vision: Possibilities and Limitations', The Literary Landscape, p. 7.

13. O.P. Saxena, 'The World of R.K. Narayan', Glimpses of Indo-English Fiction, p. 330.

14. M.K. Naik, 'The Masterpieces: Irony as Moral Discovery', Dimensions of Indian English Literature, p. 50.

15. In The Financial Expert, published in 1952, Narayan does not moralise about the merits or demerits of Dr Pal's book, yet one notes the conservatism of critics like Naik in 1983 in 'The Masterpieces: Irony as Moral Discovery', The Ironic Vision, and Suresh Nath in 1982 in Perspectives on R.K. Narayan who brand the book categorically as 'pornography'. The book has its genesis in Vatsyanana's Kama-Sutra or 'Science of Love', commonly believed to be written a thousand years ago. See Naik, p. 52 and Nath, p. 116.

16. See also Suresh Nath, '*The Financial Expert*: An Appraisal' Perspectives on R.K. Narayan, p. 114. He states that Narayan's description of the gutter is 'the most biting satire on unscrupulous politicians'.

17. This symbol is introduced in Mr Sampath. Shanti Devi's handbag is made of cobra skin and reflects her serpent-like qualities in enticing individuals at Sunrise Pictures.

18. Lakshmi Holmstrom, 'Analysis of R.K. Narayan's Novels: Development of Themes', The Novels of R.K. Narayan, p. 54. She refers also to 'An ordained hierarchy of values (dharma or right action, artha or worldly interest and kama or pleasure) is a commonplace Hindu thought. This right order of values is profoundly disturbed in The Financial Expert...', p. 53.

19. See also Naik p. 47, Srinath p. 7 and Holmstrom, p. 54.

20. See also Naik p. 45.

21. R.K. Narayan, My Dateless Diary, p. 49.

22. Ibid., p. 164. Narayan does not wish to disclose the name of the publisher. Thus he refers to publisher "A" in his Diary.

23. Samares C. Sanyal, 'Gandhian Struggle And Nationalism: Echo of the Times', Indianness in Major Indo-English Novels, p. 115.

24. Raymond Williams, p. 200.

25. V.P. Rao, 'Tea With R.K. Narayan', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. VI, No. 1 (June 1971) 81.

26. H.L. Agnihotri, 'Gandhi And R.K. Narayan', The Literary Endeavour, ed. Vimala Rao, Vol. III, Nos. 3, 4 (January-March 1982; April-June 1982) 52.

27. Dr Sudarshan Sharma, 'Gandhian Ideology And R.K. Narayan', The Influence Of Gandhian Ideology On Indo-Anglian Fiction, p. 44.

28. O.P. Bhatnagar, 'Love, Non-Violence And Freedom In *Waiting for the Mahatma*', The Literary Endeavour, ed. Vimala Rao, Vol. III, Nos. 3,4 (January-March 1982; April-June 1982) 61.

29. Dr Harish Chandar Raizada, 'Impact of Mahatma Gandhi on Indian English Fiction', Alien Voice: Perspectives on Commonwealth Literature, ed. Avadhesh K. Srivastava, p. 139.

30. Sanyal, p. 120. He states: 'As nationalist feeling came to the forefront of Indian life in the early 'thirties, the social reform novels were inflamed by politics since any desire to improve the lot of the people ... was bound to be linked with political independence'.

31. K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri, 'The Partition as a Side Issue in Indian - English Novels', The Partition in Indian English Novels, p. 1.

32. Rameshwar Gupta, 'The Gandhi In Narayan', Perspectives on R.K. Narayan, ed. Atma Ram, p. 53.

33. See M.K. Naik, 'The Indian English Political Novel', Dimensions of Indian English Literature, pp. 116 - 131.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN ACTOR AND A SAVIOUR *PAR EXCELLENCE*: *THE GUIDE*

> All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players.
> They have their exits and their entrances,
> And one man in his time plays many parts,
> His acts being seven ages....
> (As You Like It, 11. vii. 139-143.)

In Jaques's philosophic comparison of man's life to a stage play, there is a poignant touch to Shakespeare's comic description of man's existence, which is similar to the tinge of pathos often found in the characterization of the Narayan protagonist. In addition, the reference to play-acting and role-playing may well describe the actions of Narayan's characters and in this instance, specifically, the actions of the protagonist, Raju, in Narayan's eighth Malgudi novel, The Guide (1958). Furthermore, both the Elizabethan dramatist and the twentieth century novelist appear to share a world view with one important common feature, the pre-ordained pattern of man's transient life.

In Narayan's Malgudi novels this cycle of existence is often subjected to ironic twists of fate. These aspects of Narayan's comic mode of writing are well-illustrated in his masterful treatment of Indian reality in The Guide. Although Narayan remains basically a realistic fiction writer who explores character mainly from a socio-psychological standpoint, in The Guide his literary skills

have evolved to a symbolistic style of writing.

My study incorporates an historical and socio-psychological standpoint. I focus on Narayan's symbolistic style of writing, his distinctive form of narrativity and other literary techniques which he employs to create what is generally acknowledged as the best Malgudi novel. I also discuss a wide range of critical opinion dating from the 'sixties to the 'nineties, incorporating, amongst others, historical, psychoanalytical and symbolistic approaches to the novel.

The title of the novel is ironically symbolic of an 'enlightened' individual. Raju is the enigmatic guide who is a product of a heterogenous, post-independent Indian society. In keeping with his *karma* he functions at various levels in the novel. On the temporal plane Raju, is firstly, a tourist guide who symbolises the new cult of self-proclaimed tourist guides of the 'fifties; secondly, as dance promoter to Rosie, Raju becomes a cultural and entertainment guide whose hedonistic lifestyle breeds corruption. Beyond his temporal role, Raju is spiritual 'guide' of sorts, eventually transformed by an ironic twist of fate into an authentic swami, whose metamorphosis receives attention in this study. The saviour motif links The Guide with its precursor, Waiting. Mahatma Gandhi functions as a saviour and a saint on a personal and national level, whilst Raju, the fraud turned saviour

operates mainly from within his own personal orbit, and rescues the villagers of Mangal from a drought.

In locating the novel's genesis one notes that the subject for The Guide originated in India just before Narayan embarked on his 'American Journey' in October, 1956, as the following passage shows:

> At this time I had been been thinking of a subject for a novel: a novel about someone suffering enforced sainthood. A recent situation in Mysore offered a setting for such a story. A severe drought had dried up all the rivers and tanks;.... As a desperate measure, the municipal council organised a prayer for rains. A group of Brahmins stood knee-deep in water (procured at great cost) on the dry bed of Kaveri, fasted, prayed, and chanted certain mantras continuously for eleven days. On the twelfth day it rained, and brought relief to the countryside.[1]

Narayan retained the original plan in the plot of The Guide, and in spite of the American ambience which prevailed whilst he was writing the novel, it is devoid of any American allusions. Its typically Indian setting, plot, characters and themes make one feel that Narayan overlooked an invaluable opportunity to allow a Malgudi character to venture beyond Madras (to which city the Narayan protagonist generally took flight when assailed by adversity), across the seas to foreign territory - the U.S.A. The author adheres, almost puritanically, to the Indian ethos, and forfeits the opportunity (afforded by first-hand experience) to incorporate an Indo-American experience in a Malgudi novel. However, Narayan's visit to the U.S.A. appears to have inspired, as I shall show, his satire of Indian

tourist guides.

Nonetheless, Narayan's literary achievement in The Guide, is meritorious, primarily because his skill in portraiture has enabled him to create a unique protagonist. Raju's character becomes etched in the narratee's mind not because of any altruism which he displays towards his fellow-men, like certain characters in Waiting, but, rather, because of his superb masquerade in the manifold roles he plays in Malgudi society. Raju, the affable rapscallion, enacts his multifarious roles with aplomb, until his *façade* is shattered because of flaws in his character, and because of the irony of fate. Narayan gains mastery over plot, character and action in the novel through certain innovative literary techniques.

His usual narrative methods change radically to create a novel in which the complementary strands of a well-defined plot are presented by multiple narrators. Raju is the first person primary narrator in the novel, and his flashbacks include commentary by Narayan, the third person narrator. Part of the novel's merit lies in the rhythmical alternation between these narrators. Through the flashbacks, synchronised expertly with the current action in the plot, Raju unfolds his tale. The concept of man's existence within secular and universal Time, which Narayan explores implicitly, yet intrinsically, in Waiting, is sustained in The Guide, and is exemplified in the novelist's dexterous

interweaving of the protagonist's past and present actions. Furthermore, certain 'newly apprehended psychological states'[2] of character are revealed in Narayan's characterization of the enigmatic Raju, making him the most engaging Malgudi protagonist. In this chapter one of the aspects on which I focus is narrative features which distinguish The Guide amongst the Malgudi novels.

There are echoes of the *harikatha* tradition of story-telling when Raju, the ex-jailbird who seeks refuge in an abandoned temple on the outskirts of Malgudi, near the village of Mangal narrates his own life-story to Velan, a simple peasant. A distinctive feature of The Guide is its multiple narrators who function within a clearly demarcated narrative hierarchy.[3] Contrary to established narrative practice in which 'the one who ultimately introduces the entire narrative... is the main narrator',[4] Narayan deliberately relegates himself to the position of secondary narrator although it is he who introduces the plot. The narrative voice is split and the novelist accords Raju the privilege of functioning as first person, primary narrator, whose autobiography constitutes the bulk of the novel.

This narrative technique is introduced early in the first chapter of the novel. Narayan, the third person, omniscient narrator, introduces the bogus guru, Raju, 'sitting cross-legged as if it [the granite slab] were a throne, beside an ancient shrine', exchanging confidences

with Velan, the villager from Mangal (The Guide, p. 3). Having set the temple scene Narayan comments on Raju's interaction with the villagers. In between Narayan's spells of narration, Raju unfolds his life-story to Velan, through a series of flashbacks. There is a rhythmical alternation between the two narrators, and the narratee's attention is held on two levels which complement each other.

This narrative strategy contributes to Narayan's artistry which lies in co-ordinating and knitting together seemingly anachronistic events and characters into the fabric of the novel and creating a holistic effect that is both challenging and entertaining. The comic-ironic mode in the novel is enhanced by this narrative strategy, as it enables Raju to pass judgement on his own actions, albeit with hindsight, whilst the novelist becomes part of the narrative audience. One notes how Raju chastises himself at the outset of his autobiography for getting involved in other people's affairs "...I should have grown up like a thousand other normal persons, without worries in life" (The Guide, p. 6). This is one of the flaws in Raju's character - his predisposition towards getting embroiled in matters which do not concern him.

K.V. Reddy is one of the few Narayan critics who, in 1982, examines narrativity in relation to Time in The Guide:

> While the events of years of time are summed up telescopically in the former part, in the latter, the scenes, short in duration, are longer in the author's coverage in pages giving a strong sense of the dramatic present.[5]

According to K.V. Reddy the 'former part', which embraces thirty years is 'covered in 150 pages', while the 'dramatic present', constituting twelve days of Raju's fast, is 'closely sketched in fourteen pages, contributing to an illusion of actual presence in the reader' (K.V. Reddy, p. 81).

Narayan functions as third person, tertiary narrator, whose unrestricted point of view is confined, paradoxically, to a small segment of the novel, the 'dramatic present', in which Raju, as swami, undertakes a fast to bring rain to Mangal. Narayan blends these narrative voices skilfully and harmoniously in the novel, allowing the action to move deftly from the present to the past and vice-versa, ensuring the narratee's attention is secured through suspense and comic drama.

Although the chronological order of events in the novel is deliberately disturbed, one notes the rhythmical alternation between Raju's flashbacks and Narayan's commentary on his 'swamihood'. Furthermore, harmony is maintained in the novel when the polarities of the past and the present are reconciled through the central themes of the novel: the quest for self-identity, marital infidelity, asceticism, and the conflicts between orthodoxy and modernity, on the one

hand, and materialism and spirituality, on the other. These themes, handled with great skill, together with a clearly defined plot in which Raju attains a certain measure of self-realization after several cathartic experiences, skilful characterization and a balanced distribution of active and stative events occurring in Malgudi and its environs, all make for a very successful novel.

Raju's multi-dimensional character begins to unfold when Narayan portrays him as an actor who excels at role-playing. The motif of 'enforced sainthood' also takes shape at the beginning of the novel, when the ex-jailbird becomes, inadvertently, the psuedo-swami. Velan, the village rustic, mistakes Raju for a swami and confides in him, an action which precipitates much of the comedy in the novel. Although Raju does not deliberately deceive Velan, he does not correct him when he assumes that Raju is an authentic swami. Raju, the trickster, thrives on this situation because it boosts his ego. Narayan juxtaposes Velan's naivety and gullibility with Raju's artifice. A symbiotic relationship develops between the 'swami' and the 'disciple', aided by the aura of wisdom and grandeur which Narayan creates around the former. Walsh explains the nature of the relationship which develops between the duo, as follows:

> For Raju the villager's presence is simply a welcome break in his isolation; for the villager, Velan, Raju also fills a vacancy, but one of a more significant kind. As he sees it, Raju fits into the

> context of the sacred shrine; he completes it and revives it; the character that Raju presents to him is one absorbed from the stones of the temple.[6]

Walsh's comment is interesting, and testifies to Raju's flexibility, which stems from a fraudulent nature. Walsh's remark that Raju's character is 'one absorbed from the stones of the temple' accentuates Narayan's satiric treatment of Raju. Raju uses the temple shrine as a temporary sanctuary and his presence, as a fake priest in the temple, contributes to the comedy in the novel. Although Raju's presence in the temple, albeit an abandoned one, detracts from its sanctity, this place of worship becomes a hive of activity once Raju is ensconced within its confines.

Raju's masquerade is highlighted when he confesses to Velan: "I am not so great as you imagine. I am just ordinary" (<u>The Guide</u>, p. 6). Yet the charade continues, and the comic irony in the novel is set in motion when the ex-jailbird guides Velan on resolving his problem, when he himself is in need of guidance and rehabilitation. Raju's oblique reference to Buddha's teachings and his homespun philosophy as contained in the statement: "If you show me a person without a problem, then I'll show you the perfect world", overwhelm the rustic Velan who readily pays homage to him (p. 12):

> Velan rose, bowed low, and tried to touch Raju's feet. Raju recoiled at the attempt. "I'll not

> permit anyone to do this. God alone is entitled to such a prostration. He will destroy us if we attempt to usurp His rights." He felt he was attaining the stature of a saint.
>
> (The Guide, p. 13.)

Raju shows the typical Malgudi protagonist's reverence for God, thus he will not wilfully incur His wrath although he has been guilty of certain moral lapses in the past. These are revealed before long, when the second narrative voice begins to function, and Raju picks up the threads of the novel in a reflective and philosophic vein.

In the first flashback to Raju's past, the narratee becomes aware immediately of the protagonist's chequered life. Raju's identity crisis in later life has its origins in childhood. Narayan portrays Raju as a dull, unintelligent and uninspiring child, whose development into adulthood is far from remarkable. Throughout his life Raju struggles to attain an identity of his own. Although the characterization of Raju as a child is largely comic, it has a hint of sadness which is revealed through the protagonist's retrospection:

> When the sky lightened, my father was ready for me on the *pyol*. There he sat with a thin broken twig at his side. The modern notions of child psychology were unknown then; the stick was an educator's indispensable equipment. "The unbeaten brat will remain unlearned," said my father, quoting an old proverb. He taught me the Tamil alphabet .... From time to time my father snatched the slate from my hand, looked at it, glared at me, and said, "What a mess! You will never prosper in life if you disfigure the sacred letters of the alphabet."
>
> (The Guide, pp. 9-10.)

The humorous description of a typically authoritarian father who also functions as an orthodox educator, is juxtaposed with the image of an innocent and hopelessly inept pupil for whose 'clay-head' learning appears to be a tortuous and 'interminable' process (The Guide, p. 10). Narasimhaiah views this scene from an historical perspective:

> The novel begins and ends in simple surroundings and immemorial ways of living and learning. Few have portrayed the early schooling of the Indian child so convincingly and tenderly as Narayan has done. It is so typical of the schooling that all of us of the last generation have had and most of us continue to have even today.[7]

In his reminiscences Narasimhaiah appears to ignore Narayan's gentle satire of an archaic and unproductive education system. Although these childhood learning scenes recur in the Malgudi novels they are especially significant in The Guide in view of the paradigms which are evident in this novel. These school scenes from the past are authentic and contrast with the scenes in The Guide in which Raju begins to establish his identity as a bogus educator. In both sets of scenes Narayan satirizes the education system. These points are exemplified when we observe Raju, who is ensconced as 'swami' in the temple, engage the services of a teacher: 'He said with a lot of authority, "I like to see young boys become literate and intelligent" (p. 39). Raju's fake reverence and his platitudes elevate him in the eyes of the naive, yet profoundly religious

villagers. Thus, the teacher implores him to address the boys. His egotistical nature makes him accede to the request:

> This gave Raju a chance to air his views on life and eternity before the boys. He spoke to them on godliness, cleanliness, spoke on Ramayana, the characters in the epics; .... He was hypnotised by his own voice; he felt himself growing in stature .... No one was more impressed with the grandeur of the whole thing than Raju himself.
> (The Guide, p. 40.)

We are entertained by the absurdity of the situation. Raju's education was cut short early in his youth because his services were required in his father's Railway shop. Nonetheless, his overwhelming desire to acquire an identity, albeit a psuedo one, as 'swami' and 'teacher' is a powerful motivation in his life, typical of the Narayan protagonist whose dislocation necessitates a desperate quest for self-identity. This theme is closely allied to another, namely, 'the aspiration towards spiritual maturity' which, as Walsh states, is characteristic of Narayan's novels (Walsh, p. 13). The flaws of ignorance and delusion are typical attributes of the Narayan anti-hero who is continually frustrated in his attempts to acquire greatness. His quest for self-identity is inhibited by self-deception and illusion, limitations which need to be overcome if he is to acquire a proper identity.

The inability of people to differentiate between appearance and reality is one of the points which Dr Y.G. Reddy

discusses in his incisive, comparative study of V.S. Naipaul's novel The Mystic Masseur and The Guide. He states: 'Mere appearance... is taken for reality, a situation that is analogous to that of Raju, the protagonist in R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*'.[8] Further attention will be paid later in this Chapter to the subject of mysticism (also referred to by Dr Reddy), a common element in both the novels.

The critic Jai Dev examines other limiting factors in Raju's character which emanate from his childhood, such as his reliance on the community for his identity and his psychological dependance on his elders who constitute the community:[9]

> Desirous of sugar, the boy Raju feels frustrated because he cannot reach it. His mother keeps sugar in an old tin can, and the can itself lies beyond his reach, "on a wooden ledge on the smoke-stained wall of the kitchen". (p. 9.)
>
> (Dev, p. 12.)

For Dev 'sugar' is a metaphor for all 'things sweet' and the 'old tin can' is suggestive of old age. He notes Raju's fear that the can's 'position was shifted up and up as I grew older' (Dev, p. 12). This critic's comments illustrate Narayan's impressionistic style of writing and affirm two important points in Narayan's Indian world view: firstly, on the temporal plane, the Narayan protagonist struggles continually to establish his identity, not only within his personal orbit, but also within the matrix of society, and, ultimately, within the macrocosm of the universe; secondly,

he is reliant, partly, on the elders in his family for his psychological well-being, and to an extent, on his level of self-development.

These existential issues are explored profoundly in The Guide, in which Raju as a young person tries to satisfy his psychological needs by establishing a favourable identity within Malgudi society. We note the powerful impact of the Indian ethos in Raju's psychological make-up in his roles as tourist guide and swami. This point is also emphasised in Ram Dial's psychoanalytical analysis of The Guide, in which he emphasises the 'Anima-Animus Interaction' in the novel, and cautions the Western critic, in particular, to be aware of the following facts:[10]

> ... Raju is essentially an oriental, his conscious personality shaped and formulated by values, judgements, prides and prejudices of a typical South Indian Hindu society.
>
> (Dial, p. 137.)

Raju's 'oriental' nature characterizes the various roles he plays in the novel. He is the self-conscious narrator who, like an actor, plays not only 'the role that Velan had given him', but also re-lives his past through a series of flashbacks (The Guide, pp. 11, 28). He tells Velan pompously:

> Now that I reflect upon it, I am convinced I was not such a dud after all. It seems to me that we generally do not have a correct measure of our own wisdom. I remember how I was equipping my mind all the time. I read a certain amount of good stuff in my railway-shopkeeping days.
>
> (The Guide, p. 40.)

Raju's retrospection reveals the hollow pride which marked his early existence, and which is comically ironic in view of his admission later that he had 'learned much from scrap' (The Guide, p. 42). However, his role as railway shopkeeper does not fulfil his deepest needs. His inflated ego comes to the fore when he says to Velan: "I always felt that I was too good for the task...." (The Guide, p. 40). Narayan sustains Raju's egotistical nature in his description of the fake swami in action in the temple:

> A circle formed around him. They sat there looking on. The children sat there looking on .... It looked like a place where a great assembly was about to begin.
>
> (The Guide, p. 42.)

The comedy in the prominent temple scenes is generated by the interplay of the villagers' naivety and gullibility, and Raju's ignorance and self-deception. It is ironic that when asked to deliver a discourse, the 'only subject on which he could speak with any authority now seemed to be jail life...' (The Guide, p. 43). Such flaws in his make-up and his penchant for role-playing prompt one to equate his character to that of the *alazon* or impostor.[11] Rather than being self-deprecatory, though, Raju is scornful of the villagers' stupidity, an attitude which is often revealed in his internal monologues. He says, for instance, "Oh, fools,"...."Why don't you leave me alone?" (The Guide, p. 43.)

However, the adroit actor, having established an attentive

audience, continues to play his role to perfection: he grows his hair long and keeps a beard to authenticate his image. At this point in the novel, once Narayan has entrenched Raju's image as a psuedo-swami, the narration switches skilfully to the primary narrator, Raju, whose predilection for enjoying the spotlight, and his ego, prompt him to remark: 'It is written on the brow of some that they shall not be left alone. I am one such, I think' (The Guide, p. 47). Narasimhaiah explains Raju's attitude as follows:

> Life, which can promise much when under the control of a moral order or is deferential to a higher view of the universe, goes to pieces because of man's *hubris*, his inordinate self-esteem, his love of the limelight.[12]

These traits in Raju's character sustain his role as narrator and swami in the novel. When he speaks of the fame and fortune he enjoyed as a tourist guide, his narrative functions as a plot within a plot, and has a twofold appeal: firstly it keeps Velan, his immediate auditor, in suspense, and secondly it keeps the reader spellbound. In addition to the duality of the plot, one notes the superb interplay of Narayan's double-edged satire on tourists and tourist guides. In the first instance, Raju, the tourist guide, mocks the inveterate tourist:

> Travellers are an enthusiastic lot. They do not mind any inconvenience as long as they have something to see. Why anyone should want to forgo food and comfort and jolt a hundred-odd miles to see some place, I could never understand, but it was not my business to ask for reasons;....
>
> (The Guide, pp. 48-49.)

Narayan's Indian world view acquires an interesting dimension when he introduces tourists in Malgudi. The author informs the foreign narratee of this new breed of Indian who is a product of the fast-developing middle class society of post-war and post-independant India.

The advent of the railways in Malgudi, Narayan's little India, facilitated the Indian traveller's movement across the sub-continent, a movement which was not without its funny side. Raju's humorous account of the idiosyncrasies and foibles of tourists shows his talent for appraising his fellow-men.

The second object of Narayan's satire is the guide himself. Raju's ridicule of travellers is juxtaposed with Narayan's gentle satire of the tourist guide. Skilfully, the novelist makes the primary narrator a party to his own satire. Raju informs Velan how he fabricated information as a tourist guide:

> ...and the age I ascribed to any particular place depended upon my mood at that hour and the type of person I was escorting. If he was the academic type I was careful to avoid all mention of facts and figures and to confine myself to general descriptions, letting the man himself do the talking.
> (The Guide, p. 49.)

Narayan exposes Raju as a conman, whose deceptions are, ironically, easily digested by gullible tourists. The author, in all probability, was prompted to satirize the self-made Indian tourist guide after his experience in America where tourist guides are remarkably well-informed.

In his narration of events in his past, Raju confesses his earlier duplicity with roguish candour, but shows little remorse for his inventiveness. He announces proudly, yet ironically, that to 'arrive at that stage of confidence and nonchalance' (in glibly fabricating facts and figures) required many years of practice. At this stage of Raju's narrative his level of self-realization is limited. His early identity as Railway Raju, the renowned tourist guide, poses no problem to him, and neither does his fraudulence as a tourist guide evoke any anger in Velan, whose naivety makes him feel overawed by the apparently worldly-wise swami. The reader, too, is not angered by Raju's antics as tourist guide, but is suitably impressed by the *panache* with which he pursues his 'vocation'.

Narayan's art is successful in this novel because of his skilful expose of Raju in his multifarious roles. Raju is basically an ordinary human being whose flawed nature evokes the narratee's empathy. In this type of characterization Narayan observes, implicitly, the principle of 'realism as opposed to idealization or caricature' (Williams, p. 200).

In Raju's autobiography, one notes that his newly established self-identity as an 'accomplished' tourist guide begins to disintegrate when he offers his services to Rosie, the orthodox dancer, and Marco Polo, her archeologist husband, on their arrival at Malgudi station. Raju informs Velan of the impact Rosie had had on him:

> My troubles would not have started ... but for Rosie. Why did she call herself Rosie? She did not come from a foreign land. She was just an Indian ....
>
> (The Guide, p. 7.)

Raju begins to enact the new role afforded him by fate. He notes the couple's incongruity and lack of meaningful rapport, and he shrewdly starts to fill the void in Rosie's life when Marco neglects her because he is busy with archeological research. Narayan's characterization of Rosie, through Raju's eyes, is devoid of irony and satire as Rosie is portrayed as a good woman whose marriage to Marco was a mistake because of their incompatibility. She is also a victim of caste prejudice because she belongs to the stigmatised caste of temple dancers. Raju's commentary exemplifies the magnetic appeal she has for the beholder:

> Don't imagine on hearing her name that she wore a short skirt or cropped her hair. She looked just the orthodox dancer that she was. She wore saris of bright hues and gold lace, had curly hair which she braided and beflowered, wore diamond earrings and a heavy gold necklace. I told her at the first opportunity what a great dancer she was, and how she fostered our cultural traditions, and it pleased her.
>
> (The Guide, p. 7.)

This portrait of Rosie is one of the aspects in the novel which validate Sanyal's choice of the novel as a classical example of Indianness in Indian English literature.[13] In his discourse on Indianness, he shows 'how an Indian novel in English has been from the very beginning more a product of national consciousness than a mere imitation of western

models' (Sanyal, p. xi). One notes the Indianness in Narayan's description of a traditional Hindu, middle class woman, whose appearance and characterization as an 'orthodox dancer' confirm Narayan's 'national consciousness'.

Narayan's merit extends beyond the Indianness of his portraiture, for he allows his Indian sensibility to recognise and incorporate the influence of westernization. These points are exemplified in Rosie's characterization. She is an amalgam of eastern and western attributes which have their roots both in the present and in the past. Her vivacious personality is a foil for her tainted heritage, in belonging to the caste of temple dancers who are generally regarded as socially inferior in the caste hierarchy. She acknowledges her heritage:

> I belong to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers; my mother, grandmother, and, before her, her mother. Even as a young girl, I danced in our village temple.
>
> (The Guide, p. 73.)

She accepts this *karmic* existence stoically, wearing her tainted heritage like a badge. She informs Raju: "We are viewed as public women", and adds "We are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilised" (p. 73). Like Margayya in The Fin. Exp., who tries to nullify the impact of a lineage which leads to corpse-bearing ancestors, Rosie yearns to satisfy her need to elevate her socio-economic status through a college education, and so she leaves University with a Masters Degree in Economics. Her husband

has 'a big house, a motor car [and he] ... was a man of high social standing' (p. 74). Marriage signifies an attempt to break the caste bondage, and attain upward mobility in the caste hierarchy. Rosie's characterization, though, is not simplistic. She is portrayed as a complex character with an ambivalent attitude to life. She vacillates between rejecting her tainted heritage and establishing her true identity as an orthodox, traditional dancer.

Her life is ironical, since she is trapped in a faithless and loveless union after responding to an innocuous seeming advertisement:

> Wanted: an educated, good-looking girl to marry a rich bachelor of academic interests. *No caste* restrictions; good looks and university degree essential.
>
> (The Guide, p. 74.)

Narayan satirizes this business-like and clinical arrangement for marriage, an alignment which, nonetheless, continues to flourish in India. Although Rosie meets the requirements, what promises to be a compatible match becomes a farce. G.S. Balarama Gupta perceives the incongruity between husband and wife as follows:

> Rosie is a young, gay, and fun-loving woman, full of *elan vital* and an irrepressible fascination for dance, whereas Marco is an old, cold, serious scholar whose consuming obsession with archeological pursuits has left the soft springs of love in him dry and awry: "Anything that interested her seemed to irritate him"(p. 76).[14]

Besides personality and vocational differences, another inhibiting factor in their marriage is the inability of each spouse to break the shackles of caste and traditional cultural practices. Marco Polo appears to disregard caste when he marries Rosie. However, his caste prejudices are deep-seated as he forbids Rosie from pursuing a career in dancing. The flaw in Rosie's character is her inability to suppress her innate desire to perform as a dancer. Whilst Marco spends hours deciphering 'episodes from Ramayan carved on the stone wall in Iswara Temple in North Extension', Rosie watches a king cobra dance (The Guide, pp. 56, 58). Once again, Narayan uses his cinematic 'zooming in' technique to capture details of the narrated and the narrator:

> She watched it swaying with the raptest attention. She stretched out her arm slightly and swayed it in imitation of the movement; she swayed her whole body to the rhythm - for just a second, but that was sufficient to tell me what she was, the greatest dancer of the century.
>
> (The Guide, p. 58.)

The cobra, Narayan's favourite symbol to portray a seductress, is used to highlight Rosie's nature as an enchanting *femme fatale*. The cobra functions as the catalyst which liberates her inner spirit which had been subjugated by Marco Polo, and prompts her metamorphosis in the novel. As primary narrator, Raju captures his feelings graphically in describing Rosie to Velan. She is an 'angel', 'divine creature' and 'a vision' - symbols which

are pointers to the saint he becomes later in the novel (The Guide, pp. 57, 62, 63).

John Rothfork examines The Guide purely in terms of its Hindu undertones, and he presents an absorbing analysis of Rosie's symbolic characterization:

> She herself is called a snake-woman and as such she symbolises the mysterious, the unconscious, the mother goddess, the eternal renewal of life by the earth, like a snake sloughing off one skin or one life after another.[15]

Rothfork's interpretation possibly explains Rosie's almost mystical attraction for Raju although there are vast disparities in their levels of education and social positions.

When Marco Polo becomes totally engrossed in his archeological research in the Mempi Hills, studying wall friezes and rock paintings, Raju comments cynically: 'Dead and decaying things seemed to unloosen his tongue and fire his imagination, rather than things that lived and moved and swung their limbs' (The Guide, p. 71). To Dial

> Marco finds the company of a woman not only irritating but also greatly distracting. It appears that Rosie's sulkiness and depressiveness triggers some unconscious reaction within him.
> (Dial, p. 144.)

Rothfork examines the couple's characterization in terms of their antithetical qualities and categorises them as follows: 'The archeologist suggests the Aryan, the West, science and intellect. Whereas Rosie suggests the

Dravidian, the primal, the mystic' (Rothfork, p. 33). I believe that Rosie also embodies certain western traits and possesses an intellect which lies largely untapped by Marco. Ironically, it is the uneducated Raju who re-kindles her intellectual and aesthetic nature, exemplified in her superb portrayal later of the history of dance in India. Marco Polo denies Rosie free expression of these attributes. Thus he excludes her from his work and neglects her, unwittingly allowing Raju to fill the void in her life, and to become her confidant and her lover.

The illicit liaison between Raju and Rosie flourishes when Marco Polo makes no attempts to resolve his marital problems, spending months on his research in the caves of the Mempi Hills. In his characterization of Marco Polo, Narayan questions the value of such research which appears to be alienated from present day man and his life. On a personal level it estranges him from his wife.

Narayan portrays the theme of marital infidelity with extreme sensitivity. Neither Rosie nor Raju is chastised and the question of immorality does not become a central issue in the novel. The novelist remains a conventional Indian English writer who refrains from discussing sexual intimacy, immoral or otherwise. Raju refers obliquely, in his narration, to 'the inauguration of our own intimacy' (<u>The Guide</u>, p. 100). However, in Narayan's Indian world view, Hindu marriages are sacrosanct. He adheres to 'the timeless values of life' which constitute his 'frame of

reference' in the Malgudi novels. Marital infidelity is not allowed to triumph in the novel; therefore, one soon begins to note its deleterious effects. Furthermore, those characters who violate *dharma* or right action face retribution. Raju's moral lapses are punished later in the novel.

Raju reveals his transgressions to Velan who takes on the role of a father-confessor. Dev views Velan in a different light, stating that 'Velan may be a fool but he is ultimately wiser than this wise impresario; indeed, he proves to be wiser in his very foolishness' (Dev, p. 13). He refers to Velan as 'a surrogate father to Raju' (Dev, p. 14). There is little textual evidence, though, of Velan's wisdom. However one may view Velan's function in the novel, Narayan does not allow his character to evolve beyond its uni-dimensional limits.

Raju rationalises his past actions by informing Velan that he was unable to react to the domestic turbulence at the time. Significantly, one notes the *maya* which enveloped his life during his *liaison* with Rosie:

> My old life, in which I was not in the least interested, was dogging my steps; my mother facing me with numerous problems: .... to me she was a figure out of a dream, mumbling vague sounds;....
> (The Guide, p. 103.)

The novelist counters these illusions and Raju's exploitation of a fragile marital relationship through

subtle changes in Rosie's character. Gradually Rosie begins to lose the 'free and easy manner of her former days' (p. 104). Unlike Raju, she breaks through the barrier of illusion, albeit temporarily, and questions her identity:

> "After all ... After all ... Is this right what I am doing? After all, he has been so good to me, given me comfort and freedom.
>
> (The Guide, p. 105.)

She upholds the image of the conventional Hindu housewife who is moulded in the *Pativrata* tradition. This measure of self-realisation is a pointer to her character development. By contrast Raju's character remains static at this stage. He lacks the ability to differentiate between illusion and reality. Although Gaffur, the taxi-driver, functions as the voice of his conscience, Raju ignores the warnings. This is evident when Marco rejects Rosie because of her adultery, and Rosie goes to live with Raju; the veil of illusion settles firmly around Raju. Narasimhaiah describes the relationship between Raju and Rosie succintly:

> Nowhere do we read of her losing her heart to Raju, but in a context which denied life, Raju came to symbolise for her the warm flow of life that ministered to the vital human needs which had been starved.[16]

Although Rosie does not declare her love for Raju (in keeping with Narayan's conventional, attitude to love and marriage), she displays a certain nobility of character in her attitude towards the two men in her life. Thus the narratee does not reject her, but empathises with her.

Raju and Rosie's immorality may be contrasted with Marco Polo's apparent righteousness. His sense of morality is questionable because of its ambiguity. At no stage during the deterioration of their marriage does he question his own actions, yet steadfastly he refuses to understand the reasons for Rosie's infidelity, and to forgive her. When Narayan characterizes Marco Polo he alludes to the double standards of morality for spouses in marriage.

Through structural links Narayan interweaves the central themes of Raju's quest for self- identity, and marital infidelity, which are person- and family-centered, respectively, with themes that are based on social concerns: the conflict between orthodoxy and modernity, on the one hand, and religiousness, on the other. The characterization of Raju's mother aptly depicts the tension which is generated when orthodox lifestyles are threatened with modern ways. She is the typical Hindu mother who is protective of her son. Although she is orthodox, her characterization indicates that not all aspects of modernity are to be dismissed as decadent and evil. When Raju recounts his mother's first meeting with Rosie, the reader is told of her ambivalent feelings towards a younger, modern woman:

> My mother was amazed. "Girls today! How courageous you are! In our day we wouldn't go to the street corner without an escort. And I have been to the market only once in my life, when Raju's father was alive."
>
> (The Guide, p. 124.)

She is cordial and courteous towards Rosie, yet shocked by her modern name and overawed by the news that she has travelled unescorted from Madras. Rosie's modernity intrigues her and also puts her on her guard. O.P. Mathur, in his enlightening essay, 'The Guide: A Study In Cultural Ambivalence' (1982), stresses Narayan's sympathetic attitude towards Western influences in the novel. [17] In his discussion of the 'East-West theme' he states: 'R.K. Narayan seems to ridicule the exclusive orthodoxy of Indian conservatism and is clearly sympathetic towards modernity' (Mathur, p. 71).

However, in all the other Malgudi novels, Narayan is inflexible in his belief that Hindu marriages are sacrosanct. These points are validated when one analyses the ambivalent attitude of Raju's mother towards Rosie. She admires Rosie's academic qualifications: "Good, good, brave girl. Then you lack nothing in the world. You are not like us uneducated women. You will get on anywhere" (The Guide, p. 125). Her comments are ironic as Rosie's Master's degree in Economics has brought neither academic fulfilment nor a happy marriage. Although she enjoys a good rapport with Rosie her conservatism will not allow her to tolerate marital infidelity. She chastises Raju for violating their traditional lifestyle:

> "You can't have a dancing girl in your house. Every morning with all that dancing and everything going on! What is the home coming to?"
>
> (The Guide, p. 135.)

When her admonishments prove to be ineffectual, she enlists her brother's help. Raju's uncle is fanatically conservative and his characterization may be viewed as a parody of an orthodox and tyrannical individual. He is disdainful towards Raju and Rosie and threatens the couple mercilessly, an action which shows that individuality must be sacrificed in favour of Indian culture and tradition. Generally, Narayan is non-judgemental, but here he does appear to uphold tradition.

When Raju's mother refers to Rosie as a 'tainted woman' and a 'snake woman' this accentuates her generation's staunch views on the sanctity of marriage (The Guide, p. 136). Furthermore, her anecdotes about husbands and her quotations from mythological stories of Savitri-Seetha, which are intended to be moral lessons for Rosie, testify to the older generation's faith in the Hindu myths as eternal examples of morality and wisdom. Orthodox tradition and culture and devout faith in the Hindu religion are like beacons of light which guide her generation in difficult times.

One of her parting comments to Raju is testimony of her implicit faith in the Supreme Being to protect her home: "Don't fail to light the lamps in the god's niche" (The Guide, p. 154). Even if she has not been able to counter immorality in her home, spiritual concerns are not to be neglected. This attitude shows that religious faith is a pivotal point in the novel, but it does not imply

that Narayan is deeply religious; but it indicates, rather, Narayan's 'sheer fidelity to things as they are' (See Chapter Three).

When Raju becomes a dance promoter to 'Nalini', (Rosie's stage name), Narayan reflects an aspect of show business which, whilst purporting to promote Indian culture, degenerates into hedonism for the promoter. Raju promises Rosie: "... I'll make the world recognise you as the greatest artist of the time". Although Rosie soars 'rocket-like' to stardom, she is filled with despair and disillusionment (The Guide, pp. 134, 161). Pompously, Raju informs Velan of what one may call his 'award-winning performance' as entertainment mogul when he makes Rosie a famous dancer.

In Raju's world the boundaries between hypocrisy and authenticity, and illusion and reality, become indistinct. Like the film world of Mr. Sampath, materialistic pursuits replace spiritual concerns and the lifestyle of the *nouveau riche* changes dramatically. As the couple's fortunes ascend, there is an ironic corresponding deterioration in their personal relationship. Raju's love for Rosie changes to a monopolistic obsession, exemplified in his confession to Velan: 'I liked to keep her in a citadel' (p. 171); and his greed for wealth makes him view her as an instrument whereby he could make a fortune.

To Rosie, the world of show business becomes increasingly

monotonous, and she illustrates the futility of her role in the following analogy: "Do you know the bulls yoked to an oil-crusher - they keep going round and round and round, in a circle, without a beginning or an end?" (The Guide, p. 179). Rosie's allusion to the cyclical nature of things is Narayan's prescient comment on Rosie's life which, before long, is to come full circle.

The disintegration of Rosie and Marco's marriage, and the failure of her relationship with Raju, are typical features of the dissolution phase in the cycle of existence. This dislocation of order is an integral part of the characteristic, cycle of events evident in the plot of the Malgudi novels, noted earlier in this thesis. Sanyal states that '*The Guide* and other novels of Narayan are constructed around the pattern that can be formulated as "order - dislocation of order - reintegration of order".' Like actors who are pawns in the hands of a director, Raju, Rosie and Marco function within the pre-determined cycle of existence.

Both Raju and Rosie,in their roles as actors, exemplify the nature of man's *karmic* existence in which each life is a brief act which continues in a cycle until the individual has transcended his or her *karma*. Rosie's comments testify to an increasing self-awareness and character development, features which are absent in Raju's actions, as he continues to stumble in his illusory world of materialism and grandeur. Like Margayya, the

serious flaws in Raju's character precipitate his downfall. Whilst Margayya's mistake is evident when he attacks Dr Pal physically, Raju's occurs when he forges Rosie's signature on a document 'for the release of a box of jewellery left in safe custody at the Bank ...' (The Guide, p. 182).

Like most Malgudi characters, Raju is punished for his lapses: he is sentenced to two years imprisonment. His promise to Rosie: 'We will teach that cad a lesson by and by' is obviously ironic (p. 134).

Narayan is consistent in his characterization of Rosie. Her generosity towards Raju makes her sell her personal possessions to pay for his legal defence. Narayan also maintains his comic perspective at this stage, by diverting attention from the seriousness of Raju's moral and criminal offences and by focussing on the humorous antics of the adjournment lawyer, a common figure in Indian legal circles, even today. Raju informs Velan of the '"adjournment lawyer".... who continued to handle the tortuous and prolonged affair of half my house being pledged to the Sait' and he goes on to speak of 'the glamorous lawyer from Madras, whom we put up at the Taj in the best suite' (The Guide, p. 205).

Narasimhaiah describes Narayan's characterization of Raju's lawyer as 'his masterly creation in the whole book' and adds that 'it is the product of his rich ironic vision'. He goes on to state that this is evidence of Narayan's 'ethical

sensibility'.[18] Narayan's satiric treatment of lawyers highlights their deliberate procrastination which is motivated by personal financial gain, rather than by their clients' interests. Narasimhaiah's comment that the adjournment lawyer is ' perhaps...[Narayan's] masterly creation in the whole book' is excessive. This character appears very briefly in the novel to warrant such a remark. In my opinion, it is the characterization of Raju that is unsurpassed in the novel.

Raju continues his charade in prison as 'model prisoner' and 'master of the show' (The Guide, p. 201). This anti-climactic ending to Raju's narration of his past coincides with a similar ending to his masquerade as swami. Masterfully, Narayan allows the two strands of the novel, which link the past with the present, to reach a pinnacle simultaneously: Raju reaches the height of his career as tourist guide when he becomes Rosie's personal 'guide'. This action parallels his change from bogus swami to a real one.

A commendable feature of the novel is the narrative speed with which the salient parts of Raju's life from infancy to adulthood, are covered. This enhances the wholeness of the narrative. Raju's path to sainthood is triggered off through a misunderstanding. He is prompted to act as village mediator when he is told of a conflict in Velan's family. His instinct for self-preservation cautions him against possible exposure as conman and fraud, if the police

should intervene in the affairs of the village.
Thus, in a desperate attempt to make peace, Raju sends a message to Velan's family, with Velan's semi-moronic brother, that he would fast until they stopped fighting. The messenger, afraid of punishment for having divulged news of the brawl, deliberatly distorts the message stating that the swami would fast to end the drought.

This statement is received warmly by the villagers. The 'swami', responds to the auto-suggestion in his psyche which has been set in motion by the villagers' devout faith in him as their saviour. He begins to fast and pray for an end to the drought. Velan acts like a catalyst and his pronouncement, though ironic, is encouraging to Raju: "Your penance is similar to Mahatma Gandhi's. He has left us a disciple in you to save us" (p. 93). The mood is infectious and Raju's transformation to real sainthood begins.

Raju's illusory world claims another victim when Velan, unable to differentiate between deception and reality, continues to venerate Raju as a swami although the latter has denied that he is a swami: "I am not a saint, Velan, I'm just an ordinary human being like anyone else" (p. 98). However, Velan's unwavering faith influences Raju, who has little option but to continue with his enforced sainthood. He has to live up to not only Velan's expectations of him, but to those of the villagers as a whole.

> Velan gave a very clear account of what the saviour was expected to do - stand in knee-deep water, look

> to the skies, and utter the prayer lines for two weeks, completely fasting during the period - and lo, the rains would come down, provided the man who performed it was a pure soul, was a great soul.
> (The Guide, p. 95.)

Raju realises that through an ironic twist of fate he 'had 'created a giant with his puny self, a throne of authority with that slab of stone' (p. 95).

To give credence to Raju's conversion, Narayan continues to portray him in the comic-ironic mode in the first few days of his fast as one who struggles to control desires of the flesh and mind. His roguish nature persists when, on the fourth day of his fast, he continues to eat secretly. His deception is the culmination of Narayan's portrayal of his protagonist as 'a rogue from a human angle'. When Raju eventually resolves to fast and pray sincerely, he has reached a level of spirituality which is characterized by increasing self-awareness and self-realization, attributes which lead him closer to the Divine Being.

Finally, he has found his niche in life. He realizes that

> For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort; for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him a new strength to go through with the ordeal.
> (The Guide, p. 212.)

In V.P. Rao's mainly historical approach to the Malgudi novels, he notes Raju's sincerity and states:

> For once, Raju's decision does not waver because it is a true decision made in an effort towards self-abnegation. He now faces death rather than abandon this unique experience of selflessness. Death for Raju is thus the culmination of life.[19]

This viewpoint affirms the immortality of man's soul. In order to obtain a holistic view of Raju's conversion to sainthood, one should combine this perspective with Walsh's psychoanalytical viewpoint, in which he attributes Raju's metamorphosis to a common characteristic in man, which in Raju's case is tapped to its fullest potential. 'In his nature' says Walsh, 'there is developed to the point of extremity what exists in all of us to some degree - the quality of suggestibility to the desires of others' (Walsh, p. 14). Narayan's success in changing Raju from a conman to a saint lies in capitalising on this trait and in combining it with the protagonist's powerful motivation throughout his life to acquire greatness.

Another critic, Gupta, views Raju's transformation from a different angle. He firmly believes that Raju is a sinner and states: 'His act of continuing the fast is not characterized by any purity of purpose' (Gupta, p. 134). His analysis is prompted, in my opinion, by marked rigidity, and bias against any human worth the protagonist might display. I feel that Gupta's comment might have been valid had Raju been a truly tragic figure caught up in a web of evil - a situation which does not obtain in <u>The Guide</u>, in which religious faith is a central issue.

Narayan explores the concept of asceticism as an integral part of the Indian ethos, yet he does not allow its seriousness to dominate the concluding part of the novel. His success lies in allowing the theatrical elements in the novel to end in the final dramatic scenes in which Raju is once again, the main actor in his last role. On this occasion illusion has converged with reality, as the following extract illustrates:

> He went down to the river, stood facing upstream with his eyes shut, and repeated the litany. It was no more than a supplication to the heavens to send down rain and save humanity.
>
> (The Guide, p. 212.)

The newly-converted ascetic undertakes his task assiduously, and his penance is typical of the catharsis which the Narayan protagonist experiences on the path to self-realisation. Raju basks in his spiritual glory: "This enjoyment is something Velan cannot take away from me" (p. 212), and this is questionable.

Narayan succeeds in maintaining a balance between spiritual and materialistic aspects in the novel, and the comic and the tragic elements in the tail end of the plot by focussing on illuminating scenes which build up around the concept of sainthood, rather than presenting the protagonist as if he were the central figure in a Greek tragedy. The swami's fast is thrown into relief against a bustling background of humanity whose idiosyncratic behaviour is captured humorously:

> Never had this part of the country seen such a crowd. Shops sprang up overnight, as if by magic,.... The Tea Propaganda Board opened a big tea stall,.... The public swarmed around it like flies, and the flies swarmed on all the cups and sugar bowls. The presence of the fly brought in the Health Department, which feared an outbreak of some epidemic in that crowded place without water. The khaki-clad health inspectors sprayed every inch of space with DDT and, with needle in hand, coaxed people to innoculate themselves against cholera, malaria, and what not.
> (The Guide, p. 213.)

Walsh contends that the crowd scene reflects one of

> two of R.K. Narayan's deepest convictions about human life. In the first place is his sense of the way in which, at every stage of his life, the isolated individual faces the enormous, fundamentally indifferent crowd. Streams of people flow round the single stone.[20]

Walsh's comments are validated by reflecting momentarily, on Narayan's depiction of the indifferent hordes who swarm the river banks in Mangal, prompted by what they view as a sensational act. One recalls the significance of some of the crowd scenes in other Malgudi novels, in which crowds feature prominently. In Waiting, the vibrant crowds which are drawn to listen to the Mahatma become ineffectual later, when he is assasinated in their midst. One recollects also the stormy sea of faces advancing on Margayya's house when his financial empire collapses. Any visitor to the Indian sub-continent becomes aware of these crowd scenes which are an integral part of the Indian ethos, and Narayan is prompted to reflect them faithfully in his novels. Furthermore, they endorse his concept of a person's loneliness and isolation in society. Walsh refers to this as

'the sense of individual alienation' (Walsh, p. 16).

In The Guide, these crowd scenes acquire a cinematic perspective when the American TV and film producer, James J. Malone, captures the scenario on film. His actions provide further comic relief as the tension around the swami begins to mount. Through a person like Malone, Narayan satirizes foreign interviewers who often pose questions that are both stereotypical and ridiculous, such as: "Can fasting abolish all wars and bring world peace?" and "What about the caste system? Is it going?" (The Guide, p. 217). Malone's attitude gives the swami's fast a commercial taint and suggests that the interviewer has not grasped fully the urgency of the situation and the profound implications of religious faith.

Raju, now a Swami and a Mahatma, becomes a national hero whose 'life is valuable to the country' (The Guide, p. 217). On the eleventh morning of the swami's fast, the novel comes to its anti-climactic ending. He re-enters his 'basin of water' in the river and offers his final prayer whilst being held by Velan and another:

> They held him as if he were a baby. Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said, "Velan, its raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs - " He sagged down.
>
> (The Guide, p. 220.)

There is no ambiguity about Raju's death because it had been a pre-determined part of the novel's structure, which had been suggested by Graham Greene:

> Graham Greene liked the story when I narrated it to him in London. While I was hesitating whether to leave my hero alive or dead at the end of the story, Graham was definite that he should die.
> (My Days, p. 165.)

In his death Raju acquires the stature of a saviour and a martyr, and his portrait at the end of the novel challenges the traditional anti-heroic characterization of the Narayan protagonist: Raju dies a hero who saves the villagers of Mangal.

Dev appears to find Christian undertones in Raju's death, and justifies his interpretation of the protagonist's dependence on his elders and the community, by viewing his metamorphosis to a baby, as follows:

> The reference to baby is too telling to be ignored. Raju's redemption follows his symbolic return to childhood where he has to be held up in the elders' arms. Once he is in their arms, once he is a child again, he can enter into 'the kingdom of heaven.'
> (Dev, p. 14.)

This viewpoint is a fitting conclusion to Dev's essay, and Raju's image as a saviour resembles that of Christ's, yet it would be difficult to accept that Raju returns symbolically 'to childhood' on his death. In his profound spirituality and communion with God he has transcended the barriers of illusion, a feat which requires the mental and spiritual maturity of an adult.

When Raju says that he can feel the rain coming, we accept his statement as credible. However, the question arises whether the imminent rain is the result of a miracle or is

merely coincidental. Like the ending in The English Teacher, this conclusion may reflect an esoteric experience precipitated by one who has reached the pinnacle in his self-realization. Britta Olinder is one of the critics who examines the possibility of such an experience when she explores 'the crossing of myth with realism' and the 'appearances of holy men, notably people masquerading as holy men', in Narayan's fiction.[21] She discusses

> the most striking example of this in *The Guide* where Narayan by hinting at the possibility of supernatural powers creates a myth of his own as a parallel to similar cases in the legendary tradition.
> (Olinder, p. 9.)

Olinder interprets Raju's last moments as follows: 'This is the sublime moment, the climax of the whole novel. It is the moment of the miracle' (Olinder, p. 17). Gupta, on the other hand, discounts the possibility of any paranormal occurrence, remaining faithful to his interpretation of Raju as a sinner to the end. He maintains that it

> is wrong to believe that Raju who is a selfish opportunist, a crass materialist, and a voluptuous hedonist has all of a sudden become a martyr capable of making grace descend from heavens. The rains he sees (or thinks he sees) are indeed, a pathetic hallucination of a starving impostor. The textual suggestion is unmistakable: "The eastern sky was red ... the morning was out now; a great shaft of light illuminated the surroundings."
> (Gupta, p. 135.)

It is possible that Raju is hallucinating as his life has been for the better part, a charade. However, one cannot easily discount the intense religious faith of the

villagers and Raju. This could have culminated in the miracle alluded to by the novelist. The textual suggestion to which Dev refers is not a discrepancy in the plot, but is used intentionally by the novelist to heighten the impact of a an extra-sensory experience which transcends the boundaries of normality. The dividing lines between illusion and reality, psuedo-spirituality and asceticism have become progressively indistinct in the novel, creating the climate for a supernatural event in the climax.

Walsh's interpretation of the final scene also implies divine intervention:

> And the hint in the last words of *The Guide* that rain is on its way is Narayan's method of suggesting that there is some measure of objectivity, of endorsement by reality, in Raju's transformation. It has the approval of the gods, of life.
> (Walsh, p. 17.)

Another viewpoint which confirms the strong religious undertones in the entire novel is that of Viney Kirpal, who in her 1988 essay, '*Moksha* for Raju: The Archetypal Four- stage Journey', states that 'the life of Raju as depicted in the novel resembles the archetypal division into the four stages corresponding to the four *ashramas*'[22] She goes on to point out that in death the protagonist is redeemed because of his correct actions according to Hindu principles:

> The *Bhagvad Gita* places action and *dharma* above knowledge and devotion. Raju is no learned mystic or devotee of God. It is only through good

> action, renunciation of the self and a return to a life governed by *dharma,* that he wins *moksha.*
>
> (Kirpal, p. 361.)

Raju's transformation to a swami is linked to the imminent rains. We realize that religious faith and asceticism are important aspects of the Indian ethos which Narayan reflects faithfully in The Guide. The novelist portrays the villagers' religious faith and Raju's actions as an authentic swami without irony or satire.

Another interesting feature evident in the last scenes of The Guide is the marked departure from the traditional structure of the Malgudi novel with its anti-climactic endings and anti-heroic protagonists. In terms of man's *karmic* existence, Raju's asceticism allows his immortal soul to triumph in death. This victory and the protagonist's heroism as saviour who breaks the drought give the novel an academically challenging, *finale*.

The Guide is generally acclaimed by critics as Narayan's best novel. In 1961 it received India's highest literary award, the Sahitya Akademi award, and elicited the following comment from Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah: 'Indian writing in English made history early this year when the Sahitya Akademi conferred for the first time the highest honour it could for the most distinguished writing in English since 1959'.[23] In 1973 Prof. William Walsh acknowledged the superiority of the novel in the Malgudi chain: 'Perhaps the most remarkable example of the

the difficult genre - the serious comedy - to which R.K. Narayan's novels belong is *The Guide* (1958).[24] To Walsh it seems 'not only his best novel but the one in which his characteristic qualities show themselves most clearly' (Walsh, p. 14).

In the 'eighties critics continued to extol the novel's merit, highlighting its technical artistry. In his essay, 'The Masterpieces: Irony As Moral Discovery', M.K. Naik examines Narayan's use of comic and tragic irony in the novel, and in his summative comments lauds Narayan's achievement:

> The most popular and perhaps the widest known of Narayan's novels, it may owe this good fortune to the adventitious reason of its having been made into a (bad) film; but the vitality of its tragic irony and the complexity of its technique have certainly given it a well-merited pre-eminence among all his novels - a pre-eminence on which the Sahitya Akademi award of 1961 deservedly set the seal.[25]

Narayan's transformation of Raju from an ordinary human being to a 'swami' who acquires 'the stature of a saint' (The Guide, p. 13), elicits the following comment from Kirpal Singh:

> When we come to Raju in *The Guide* we are as close as is ever possible in Narayan's work, to see the average and the ordinary triumph beyond their stations in life. It is in this novel - which I consider to be Narayan's best work - that Narayan makes at least some attempt to redeem a character caught in the endless complications imposed by life.[26]

The novel's fine structure, with its deft interplay of multiple narrators, superb characterization of the enigmatic Raju, and stimulating exploration of universal themes, all contribute to the novel's merit and elevate it to the prestigious position of the best Malgudi novel.

At this stage the following paradigm affords one meaningful insight into the *modus operandi* of another Commonwealth writer, the West Indian, V.S. Naipaul, whose novel, The Mystic Masseur, offers a basis for comparison. In his writings, Naipaul focuses on his own Trinidadian Indian community's search for identity in a heterogenous society in which West Indian negritude and British colonialism were often strong forces. His examination of the theme of identity in the The Mystic Masseur may be compared with The Guide because of certain similarities between the respective protagonists in the novels, Ganesh Ramsumair and Raju. Raju's quest for self-identity is characteristic not only of the inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent, but also of migrant Indian communities throughout the Hindu diaspora.

Both characters appear to be endowed with certain special powers which elevate them in their own communities to the stature of 'saviour'. In his comprehensive analysis of The Mystic Masseur, Y.G. Reddy highlights Ganesh's mystic power which, in some respects, is akin to the aura which exudes from Raju:

> Mrs Cooper, meaning to comfort him after his failure as a teacher, says mysteriously that he has an 'aura' which, presumably, will bring him success in life. This is the first of several references to Ganesh's mystic powers, his belief in which grows with time.
> (Y.G.Reddy, p. 64.)

Although both protagonists have a common goal, that is, the quest for self-identity, their genesis differs. Raju is a product of the post-independent Indian milieu into which westernisation has continued to make serious inroads, whilst Ganesh emanates from a community which, even after almost a century on foreign soil, is still plagued by serious problems of acculturation.

Ganesh, like Raju, has multifarious roles during his lifetime, that of teacher, masseur, mystic and Member of the Legislative Council, in addition to his function as writer and political agitator who becomes a turncoat. When his patriotism to the British colonists is adequately rewarded, his identity crisis appears to be resolved. Like Raju, his illusory world continues to expand, culminating in his total negation, ironically, of his Indian heritage. He becomes G. Ramsay Muir. Naipaul's negativity in his characterization of Ganesh contrasts sharply with Narayan's affirmation of cyclical life in his portrait of Raju.

D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu succintly notes the different approaches to the comic mode adopted by both these authors:

> Naipaul uses the novel form as a ritual of extinction and exorcism, whereas Narayan employs it as a ritual of initiation and renewal.[27]

These points are validated when one notes that Ganesh's identity is obliterated at the end of The Mystic Masseur, whilst Raju finds his identity in a cyclical return to his Indian roots, exemplified in his final role as authentic swami. Raju's success in acquiring his identity as saint lies in his deepening spirituality, whilst Ganesh negates any special 'Power' he had as a faith healer, through his obsession with materialistic concerns. Ganesh, like Raju in his role as bogus guru, is a conman, who not only exploits the gullibility of village peasants, but also entertains delusions of grandeur himself.

Naipaul's double-edged satire of the mystic masseur and the simple peasants may be compared with Narayan's gentle satire of the tourist guide and tourists, on the one hand, and the fake swami and gullible villagers, on the other. In comparing their use of language one notes that Narayan is the conventional, Indian English writer whose prose is unadulterated by regional dialects, whilst Naipaul aims for authenticity through prose which is dominated by dialogue in the Trinidadian dialect, which his Indian characters use almost exclusively in order to align themselves with their adoptive country.

In his role as critic, Naipaul has shown a certain ambivalence in his criticism of aspects of Narayan's Indian world view reflected in his fiction:

> He tells an Indian truth. Too much that is overwhelming has been left out; too much has been taken for granted. There is a contradiction in Narayan, between his form which implies concern, and his attitude, which denies; and in this calm contradiction lies his magic which some have called Tchekovian.[28]

Nonetheless, Narayan, like Naipaul in The Mystic Masseur, has secured enduring fame in his exploration of existential issues in his novel. It may be fitting to end this chapter with Raghavacharyulu's pithy comment that 'Narayan's humour is gentle, tender and gregarious; but Naipaul's comic wit is harsh, anguished and isolative. We may admire Naipaul; but we love Narayan' (Raghavacharyulu, p. 217).

END NOTES

1. R.K. Narayan, My Days: A Memoir, pp. 163-164.

2. Raymond Williams, ' Realism and the Novel', Partisan Review, No. 26 (Spring 1959), 202.

3. See also Gerald Prince's note on multiple narrators and narrative hierarchy, 'Narrating', Narratology: the Form and Functioning of Narrative, p. 15.

4. Ibid.

5. K.V. Reddy, 'Point of View, Time, and Language in R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*', The Literary Endeavour, Vol.111, Nos. 3 & 4 (January - March 1982; April - June 1982), 80-81.

6. Prof. William Walsh, 'India', Commonwealth Literature, p. 14.

7. Prof. C. D. Narasimhaiah, 'R.K. Narayan's "The Guide": With a note on the Sahitya Akademi award to the novel', The Literary Criterion, ed. C.D. Narasimhaiah, Vol. IV, No. 4, (Summer 1961), 70.

8. Dr Y.G. Reddy, 'The Mystic Masseur', Alienation And The Quest For Identity And Order In The Novels Of V.S. Naipaul, D. LItt. et Phil. Thesis, UNISA, 1985, p. 66.

9. Jai Dev, 'The Importance Of Being A Child: A Note On Two Details In Narayan's *The Guide*', The Journal of Indian Writing in English: A Biannual of Creative and Critical Indian Writing in English, ed. G.S. Balarama Gupta, Vol. XV, No. 2 (July 1987), 12.

10. Ram Dial, 'The Anima-Animus Interaction In *The Guide*', Perspectives On R.K. Narayan, ed. Atma Ram, pp. 136, 137.

11. Prince, p. 72.

12. C.D. Narasimhaiah, ' R. K. Narayan: The Comic as a mode of study in Maturity', The Swan And The Eagle, p. 150. A similar trait is found in Margayya who enjoys the adulation of Malgudi's citizens when he becomes one of its richest inhabitants.

13. S.C. Sanyal, Preamble, Indianness In Major Indo-English Novels, p. xi. 'The re-integration of order' to which Sanyal refers, lies in The Guide in

Mangal's return to normality with the advent of the rains; Rosie's return to Madras and Raju's self-realisation before death (p. 12).

14. G.S. Balarama Gupta, 'A Sinner Is A Sinner Is A Sinner - A Study of Raju', Perspectives on R.K. Narayan, ed. Atma Ram, p. 128.

15. John Rothfork, 'Hindu Mysticism in the Twentieth Century: R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*', Philological Quarterly, Iowa City (Winter 1983), 33.

16. Swan., p. 152.

17. O.P. Mathur, '*The Guide* - A Study in Cultural Ambivalence', The Literary Endeavour, Vol. 111, Nos. 3&4 (January - March 1982; April - June 1982), 71.

18. Narasimhaiah, The Literary Criterion, 72.

19. V.P. Rao, ' The Art of R.K. Narayan', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, No. 5 (July 1968), 35.

20. Walsh, p. 16. The second point to which the critic refers is that 'Narayan is intensely aware of the way in which human character is constituted - not simply influenced - by the expectations of others', pp. 16-17.

21. Britta Olinder, 'Reality And Myth In R.K. Narayan's Novels', The Literary Criterion, Vol.XX, No. 2, (1985), 9.

22. Viney Kirpal, ' *Moksha* for Raju: The Archetypal Four-stage Journey', World Literature Written in English, Vol. 28, No. 2 (1988), 357.

23. Narasimhaiah, The Literary Criterion, 63. He adds that 'it is a unique honour done not only to R.K. Narayan, but a mark of recognition shown to this exotic plant called Indo-Anglian or Indo-English literature', 62.

24. Walsh, p. 14.

25. M K Naik, 'The Masterpieces: Irony As Moral Discovery', The Ironic Vision, p. 65.

26. Kirpal Singh, 'The Average And The Ordinary As Satiric Traps: The Case of R.K. Narayan', Explorations in Modern Indo-English Fiction, p. 138.

27. D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu, 'Naipaul and Narayan: The Sense of Life', Awakened Conscience: Studies in Commonwealth Literature, ed. C D Narasimhaiah, p. 216.

28. V.S. Naipaul, 'R.K. Narayan', Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. XXV111, 293.

CHAPTER FIVE

HINDU ORTHODOXY AND MODERN MARRIAGES: *THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI, THE VENDOR OF SWEETS* AND *THE PAINTER OF SIGNS*

In my critical, textual analyses in Chapters Five and Six, I focus on the six Malgudi novels published between 1961 and 1990: The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961), The Vendor of Sweets (1967), The Painter of Signs (1976), A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), The Talkative Man (1986) and The World of Nagaraj (1990). My objective in these chapters is twofold: I highlight evolutionary trends in Narayan's artistic approach to theme and character in these novels, and note any changes in the overall pattern which characterizes his *modus operandi* and content in the Malgudi novels.

In Chapter Five I focus on the ninth, tenth and eleventh Malgudi novels: The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961), The Vendor of Sweets (1967) and The Painter of Signs (1976). These are characterized by a marked change in Narayan's literary style and his authorial standpoint. His experimentation with multiple narrators, the flashback technique, the presentation of esoteric experiences and man's existence within secular and universal Time - aspects which characterized, amongst others, The Guide, do not predominate in the three novels published between 1961 and 1976. His maturity as a writer enables him to shed his conservatism and to reflect controversial issues spawned by the new, post-independent Indian society.

In The Man-Eater, The Vendor and The Painter Narayan's focus changes from the family-centred themes identified in most of the earlier novels, to social and community-centred themes. The conflict between the forces of good and evil, Gandhian philosophy and capitalist values, immorality and debased sexual passions, unorthodox concepts of marriage and religious faith and Hinduism are the central issues in these novels. The transition in themes is indicative of the centrifugal pattern identified earlier in this thesis, and confirms Narayan's maturity as a writer.

Noteworthy, too, is the change evident in the novelist's use of the English language. Although his language remains basically lucid, occasionally his diction is bold and explicit, as I shall show, when he discusses love, unconventional marriages, sexuality, immorality and modern male-female relationships. One notes also that Narayan's diction at this stage of his career carries a hint of the influence of the jargon of Hollywood films, popular at the time.

Another significant feature which reflects the evolution of Narayan's literary skills and maturity as a writer is his balanced perception of Indian society. His Indian world view, encapsulated in his little India, Malgudi, acquires certain new dimensions which reflect some of Indian society's social ills prevalent at the time. Narayan sheds his rose-coloured spectacles when he exposes Malgudi's darker side created by the injurious effects of new value

systems and norms displayed by his main characters like Vasu in The Man-Eater, Mali and Grace in The Vendor, and Raman and Daisy in The Painter. In this chapter I aim to illustrate these points through a series of paradigms as I evaluate theme and character critically in The Man-Eater, The Vendor and The Painter.

In The Man-Eater Narayan retains his symbolistic style of writing to portray the protagonist, Vasu, as a demon or *rakshasa*. The title of the novel is ironically symbolic of a man, rather than a predatory tiger, who hunts and kills animals to satisfy his perverted desire to conserve the animal populace through taxidermy. Vasu is the first Malgudi protagonist who is characterized as a truly evil person. As Narayan's *forte* is the portrayal of comic realism in Indian society, he does not create really heinous characters, as this would necessitate censure on his part. Narayan does not wish to compromise his non-moralistic standpoint by chastising malevolent individuals. Thus he moulds Vasu's character with certain comically-ironic attributes which leads him to self-destruction. Narayan was motivated by the famous *Bhasmasura* myth to characterize someone as vile as Vasu. M.K. Naik draws attention to the novel's genesis by referring to Narayan's comments on the novel, made at Columbia University in 1972:

> After writing a number of novels and short stories based on the society around me, some years ago I suddenly came across a theme which struck me as an excellent piece of mythology in modern dress. It was

> published under the title, Man-Eater of Malgudi ... I based this story on a well-known mythological episode, the story of Mohini and Bhasmasura.[1]

Narayan dedicates the book to Graham Greene in order to mark over 'a quarter of a century of friendship' since the publication of Swami in 1935.[2] In The Man-Eater Narayan's literary skills have evolved appreciably to enable him to handle comic and tragic irony with finesse, and to allow his characters to function within a well-defined plot which has the essence of a suspense drama with an anti-climactic ending.

Naik encapsulates the salient aspects of Narayan's ironic approach to theme and character in The Man-Eater as follows:

> The *Man-Eater of Malgudi,* the third of Narayan's masterpieces, is at once a recreation of the old Hindu myth of Bhasmasura in modern form (a myth presented with both serious parallelism and ironic contrast in the manner of William Faulkner in *The Sound and The Fury)* and a thoughtful presentation of two diametrically opposed attitudes to life, the inadequacies of both of which are ironically exposed.
>
> (Naik, p. 65.)

The mythopoeic nature of The Man-Eater will come under scrutiny in my critical evaluation of Vasu's tragi-comic character. Vasu is 'perhaps Narayan's best comic character'[3], and is the protagonist who violates the traditional code of conduct in a town whose social climate shows increasing signs of licentiousness evidenced in Sankunni's 'eighteen taverns scattered in the four corners

of the city, where any evening one could see revellers fighting or rolling in the gutters' (The Man-Eater, p. 9).

Narayan tries to achieve cohesiveness in the novel by attempting to balance the forces of degradation and depravity with the forces of virtue and wholesomeness. Nataraj, the owner of the printing press, and his coterie of friends, comprising primarily Kavi the poet and Sen the journalist, and Nataraj's assistant, Sastri, together with Muthu, the shopkeeper, and Dr Joshi, the veterinarian, symbolise the positive forces in Malgudi.

These Malgudians represent a heterogeneous group of Hindu middle class characters whose intellect and vocations differ appreciably from those of their predecessors who are often identifiable in the early Malgudi novels by their idiosyncrasies. Narayan's artistry in The Man-Eater is reflected in his masterful portraits of antithetical characters whose actions reveal the conflict between the forces of good and evil in Malgudi society. Yet, a few characters, such as Vasu and Sankunni, reflect, as Williams avers, Narayan's 'preoccupation with great eccentrics and with comic disorder in the Malgudi novels of the post-war phase'.[4]

With precision and remarkable insight into the nature and function of artisans such as printers, Narayan portrays Nataraj and Sastri as dedicated workers whose expertise is in demand in Malgudi. Nataraj functions as the first person

narrator who unfolds his own character as a god-fearing, successful printer whose prosperity has made him fairly complacent about life:

> I hung up a framed picture of Goddess Laxmi poised on her lotus, holding aloft the bounties of earth in her four hands, and through her grace I did not do too badly. My son, little Babu, went to Albert Mission School, and he felt quite adequately supplied with toys, books, sweets, and any other odds and ends he fancied. My wife, every Deepavali, gave herself a new silk sari, glittering with lace, not to mention the ones she bought for no particular reason at other times. She kept the pantry well-stocked and our kitchen fire aglow, continuing the traditions of our ancient home in Kabir Street.
> (The Man-Eater, p. 7.)

In his exploration of narrativity in the novel, R.A. Jayanta comments on its beginning as follows:

> Narayan begins the novel as an absorbing first-person narrative, direct and straight-forward. Not only does this device lend a certain urgency to the narrative as it involves the narrator but it also tricks the readers unobtrusively into sympathising with him as he takes them into his confidence and tells them all about himself.[5]

As the action in the novel proceeds the sympathy which the reader has for Nataraj diminishes when he remains passive whilst evil and destruction flourish. We feel disappointed, even angry with him when he resigns himself to the forces of disruption. However, in this world of comic realism[6], Nataraj is characterized, on the whole, as a generous and gregarious individual who turns his parlour into a haven for weary passers-by, and a meeting place for the enclave of young intellectuals who are his regular companions. He notes:

> Among my constant companions was a poet who was writing the life of God Krishna in monosyllabic verse. His ambition was to compose a grand epic, and he came almost every day to recite to me his latest lines.
>
> (The Man-Eater, p. 7.)

In the introductory paragraphs of the novel Narayan highlights Hinduism's pivotal role in Malgudi society and sets the tone for religious faith to counter the forces of evil in the novel. The atmosphere which is created in the cosy parlour scenes is similar to that which pervades the drawing room scenes of Jane Austen's novels. Nataraj is fully involved in his printing works, in addition to taking an interest in Malgudi's cultural affairs. Shirley Chew's predominantly sociological approach to theme and character in her critique of The Man-Eater underscores 'The theme of dissociation which recurs throughout Narayan's fiction', and emphasises the point that 'Detachment, when it is meaningful, follows after engagement with living'.[7] She analyses Nataraj's character as follows:

> His daily life is a poised arrangement of personal routine, mild business activity, and clubbable exchanges on poetry and politics .... He establishes a little sitting room .... Here they [his friends] find Nataraj as he wishes to appear to the world - an urbane social being, and an obliging but astute business man.
>
> (Chew, p. 71.)

Narayan creates this idyllic atmosphere not only in the parlour, but also in the printing press where he highlights the symbiotic relationship between Nataraj and Sastri. To the former, Sastri transcends his function of a co-worker.

He is Nataraj's

> well-wisher ... the old man who set up type, printed the formes four pages at a time on the treadle, sewed the sheets, and carried them for ruling or binding to Kandan four streets off.
> (The Man-Eater, p. 8.)

Sastri and Nataraj are sincere and dedicated artisans who serve Malgudi's citizens through their expertise. Nataraj epitomises the perfectionist in printing, and all work is completed with skilful precision. The printing process is given a new dimension in Bettina Knapp's psycho-analytical approach to The Man-Eater:

> The printing process, as depicted in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, takes on the stature of a religious act. While working the machine, Nataraj not only feels attuned to the spiritual powers which flow through him, but the birth of each letter or word, like an act of faith, reinforces his belief in Divinity's omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience.[8]

Whilst I concede that Hinduism and religious faith are pivotal factors in the novel, I do not accept that Narayan elevates the printing operation to the level of a divine power. His affinity for printing simply stems from his work as a printer during his journalistic career. Furthermore, the printing press in the Malgudi novels generates an atmosphere of productivity and has a literal function, rather than a symbolic one.

The serenity of the printing press is short-lived and Malgudi's tranquillity is threatened when Vasu arrives on the scene. His physical appearance is a pointer to his

brutal nature - 'a tanned face, large powerful eyes under thick eyebrows, a large forehead and a shock of unkempt hair, like a black halo' (p. 15). The oxymoron and irony in the description are used to predict Vasu's demoniac nature that will unfold. Narayan's diction is commendable as it conveys a vivid picture of Vasu. 'Black' signifies darkness and evil - he is the 'prince of darkness' (p. 154). By contrast, the 'halo', which is literally his hair, suggests an aura of holiness. In this instance, it is used ironically because Vasu can hardly be deemed holy, denoting thus an air of evil which envelops him. Nataraj is overwhelmed by Vasu's powerful physique and intimidatory manner, and is intrigued by his request for 'Five hundred sheets of note-paper, the finest quality, and five hundred visiting cards' (p. 15).

One notes the ironic undertones implicit in Vasu's credentials, 'H. Vasu, M.A., Taxidermist', and in his statements 'I was educated in the Presidency College. I took my Master's Degree in History, Economics and Literature' (pp. 16, 17). Like his predecessors in the Malgudi novels, Vasu experiences academic dis-illusionment. His postgraduate education at a prestigious tertiary institution has been futile as he is (according to his narrative) ill-equipped to function in the real world. Ironically, his education has not enhanced his aesthetic sensibility. Instead of advocating animal conservation, he espouses plans for animal destruction. The

events in his past are tinged with tragic irony. His narration of his life history serves as a dramatic interlude, a story within a story, and is a technique which Narayan uses adeptly to capture a dual audience comprising Nataraj and the narratee:

> That was in the year 1931. Then he had joined the civil disobedience movement against British rule, broken the laws, marched, demonstrated and ended up in jail. He went repeatedly to prison and once when he was released found himself in the streets of Nagpur. There he met a *phaelwan* at a show ....'I was young then, his strength appealed to me.'
> (The Man-Eater, p. 17.)

In the extract Narayan emphasises certain social concerns of his time. Academic disillusionment and the aftermath of participation in the Nationalist Movement are factors which are mooted as probable causes of Vasu's sense of dislocation. When he became Suleiman's disciple, physical feats took precedence over intellectual concerns. Vasu's comment that 'In a few months I could also snap chains, twist iron bars, and pulverize granite' (p. 17), is indicative of an individual whose sense of values is distorted through life's experiences. In Vasu's commentary on his past, one recognises the tragic irony which characterized his actions and his philosophy:

> His stuffings go all over the world. He was a master, and he taught me the art. After all we are civilized human beings, educated and cultured, and it is up to us to prove our superiority to nature. Science conquers nature in a new way each day; why not in creation also?
> (The Man-Eater, pp. 16-17.)

Narayan presents Vasu as an educated individual with a perverted sense of morality. He has turned into a fiend who claims his mentor's life, ironically, with the same brutal force which had been inculcated in him: 'I knew his weak spot. I hit him there with the edge of my palm with a chopping movement...and he fell down and squirmed on the floor. I knew he could perform no more. I left him there and walked out, and gave up the strong man's life once and for all' (pp. 17-18).

Dr K.C. Bhatnagar commends Narayan's artistic feat in contextualizing Hindu myths within reality and quotes the above-mentioned scene to illustrate that ' In short, the setting and the variety of people are thoroughly realistic; so also the dialogue....'[9] Besides the comic realism of the statement one notes its irony as Vasu does not give up the 'strong man's life' when he plans to continue his work as a taxidermist in Malgudi. He states candidly: 'Know this, I'm here because of Mempi Forest and the jungles in those hills. I'm a taxidermist. I have to be where wild animals live' (<u>The Man-Eater</u> p. 18).

Narayan's skill in portraiture manifests itself once again in his superb characterization of a multi-dimensional, tragi-comic figure within a socio-psychological, authorial standpoint. In Vasu's characterization Narayan explores the tragic flaws and evil traits inherent in man's nature, and his potential for self-destruction. The conflict between the forces of good and evil is heightened when Vasu

takes over the attic over Nataraj's printing press and intimidates Nataraj's friends. Nataraj's reaction to the deteriorating situation in his parlour, reveals his flawed character:

> I left everyone alone. If they wrangled and lost their heads and voices, it was their business and not mine. Even if heads had been broken, I don't think I'd have interfered. I had resigned myself to anything. If I had cared for a peaceful existence, I should have rejected Vasu on the first day. Now it was like having a middle-aged man-eater in your office and home, with the same uncertainties, possibilities, and potentialities.
> (The Man-Eater, p. 27.)

Nataraj is weak-willed and ineffectual in countering Vasu's bullying tactics. His air of resignation arises from ambivalent feelings of admiration and revulsion for Vasu's expertise in taxidermy. He remains passive and in awe of Vasu's character as a demon who destroys life. This is exemplified when Vasu turns the attic into an animal graveyard. There was ample evidence of the marauder's visits to the Mempi Forests:

> He took a flashlight and threw the beam on to the back seat, where lay the enormous head of a tiger. 'How did you manage that?' I asked, there being no other way of talking to a man who had brought in the head of a tiger. A couple of curious passers-by slowed their pace. Vasu shouted to them, 'Get away and mind your own business.'
> (The Man-Eater, p. 47.)

Nataraj lacks the courage to denounce Vasu and his inane comment reveals his reluctance to question the righteousness of Vasu's actions. The extract cited reflects one of the levels of irony to which Naik refers:

> First, the 'man-eater' in the present case is not a tiger but a tiger-killer, though he is also a 'man-eater' (at least a 'man-bullyer') in a different sense.
>
> (Naik, Ironic, p.65.)

The tiger - killer's satanic qualities are also emphasised in the following scene when Nataraj witnesses Vasu's activities in the attic:

> Vasu was stirring the broth in the tub with a long pole, at which the stench increased .... 'What do you think that tub contains? Tiger blood? Ha! Ha! Pure alum solution.'
>
> (The Man-Eater, p. 48.)

Nataraj appears to be bewitched by such scenes, whilst Vasu appears to derive a sadistic pleasure from taxidermy. O.P. Saxena comments succinctly on the scene: 'It is reminiscent of the nasty practices of the three witches in *Macbeth* who are to seal the doom of the tragic hero'.[10] The analogy is appropriate, but Nataraj has the qualities of an anti-hero. He and his friends are powerless to stem the tide of senseless killings of innocent animals. Vasu has the overpowering aura of a demon and the attic is turned into a 'charnel house' (The Man-Eater p. 57) and, ironically, a Noah's Ark (p. 58).

Nataraj continues to be 'lulled into a state of resignation' (p. 57), and his reaction to the spiral of evil is questionable: '...I tried to shut my eyes' and 'I was appalled at the thought that I was harbouring this destroyer, but I hadn't the courage to go up to him and say, "Take yourself and your museum out of here!"' (p. 52). The

authorial intention is clear in Nataraj's characterization. Narayan satirizes basically good men who allow evil to flourish and indict society. This theme is universally significant and is of paramount importance in the conflict between good and evil.

Britta Olinder investigates Narayan's method 'of the crossing of myth with realism' and examines, in The Man-Eater, 'Narayan's representation of an evil demon in a modern realistic setting'.[11] Nataraj, an important character in this 'modern realistic setting', is expected to tip the scales in favour of virtue and goodness; instead he becomes a victim of what one might call 'a withdrawal syndrome'. Knapp's succinct comments are relevant here:

> During the days and weeks that follow, every time Nataraj attempts to confront Vasu, the strength necessary to perpetrate such an overt act fails. Nataraj backs away, withdraws into his cavernlike space behind the blue curtain. There, in peace, he works his machine, ...
>
> (Knapp, p. 237.)

By contrast Vasu's overt acts of aggression make him an individual who is symptomatic of a new breed of middle class intellectuals in post-independent India, who appear to have been traumatised during the transitory period. The evil he epitomises seems to triumph in Malgudi. Narayan tries to maintain the delicate balance between the forces of the 'gods' and the 'demons' in the novel by reinforcing the concept of Hinduism and religious faith in Malgudi's citizens. Sastri, the 'orthodox-minded Sanskrit

semi-scholar', is a secondary character whose religious faith endows him with an inner strength and moral fibre often denied Nataraj and his friends. He analyses Vasu's character accurately and predicts the *rakshasa's* ultimate doom:

> 'He shows all the definitions of a *rakshasa*,' persisted Sastri, and went on to define the make-up of a *rakshasa*, or a demoniac creature who possessed enormous strength, stranger powers, and genius, but recognized no sort of restraints of man or God. He said, 'Every *rakshasa* gets swollen with his ego. He thinks he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him.'
>
> (The Man-Eater, p. 72.)

Through Sastri's explanation of the nature of a *rakshasa* in Hindu mythology Narayan illustrates the timelessness of evil, yet men like Vasu are not indestructible. They are soon annihilated, as a consequence of a flaw in their character. Olinder and Naik interpret Sastri's dramatic function in the novel as that of a 'chorus'.[12] I concur with their view and feel that as a chorus Sastri emphasises specifically society's moral and religious conscience. Critics unanimously commend Narayan's artistry in introducing the *Bhasmasura* myth from the *puranas* into a modern setting, where an ironic contrast is developed very successfully. Naik asserts that 'Narayan's use of the *Bhasmasura* myth in the novel was a piece of conscious literary strategy' (Naik, p. 66).

Shyam Asnani examines the role of myth in Narayan's narrative strategy, and adds that 'The use of myth in

literature is significant for its quality of timelessness'.[13] He goes on to state that

> Implicit in the diametrically opposed characteristics of Nataraj and Vasu is the allegorical or mythical conflict between good and evil, the gods and demons, the *sura* and the *asura*.
>
> (Asnani, p. 33.)

The critic's comments reflect Narayan's symbolistic style of characterization in the novel. Bhatnagar, too, examines the vibrancy of mythical gods and demons as motivation for using them in the Malgudi novels:

> It is however, the dynamism of gods and demons that inspires Narayan to give us an imaginative rendering of myths in a setting which is at once *local*, *regional* and *universal*.
>
> (Bhatnagar, p. 173.)

These critics offer valid commentary on the use of myth in the Malgudi novels; however, one must guard against over-emphasising myths as source material. In the overall pattern of the Malgudi novels, Narayan's use of myth is limited. His artistic talent and creativity were nurtured throughout the decades by his greatest source of inspiration - Indian life in its totality. Jayanta points out that besides myth

> there is in *Man-Eater* yet another related traditional belief implicitly present. It reinforces the central theme of the novel .... I here refer to the belief in the doctrines of indefinite transmigration of souls after death into other bodies, human as well as non-human, and reincarnation (*samskara*).
>
> (Jayanta, p. 96.)

She goes on to state: "If this is so, then, killing any non-human creature is *tantamount to killing a potential human being*' (Jayanta, p. 97). The critic implies that when Vasu kills an animal, that animal might possess the soul of a human being. Thus Vasu would be killing a 'potential human being'. In this manner Jayanta highlights the relevance of the title The Man-Eater. This is a serious consideration based on profound Hindu philosophy, and one doubts whether Narayan would have wanted the title to have this connotation although Vasu is a tragi-comic figure.

The tragic flaws in Vasu's character come to the fore in his relationship with Rangi. Narayan's portrait of this secondary character, a prostitute who becomes Vasu's paramour, depicts another aspect of Indian reality. The scene has been set for Rangi's advent in Vasu's life by Sastri's scholarly exposition of the Bhasmasura myth:

> Then there was Bhasmasura, who acquired a special boon that everything he touched should be scorched, while nothing could ever destroy him. He made humanity suffer. God Vishnu was incarnated as a dancer of great beauty, named Mohini, with whom the *asura* became infatuated.
>
> (The Man-Eater, p. 73.)

This extract has an exotic appeal for the foreign reader, who will soon understand the authorial intention in using the myth. Rangi, the courtesan, is created in comic-ironic contrast to Mohini, the goddess, and her characterization indicates Narayan's skill in adapting the myth to reflect

contemporary reality. This is evident in Sastri's chorus-like narration:

> Rangi was a notorious character of the town. She lived in the shadows of Abu Lane. She was the daughter of Padma, an old dancer attached to the temple of God Krishna four streets off, our ancient temple.
>
> (The Man-Eater, p. 81.)

Rangi's characterization is a skilful combination of disparate attributes. As a prostitute and pimp to Vasu she personifies immorality, yet as a temple dancer she projects the image of a devout Hindu paying tribute to the gods. One notes an ironic parallel between the temple dancer, who venerates the gods at a temporal level, and the deity Nataraja, who performs his cosmic dance on a spiritual plane.

The relationship between the temple dancer, Rangi, and Vasu, the taxidermist, is an ironic liaison of individuals whose talents have been misdirected. In an earlier conversation with Nataraj Vasu has scoffed at the idea of traditional marriages:

> Only fools marry, and they deserve all the trouble they get. I really do not know why people marry at all. If you like a woman, have her by all means.
>
> (The Man-Eater, p. 32.)

Vasu's comments are indicative of the new value systems being generated by young modern intellectuals of the time. The new morality undermines the sanctity of Hindu marriages, and Narayan continues to explore this theme through the relationships between Mali and Grace in The Vendor and Raman

and Daisy in The Painter. Narayan exemplifies the theme of immorality and debased sexual passions in The Man-Eater through Vasu and Rangi's relationship. Nataraj, too, fantasizes about the courtesan and entertains immoral thoughts about her. By contrast, like the voice of conscience, Sastri registers his indignation at her nocturnal visits to Vasu's attic.

In an ever-widening spiral of depravity and degradation, Vasu transforms himself from tiger-killer and 'man-eater' into a 'woman-eater'. Nataraj is mesmerized by Vasu's moral aberrations. Prostitutes frequent the attic and he muses: 'I had no notion that our town possessed such a varied supply of women' (p. 82). Saxena comments aptly on the relationship between Vasu and Rangi:

> Vasu's identity as an evil force is established fully for the people of Malgudi with his contact with Rangi, the fleshy black woman with irristible physical attraction on whom he somehow wields despotic power.
> (Saxena, p. 285.)

Like Vasu, Nataraj is entranced by Rangi. His flippant commentary on the prostitution taking place on his premises is consistent with his characterization as a passive onlooker who does not stem the tide of evil, and is almost consumed by it eventually. To Nataraj, Rangi personifies eroticism although she is careless about her appearance.

> She was dark, squat, seductive, overloaded with jewellery; the flowers in her hair were crushed, and her clothes rumpled; she had big round arms and fat

> legs and wore a pink sari. She evidently didn't care how she looked now, ... Anyway ... every inch of her proclaimed her what she was - a perfect female animal.
>
> (The Man-Eater, pp.81-82.)

Chew comments on Nataraj's ambivalent feelings in the scene quoted: 'If he is shocked, he is titillated also' (Chew, p. 72). Nataraj continues to be tormented by the 'goddess carved out of cinder' (p. 115), and when he fantasizes about Rangi, Narayan hints at man's sublimated desires which sometimes surface. Nataraj confesses ultimately: 'I want to seduce Rangi or be seduced by her' (p. 150). Narayan changes his diction radically in The Man-Eater when he describes Rangi's sensual appeal for Nataraj:

> 'Not bad, not bad. Her breasts are billowy, like those one sees in temple sculptures. Her hips are also classical.'
>
> (The Man-Eater, p. 114.)

Nataraj's reaction is understood when one notes that Narayan sheds his conservatism when he focuses directly on a woman's sexuality for the first time in the Malgudi novels. This explicitness is also comically ironic as it conveys an image of Rangi as a voluptuous goddess. Narayan's diction changes when he speaks of female sexuality. This is exemplified in the following exchange between Vasu and Nataraj which unsettles the narratee who has been accustomed to the novelist's moderate language:

> '"Has that bitch been talking to you?'
> "Which bitch?" I asked' (p. 125).

The authorial intention is, perhaps, to depict the current

Indian scene authentically. Yet, although Narayan achieves this objective, he does so at the expense of the charm and dignity which characterized his diction in the earlier novels. Significantly, this change in his self-imposed code of diction is confined to isolated parts of the ninth and tenth novels and this type of diction is evident for the last time, as I shall show, in The Painter of Signs.

Narayan's language is appropriate for his discussion of the theme of immorality and debased sexual passions. When he focuses on other themes, for example, religious faith and Hinduism in general, he reverts to more conventional diction. During the temple celebration held in honour of the publication of Kavi's book, Radha Kalyan, Narayan's diction reflects his traditional deference and respect for Hinduism. Nataraj appeals to the Gods Krishna and Vishnu to protect Kumar, the temple elephant, and the devotees from any harm:

> The priest was circling the camphor light before the golden images, and the reflections on the faces made them vibrate with a living quality. God Krishna was really an incarnation of Vishnu, who had saved Gajendra; he would again come to the rescue of the same animal ....
>
> Unknowingly I let out a terrific cry which drowned the noise of children, music, 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.'
> (The Man-Eater, p. 132.)

This extract is devoid of irony and satire and reflects Nataraj's absolute faith in Hinduism as well as his

sincerity in invoking the assistance of the gods. This account of the temple ceremony is vibrant with examples of Indianness, and illustrates the pivotal role that Hinduism plays in the lives of Malgudi's citizens.

In considering the novel's gestalt, one gets the impression that Narayan's presentation of the forces of evil is remarkably concrete and forceful; it is clear, too, that in the conflict between the gods and the demons the latter appear to be all-powerful. Nataraj's sense of helplessness persists during the temple procession: 'I had done nothing to divert the procession, I had done nothing to disarm or dissuade Vasu; God knew what trick he might have up his sleeve' (p. 151). In addition, Vasu's powerful personality as a demon remains intact before and after his death. On Nataraj's way to the attic to dissuade Vasu from killing Kumar and causing pandemonium during the temple procession, he notes the darkness which envelops the place. Narayan creates an atmosphere of intrigue and suspense in the scene quoted:

> There was no light in it. Of course he would put out all lights. He was the prince of darkness, and in darkness his activities were to be conducted.
> (The Man-Eater, p. 154.)

One notes the Hindu connotations in the concept of light and darkness, and the main role-player, the devil himself. The suspense in this drama reaches its climax when Nataraj enters the attic to find Vasu seated facing the window below which the procession was passing:

> He had stretched his leg on a stool .... and his gun lay on the floor within his reach .... He had probably fallen asleep waiting for the procession to come along ....
>
> My decision was swift; I would make a dash for his gun and seize it. My heart palpitated and my breath came and went like a bellows as I crawled towards the gun. If he woke up before I reached it, that would be the end of me .... As my fingers reached the cold butt of his gun, I could have swooned with excitement. I had never touched a gun before and felt scared. I rose to my feet and covered him with the gun.
>
> (The Man-Eater, p. 156.)

This scene has all the elements of a suspense thriller and is reminiscent of the scenes from Hollywood western films popular at the time. Narayan continues to build an atmosphere of comic suspense and intrigue: 'During the following days the air became thick with suspicion. Each confided to the other when the third was out of earshot' (p. 166). The tension mounts when Nataraj's office 'became an extension of the Town Police Station' (p. 161), indicating that 'Vasu dead proved a greater nuisance than Vasu alive' (p. 161). The comic irony implicit in the scenes quoted is highlighted when Sastri reveals the nature of Vasu's death, as narrated to him by Rangi:

> 'Rangi was awakened by the man yelling, "Damn these mosquitoes!" She saw him flourish his arms like a madman, fighting them off as they buzzed about his ears to suck his blood. 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. The woman switched on the light and saw two mosquitoes plastered on his brow. It was also the end of Vasu.'
>
> (The Man-Eater, p. 173.)

Narayan's light-heartedness is evident when Sastri narrates the peculiar manner of Vasu's death. The novelist does not allow the scene to turn into a tragic one, lest this event should arouse the narratee's sympathy for Vasu. Sastri expiates the story of the triumph of good over evil, according to the Hindu myths: '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' (pp. 173-174).

Nataraj and Sastri's faith in Hinduism has been rewarded and a sense of normality returns to Malgudi although, according to Nataraj: 'Everyone thinks that this is a murderer's press' (p. 172). Like Saxena I feel that Vasu's death may be viewed as poetic justice: 'When all human efforts fail to destroy the evil, God intervenes and Vasu is destroyed by divine intervention' (Saxena, p. 290). Although Narayan might feel morally bound to uphold the positive forces within the Indian ethos, his powerful portrayal of the negative forces hints at their potential for being cataclysmic in society. If this is the authorial intentional in The Man-Eater, then Narayan has succeeded admirably in achieving his objective.

The extraordinary solution to the murder mystery deflates the narratee's expectations of the murderer being exposed at the end of the narrative, and he or she feels cheated by the unexpected ending. This anti-climactic ending reflects the recurrent pattern in which most of the Malgudi novels

end, and it indicates the novelist's reluctance to experiment with other types of endings.

The plot of the tenth Malgudi novel, The Vendor of Sweets (1967), is constructed along similar lines to that of its precursor, The Man-Eater. The cyclical nature of the action and the anti-climactic ending in The Vendor are characteristic features of Narayan's literary style which he uses adeptly at this stage of his career. In The Vendor the plot is well-defined, but typically the number of static events predominate in the action. Narayan acquires dynamism and vibrancy in the novel through his portraiture of Jagan, the protagonist whose complex characterization, as I shall show, contributes chiefly towards the novel's merit.

Besides the structural links between The Man-Eater and The Vendor, these Malgudi novels are linked thematically. In The Vendor Narayan continues to explore unorthodox male-female relationships, and brings the themes of religious faith, Hinduism and Gandhian ideology to a finality. Although Narayan has explored these themes in earlier Malgudi novels, the perspective from which they are re-examined differs in the later novels. H.M. Williams expresses similar thoughts in his critical analysis of The Vendor:

> The recent contribution to the Malgudi cycle, *The Sweet Vendor*... is in some ways a definitive novel: it brings the series full circle thematically and in choice and treatment of its leading character.[14]

At the time of Williams's critique, The Vendor was the latest Malgudi novel. In the 'cycle' to which Williams refers, I believe that Bharati in Waiting for the Mahatma epitomises the perfect application of Gandhian philosophy to everyday life. By contrast, Jagan's characterization, in The Vendor illustrates the degeneracy which is evident when certain Malgudi citizens apply Gandhian principles selectively to their everyday lives. In post-independent India the Malgudi ethos changes dramatically, and the old norms based on religious faith and Gandhian philosophy recede into the background in society. Westernization, modernity and technological advances generate new codes of conduct and new lifestyles, and Malgudi's citizens such as Jagan and Mali, and Grace the foreigner, experience a sense of dislocation as they struggle continually to establish a proper self-identity, within a changing society and culture. O.P. Mathur draws similar conclusions in his examination of western influences in R.K. Narayan's novels:

> As a matter of fact, the West has made deep inroads into the common man's life in Malgudi in respect of not only the geographical aspects of the town but also of the steady erosion of traditional ways of life and the rise of new values necessarily accompanying the contemporary cultural upheaval ....[15]

This chapter highlights the 'steady erosion of traditional ways of life and the rise of new values' which impact on the lives of Malgudi's citizens. The critic Henrik Strandgaard closely examines the role of culture in his

assessment of the Malgudi novels and explains Narayan's prominence as an Indian English writer thus:

> Narayan's importance resides in the authority with which he handles his overall theme: the dependence of the individual on the society and culture of which he is product, in his faithful delineation of that society and culture, and in the success with which he has evolved a style and method which combines European and Indian elements[16]

Strandgaard's views will be tested in the critical analyses of The Vendor and The Painter of Signs(1976). In characterizing Jagan as a sweet-vendor and Gandhian follower Narayan explores the extent to which he is dependent on Malgudi society and culture for his identity. Jagan's life reflects the fourth phase or *asrama*, in the cycle of man's life - which culminates in his desire to become a hermit. In the opening chapter of the novel Narayan characterizes Jagan as a quaint Gandhian follower:

> At fifty-five his appearance was slight and elfish, ... His chin was covered with whitening bristles as he shaved only at certain intervals, feeling that to view oneself daily in a mirror was an intolerable European habit. He wore a loose *jibba* over his *dhoti*, both made of material spun with his own hand; every day he spun for an hour, and produced enough yarn for his sartorial requirements. He never possessed more than two sets of clothes at any one time ....
> (The Vendor, p. 6.)

Narayan portrays Jagan's austere lifestyle with touches of humour and occasionally pokes fun at some of his quirks of character. These are revealed when he continues to follow certain Gandhian practices slavishly, even twenty years after the Mahatma's visit to Malgudi:

> He draped his shoulders in a *khaddar* shawl with gaudy, yellow patterns on it, and he shod his feet with thick sandals made out of the leather of an animal which had died of old age. Being a follower of Gandhi, he explained, 'I do not like to think that a living creature should have its throat cut for the comfort of my feet,' and this occasionally involved him in excursions to remote villages where a cow or calf was reported to be dying.
> (The Vendor, p.6.)

Jagan is the proprietor of 'Sweet Mart' and his characterization is a skilful blending of comically ironic attributes which reflect him as a devout Gandhian follower, on the one hand, and an astute and prosperous businessman, on the other. Jagan's observance of important principles in Gandhian philosophy is commendable. However, one notes Narayan's gentle satire, as in the extract quoted, when Jagan resorts to strange means to achieve his ends.

Some of the action which is comically ironic takes place at the 'Sweet Mart'. The Gandhian principles of self-abnegation and personal sacrifice are juxtaposed against Jagan's penchant for money-making. His opening statement in the novel 'Conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self', which has connotations of self-sacrifice, is comically ironic (The Vendor, p. 5). If it were put into practice by Malgudi's citizens, Jagan would be bankrupt. As a prosperous sweet vendor, Jagan 'almost fancied himself a monarch on a throne' (p. 8). Narayan's comic irony is at work, and Jagan's regal air contradicts the Gandhian principle of humility and simplicity. Jagan's life reflects the 'steady erosion of traditional ways of life and the rise

of new values'. When he compromises his Gandhian principles for materialistic gains, the narratee is entertained by the comic mixture of attributes. Though mildly satirical, Narayan remains non-judgemental at all times. These points are exemplified in the following extract:

> As long as the frying and sizzling noise in the kitchen continued and the trays passed, Jagan 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?' The head cook would give a routine reply, 'Nothing,' and that would quieten Jagan's mind and enable it to return to the Lord's sayings until again some slackness was noticed at the front stall ....
> (The Vendor, pp. 8-9.)

The extract quoted presents Jagan as a shrewd businessman who attempts to nullify his desire for increased productivity and added income, through a selective adherence to Gandhian principles. In business, he ignores the basic Gandhian tenet of seeking and observing the Truth in life:

> He made an entry in a small notebook, and then more elaborate entries in a ledger which could be inspected by anyone. In his small notebook he entered only the cash that came in after six o' clock, out of the smaller jug. This cash was in an independent category; he viewed it as free cash, whatever that might mean, a sort of immaculate conception, self-generated, arising out of itself and entitled to survive without reference to any tax. It was converted into crisp currency at the earliest moment, tied into a bundle and put away ....
> (The Vendor, p. 10.)

When Jagan differentiates between taxable income and 'free cash' he projects the image of an astute businessman who revels in amassing wealth rather than utilizing it. In a

society in which materialism is rapidly replacing spiritual concerns, resulting in a new moral, social and economic order, Jagan keeps pace with the changes. In this manner, like other Malgudi protagonists, he seeks to establish a proper self-identity. His actions lend credibility to the overall theme which, as Strandgaard identifies, is 'the dependence of the individual on the society and culture of which he is a product'. This critic goes on to commend Narayan for his portraiture: 'It shows his mastery of character portrayal at its most assured and his ambivalent humour at its keenest' (Strandgaard, p.46). Malgudi society also determines Jagan's aspirations for his son. This is revealed in his response to his cousin who informs him that Mali "is writing, that's all. Wants to be a writer":

> Jagan felt aghast. Here was he trying to shape the boy into an aristocrat with a bicycle, college-life, striped shirts and everything, and he wanted to be a 'writer'! Strange!
>
> (The Vendor, p. 21.)

Mali formulates his plans for his future without consulting his father. His statement to his teachers: "My father has other plans - probably he is sending me to America" is optimistic, yet unrealistic (p. 21). The lack of communication between father and son is symptomatic of the polarity between eastern and western lifestyles which begins to predominate in Malgudi society. In spite of this dichotomy in society, both Jagan and Mali reflect on elitist attitude towards life; Strandgaard calls it a 'petit

bourgeois' attitude on life (Strandgaard, p. 40). The characterization of Mali is a culmination of Narayan's portrayal of petulant, spoilt children of whom Balu was the first example in the Malgudi novels. Mali is the product of a deteriorating culture. In keeping with Swami and Balu's actions in earlier novels, Mali vehemently rejects the educational system. One gets the impression that Narayan labours this point unduly in his novels. The cousin informs Jagan of Mali's conduct:

> 'College, college .... The very word drives him crazy .... He hates his lessons, he hates his syllabus and all his books .... He suddenly tore up the pages of his books savagely, beckoned an attendant and said, "Put these in the fire in the kitchen."'
> (The Vendor, p. 23.)

One is inclined to agree with Michel Pousse that 'Vasu goes on living in the character of Mali and Jagan ....'[17] In Mali one notes the distinctive savagery whilst Jagan shares Vasu's dedication and commitment to a chosen vocation, yet differs in his orthodoxy. Jagan's traditional veneration of books makes him view Mali's act (in the extract quoted) as sacrilegious: "Could you not stop him? Didn't you tell him that books must be treated respectfully, being a form of the goddess Saraswathi?" (The Vendor, p. 23.)

Mali's action may be viewed as a symbolic rejection not only of the educational system current at the time, but also of traditional Indian ways. His actions are ironic in view of the fact that he wants to become a writer. Mali rebels against Hindu orthodoxy and tradition which Jagan

epitomises. He shows no interest in Gandhian philosophy and does not share his father's attitude towards economics. Mathur focuses on this dichotomy and highlights the East-West theme in the novel:

> It is in The Vendor of Sweets (1967) that the East-West polarisation is dramatised powerfully with all its ironies and tragic implications.
> (Mathur, p. 32.)

Jagan's conservatism makes him over protective and indulgent towards his son. Ironically, this contributes partly towards Mali's belligerence, and his downfall later in the novel. When Jagan discovers that about 'ten thousand rupees had been extracted from the bundled currency' by Mali, he does nothing to bring his son to book (The Vendor, p. 37). Jagan's compassionate nature makes him feel 'like a burglar himself, instead of one whose cash had been extracted' (p. 37). These are serious flaws in Jagan's character and contribute towards his eventual renunciation of worldly life for the life of a hermit.

When Mali returns to Malgudi after spending three years abroad, the fragile relationship between father and son continues to be strained. The problem of the lack of communication between the two is aggravated by the cultural shock Jagan experiences when he meets Mali on his return from America:

> He was overwhelmed by the spectacle of his son, who seemed to have grown taller, broader and fairer and carried himself in long strides. He wore a dark

> suit, with an overcoat, an airbag, a camera, an umbrella and what not on his person.
>
> Jagan felt that he was following a stranger. When Mali approached him, extending his hand, he tried to shrink away and shield himself behind the cousin. When he had to speak to his son, with great difficulty he restrained himself from calling him 'sir' and employing the honorific plural.
> (The Vendor, p. 43.)

Narayan's brilliant portrayal of Mali, the Americanised Indian, shows his skill in capturing the nuances of manner which contribute to the comedy in the novel. Jagan is taken aback when Mali introduces Grace, half Korean-half American, as his wife. He lacks the courage to question his son about his wife fearing that 'Any indiscreet question might upset the gentleman with the camera' (p. 43). Jagan acts cautiously towards Mali, although the latter has shown scant regard for his feelings by bringing home a wife unannounced. Mathur emphasises the estrangement which continues to exist between father and son: 'Both of them seem to be alienated beings. Mali's alienation is cultural,' (Mathur, p. 32). When Mali rejects his Indian heritage and becomes a psuedo-American, he is experiencing an identity crisis. Like Jagan, he is yet to attain that golden mean which lies between orthodoxy and modernity. This balance proves to be elusive to both these characters and to most protagonists in the Malgudi novels.

Narayan explores the theme of immorality through the relationship between Mali and Grace, the unwed couple (revealed later) who live together and taint Jagan's

ancestral home. One notes the comic contrast in the couple's adjustment to Indian life on Mali's return from America:

> Mali never wore a *dhoti* at home, but a pair of dark trousers over a white shirt and always had his feet in slippers .... He carried himself like a celebrity avoiding the attention of the rabble.
> (The Vendor, p. 46.)

Mali is disdainful of his Indian heritage and becomes haughty and aloof. He rejects the Indian way of life, displaying a dubious set of values borrowed from American society. Grace, however, readily adapts to the Hindu lifestyle. She arouses Jagan's admiration in her role as a typical Indian housewife:

> She was stooping and scrubbing the ancient granite sink in the kitchen at floor level, tucking up her sari (which she had learnt to wear), exposing her ivory hued kneecap.
> (The Vendor, p. 46).

This is a classic example of 'the contemporary cultural upheaval' to which Mathur refers. In Pousse's comparative study of the impact of the West on the main characters in The Man-Eater and The Vendor, he states:

> There is a new evil in ... [Mali] because he is aiming at the destruction of the Indian mind .... Vasu merely wants to change the Indians' attitude to life. He wants them to become more efficient even if his own efficiency is to be assessed by the number of animals he can kill and things he can destroy.
> (Pousse, p. 103.)

While Pousse's remarks about Mali are valid, his comments on Vasu are questionable: Vasu's 'efficiency' as a taxidermist

is eclipsed by his evil nature which predominates in the novel. Mali's degenerate nature does make him denigrate Indian culture and tradition. Furthermore, traditional paternal respect is disregarded for capitalist gains. When Mali and Grace try to pressurise Jagan into investing money in their proposed business venture, Jagan muses:

> Fifty-one thousand dollars! I am not growing over-fond of money, but I'm not prepared to squander it. Why should we want stories or machines for writing them?
>
> (The Vendor, p. 62.)

The psychological war which Mali and Grace wage against Jagan results in further alienation of the couple from Jagan: 'He was aware of a silent tension growing' and the efforts of the 'charmer from Outer Mongolia', to trap him into agreeing to the business proposition (p. 65).

In his refusal to finance the business venture, Jagan's statements ironically indicate how false his lifestyle has been: 'I am a poor man' and adds: 'Gandhi always advocated poverty and not riches' (p. 67). His son echoes the hypocrisy of his father's business venture in terms of Gandhian ideology: 'And yet you earn your thousand rupees a day,' said Mali with a vicious smile (p. 67). For solace Jagan now resorts more frequently to reading The Bhagavad Gita. Later, his changed business strategy, purpotedly altruistic proves to be superficial: 'From tomorrow the price of everything will be reduced' (p. 69). This action causes chaos in the sweetmeat business in Malgudi and incurs

the wrath of other businessmen. It is as defeatist as Jagan's decision to renounce worldly pleasures and retreat as a hermit to a secluded garden. There he would allow Chinna Dorai, the sixty-nine year old 'hair-blackener' and sculptor of temple deities, to complete a statue for the temple shrine beside the pond. Jagan's decision to withdraw from society is escapist. The Malgudi protagonist who follows this course of action, realizes soon enough, how futile his action has been. Yet Narayan allows his characters to follow this path as if it were an unavoidable part of their pre-determined cycle of existence.

Pousse believes that

> Jagan represents a decadent stage of Hinduism, and the West which already produced a first renaissance in nineteenth century India could then be seen as a catalyst bringing about a new spiritual revival as a defence against an outer menace.
> (Pousse, pp. 103-104.)

Jagan's actions in the novel attest to the validity of Pousse's claim about the protagonist; however, the West plays a destructive role, rather than that of a 'catalyst' for 'spiritual revival' in The Vendor. Furthermore, Jagan's desire for spiritual enlightenment does not emanate from progressive self-realization, but is an escape mechanism. He is motivated to start a new *janma* for other reasons. His orthodoxy and conservative upbringing make him remember that 'he had been fooled by the young people and that the house which had remained unsullied for generations had this

new taint to carry. How could he live in the same house with them?' (p. 105). Furthermore, he desires to flee a house with 'no light in it ... [which] stood up, sinister, and silent.' Yet, 'There was a time when it had seethed with life, lamps burning in every room, and during the festivals hundreds of mud lamps would be lit and arrayed along the parapet' (p. 112). Jagan realises that Mali and Grace 'are not the sort to make a home bright, ... On the contrary, they blacken their surroundings' (p. 133). When darkness and ignorance replace light and knowledge, the natural order is reversed in society.

Once again, Narayan succeeds in revealing the cyclic nature of man's life in terms of Hinduism. Mali and Jagan's lives come full circle in The Vendor, and the novelist restores a sense of normality in Malgudi. Immorality, degeneracy and materialism are not allowed to triumph and the ending of the novel implies that traditional morality and lifestyles are sacrosanct. He who breaches customary codes of conduct does so at his own peril. The law is Mali's nemesis, as the cousin informs Jagan:

> 'A policeman seems to have stopped Mali's car and found hidden in it half a bottle of some alcoholic drink, and you know how it is .... The police immediately seized the car, sealed the bottle before witnesses, and have charged the inmates of the car under the Prohibition Act.'
> (The Vendor, pp. 137-138.)

Paternal love prompts Jagan to pay for Mali's bail, and to offer Grace a return ticket to America. Jagan's comment

that 'A dose of prison life is not a bad thing. It may be just what he needs now' is made with hindsight (p. 141). Yet, in spite of his shortcomings Jagan is as Strandgaard says, 'a superbly comic creation - and manages to appear a rather endearing figure of a man despite his faults' (Strandgaard, p. 48). One of the serious flaws in his character is his inability to establish a meaningful rapport with his son. The lack of proper communication between father and son is a problem which remains unresolved in the Malgudi novels: Swami, Chandran, Balu and Mali continue to strive towards harmonious paternal relationships. No father-son relationship in the Malgudi novels attains the elusive, golden mean which appears to be one of Narayan's ideals.

Significantly, with the exception of The English Teacher, Narayan does not explore mother-daughter relationships in the Malgudi novels. This reservation is probably due to his lack of exposure to this relationship because of the early death of Rajam, his wife. Besides his search for happy family relationships, the Malgudi protagonist also struggles to find his self-identity and his proper niche in life. In The Vendor, Jagan decides to seek the truth in life by following a purist Gandhian lifestyle at a river retreat:

> 'I don't care what he does. I am going to watch a goddess come out of a stone. If I don't like the place, I will go away somewhere else. I am a free man. I've never felt more determined in my life.... The world doesn't collapse even when a great figure is

> assassinated or dies of heart failure. Think that my heart has failed, that's all.'
> (The Vendor, p. 140.)

One notes the comic link between Nataraj's fantasies about a 'goddess carved out of cinder' and Jagan's dreams of watching a 'goddess come out of a stone'. Both The Man-Eater and The Vendor hint at the illusions man constantly pursues in life. Jagan's renunciation is real, but it is not without a touch of comic irony - he takes his cheque book with him. This action implies an incomplete renunciation of the material world. Strandgaard views Jagan's actions in a different light:

> Even in his quest for truth beyond the material world he does not take leave of his good common sense: prior to his departure he makes eminently practical arrangements for his shop to be kept open and is resourceful enough to take his cheque book with him .... The reality of Jagan's severing his ties with society is not entirely beyond doubt.
> (Strandgaard, p. 48.)

Nonetheless, however 'practical' and 'resourceful' Jagan is, his actions are nullified when he chooses an impractical lifestyle. He is concerned about the future of the business, yet he relinquishes control to his cousin. This anti-climactic ending to the novel has a surrealistic touch: Jagan desires to watch a 'goddess come out of a stone'. This literal sculpting of a deity which Jagan intends to watch, is reminiscent of the esoteric experience when Krishna sees Rajam come to life at the end of The English Teacher. One also finds a parallel in these actions with a scene from Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale,

in which Hermione's statue comes to life. The note of mysticism and the hint of a possible supernatural event to follow, are narrative strategies which Narayan employs deliberately to question the validity of Jagan's new *janma*. One might ask: Is renunciation the answer to man's search for his self-identity and his niche in life? However one may view Jagan's decision to become a hermit, the theme of renunciation is brought to a finality in The Vendor. Jagan is the last Malgudi protagonist who renounces the material world to become an ascetic. One sees the 'outer menace', westernization, which appears to have taken root firmly in Malgudi. The Painter of Signs, A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), The Talkative Man (1986) and The World of Nagaraj (1990) reflect, among other aspects, westernization's deleterious effects. Furthermore, as Mathur's comments on the novel indicate, certain issues remain unresolved in the novel:

> The conclusion of the novel is both comforting and disturbing. Jagan's return to the Indian ideal of renunciation is satisfying and inspiring. But what is disturbing is the feeling that he may be among the last to embrace this way of life. A sculptor has already turned hair-dyer.
>
> (Mathur, p. 33.)

Whilst Mathur approves of Jagan's renunciation, Narayan does not show the success of this withdrawal from the world. It is the reader who will have to decide whether this is an acceptable solution to life's problems.

In The Painter of Signs (1976) Narayan's focus changes from

degenerate Malgudians like Vasu and Mali to young, modern intellectuals like Raman and Daisy who are fully committed to their vocations and to serving society. In this novel Narayan reflects a society in a state of flux, as modernity and westernization continue to permeate the various echelons of society. The authorial intention is to highlight current trends such as rational, scientific thinking and family planning, and the contentious issue of modern, educated career women who sacrifice marriage for a vocation. These evolutionary processes are presented in a well-defined plot, with the point of view being balanced and the authorial standpoint remaining non-judgemental.

Raman, the painter of sign-boards, and Daisy, an employee of the Population Development Board, are products of the scientific era which exerts a predominantly positive and constructive influence over Malgudi's citizens. Malgudi society in the 'seventies is complex; the economic boom and modern technology generate an atmosphere which often bewilders some of its citizens. Raman's difficulty in coming to terms with the changing Malgudi milieu, is revealed in the following extract:

> A sign-board was inevitable in modern life, a token of respectable and even noble intentions. But he felt abashed when he realized that he was perhaps picking his own loot in the general scramble of a money-mad world! He wished he could do without it, but realized too that it was like a desire for a dry spot while drifting along neck deep in a cesspool. Ultimately he would evolve a scheme for doing without money.
>
> (<u>The Painter</u>, P. 13.)

The extract quoted reflects some of Malgudi's new values which centre around a money-oriented lifestyle which is depicted as degenerate. Raman's desire to 'evolve a scheme for doing without money' is impracticable, and reflects his inability to cope with capitalist trends. By contrast, his expertise as a sign-board maker and calligrapher establishes his status in Malgudi society. He is unique amongst the Malgudi protagonists as Narayan characterises him as a 'rationalist'. He does not want his vocation or his lifestyle to be determined by Hindu tradition or religion. These points are illustrated at the outset of the novel in the dialogue between the artisan and a lawyer, who is discussing the type of writing he wants on a sign-board for his office:

> "It's my astrologer again, who believes that a left slant is auspicious for my ruling star, which is Saturn."
> Raman was upset. All day long he was engaged in arguing with his old aunt who advised him to do this or that according to the stars. He was determined to establish the Age of Reason in the world. "I want a rational explanation for everything," he cried .... "I'm a rationalist, and I don't do anything unless I see some logic in it."
>
> (The Painter, p. 5.)

The extract quoted validates Mathur's statement, quoted earlier, on 'the steady erosion of traditional ways of life and the rise of new values accompanying the contemporary cultural upheaval'. Raman repudiates the lawyer's practice of allowing Hindu astrology to determine the 'slant' in writing on a sign-board. Malgudi's new values create tension, as rationalism is juxtaposed with

traditionalism. Further tension is generated when Raman tries to understand male-female sexuality:

> Money and sex, he reflected, obsessive thoughts, too much everywhere - literature, magazines, drama, or cinema deal with nothing but sex all the time, but the female figure, water-soaked, is enchanting.
> (The Painter, p. 14.)

Raman's introverted nature makes him philosophic about life, and places him in the category of one of 'Narayan's major characters...[who] become[s] serio-comic, uncomfortably poised between the two worlds' of East and West, (Mathur, p. 36).

In the extracts just quoted one notes that whilst Narayan continues to focus on Indian realism in The Painter, there are perceptible changes in his literary style: the authorial approach remains comic, but irony begins to diminish. Themes such as the importance of family planning, immorality and debased sexual passions are explored seriously. Narayan's serious engagement with theme may also be observed in the twelfth Malgudi novel, A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), where the themes of Hinduism in general and reincarnation in particular are dominant. The community-centred themes of population development and family planning in The Painter reflect urgent, national, social concerns which have been transposed into Malgudi. Daisy has the difficult task of educating both urban and rural communities on family planning. She meets Raman when he is commissioned to make a sign-board for her workplace,

with the message: "Family Planning Centre. Free Advice' (p. 30). Her personality overpowers him. Later, whilst in the company of friends at the Boardless Hotel, Raman recollects his first meeting with Daisy.

> His thoughts hovered around the person who had commissioned this work. She called herself just Daisy. She was a slender girl in a sari. No one could say who was her husband or father or brother, or where she came from - a sudden descent on Malgudi. Daisy! What a name for someone who looked so very Indian, traditional, and gentle! One would expect a person on this job to be somewhat matronly, like the Mother Superior in the convent - large, broad-faced, towering over others, an executive type who could with a flourish of her arms order people about. But this girl looked like a minor dancer. He felt he ought to know more about her.
> (The Painter, p. 31.)

Narayan sustains the narratee's interest in Daisy, through creating an aura of mystery around her. Raman expects to meet someone who is 'matronly', a 'Mother Superior' or 'executive type' of person and the reality is different, Narayan's description of the meeting is hilarious. However, Daisy's appearance and demeanour belie her true character. She proves to be a zealot, and her commitment to the national family planning programme is at the expense of personal relationships.

Narayan's talent for individuation comes to the fore once again, in his treatment of Daisy. She belongs to a new breed of Malgudi women: well-educated, career-orientated, poised and confident. Narayan's detailed account is to examine the characters of these women: This affirms his acknowledgement of significant change.

Meena Shirwadkar posits a similar viewpoint: 'The young educated girl was becoming an object worth studying, even placing at the centre of the Indo-Anglian novels'.[18]

Daisy is one of the central figures in the novel and her rare attributes arouse ambivalent feelings in Raman because he has had little or no contact with such women. His well-ordered lifestyle has been confined to a fixed orbit: working on sign-boards at home, attending to business matters in town and meeting his male friends at The Boardless Hotel. Furthermore, 'He had chosen to remain a bachelor' (p. 45). Yet, in spite of his resolution, or more accurately, because of his decision, he is unable to handle a woman's sexuality. Earlier in the novel, when he flees an evocative scene in which a girl is bathing at the river, he rationalizes his actions as follows: "Just my principle, and disciplining my mind against sex - obsessive sex' (<u>The Painter</u>, p. 16). In reality it is an undisciplined mind which makes him fear that he might succumb to undesirable thoughts. According to Mathur:

> It is from this dilemma that the events of the novel grow, for this introspective, somewhat "unmanly" man comes across an "unwomanly" woman, a puzzling young girl ....[19]

Raman's "unmanly" nature soon changes and his 'principled' stand against 'obsessive sex' thoughts is put to the test when he and Daisy spend 'the next three weeks ... together travelling and campaigning in the countryside', spreading the Population Development Board's message: 'We are two; let

ours be two; limit your family' (The Painter, pp. 57,56). Daisy's strong sense of social commitment makes her tackle the family planning programme with a single-minded purpose. There is no room for personal relationships in this "unwomanly" individual's life. Thus Raman is confined to planning slogans and pictures on population control, for placing on walls in strategic places. He studies Daisy's actions closely and arrives at a better understanding of her multi-faceted character. The authorial intention is to create a professional, career woman who could undertake national social programmes successfully, and create a niche for herself, in what has been traditionally a predominantly male domain.

Daisy's fortitude and the ardent zeal with which she executes her programme are reminiscent of Bharati's dedication when she works on the social upliftment programmes for the underpriviliged in Waiting for the Mahatma. Both women are determined to follow their calling in life without being involved with men, until the task at hand has been completed. During their travels, Raman fails to establish a personal rapport with Daisy because she has 'a steel-framed itinerary' and follows it 'scrupulously' (p. 57). Daisy follows her programme in a cold and calculated manner. Her *modus operandi* is sterile and business-like. These characteristics minimize her feminity and are in keeping with Narayan's mild satire of unemotional career women like Daisy:

> At every place, she had the same routine. She had a perfect time-table between her arrival and departure. Settled down at the local school or on the veranda of a hospitable home or hut or in the shade of a tree. Sent Raman out to select a wall for their inscription, met the local official or the village headman and with his help collected data and statistics, called for the register of births and deaths, and took notes in her diary. Summoned an audience of men, women, and children under the big tree, and spoke to them quietly, firmly, with conviction. Explained to them the process of birth and its control.
>
> (The Painter, p.59.)

This image of a social worker-cum-educator is not portrayed with comic-irony. The tone in the extract quoted is serious, and Daisy, like Raman, may be viewed as a 'serio-comic' character.[20] Mathur also draws attention to this change in literary strategy:

> Modernization and modernized characters were targets of irony in many of Narayan's major novels like The Guide, The Man-Eater of Malgudi, Mr Sampath and The Vendor of Sweets. But in The Painter of Signs they are viewed with marked approval.[21]

Whilst Narayan admires Raman and Daisy's competence in their chosen vocations he cannot resist drawing attention to the comedy evident in some of their actions. He pokes fun at Daisy who works like an army major, planning logistical strategies with military-like precision for what appears to be an impending combat situation:

> I am planning now. You will have to come round later and finish the work as quickly as possible. When the message has sunk into their minds, I'll come again with a medical team, who'll do vasectomies and also fit up contraceptive devices. I am preparing them for it in this visit.
>
> (The Painter, p. 60.)

Some of the flaws in her character are revealed when, naively, she disregards moral, ethical and religious considerations which impact on any family planning programme. The mammoth task which confronts a social revolutionary like Daisy is also evident when she has to counter orthodoxy:

> Some elders of the village asked, "God gives us children. How can we reject His gift?" She did not contradict the thesis outright, but gently presented a scientific, rational point of view.
> (The Painter, p. 68.)

The temple priest proves to be a formidable opponent of the family planning programme because of his apparent lechery. Narayan exposes his immorality and the peasants' gullibility. Daisy is disturbed when he threatens her and alludes to her mysterious past. Nonetheless, she regains her composure and completes her tasks successfully. The theme of family planning predominates in the novel whilst that of immorality and debased sexual passions is relegated to a secondary position. These social concerns are interwined successfully and contribute to the novel's holistic appeal.

Whilst Daisy remains in full control of her emotions, Raman struggles to repress the feelings which her sensuality arouses in him. He is depicted as a love-lorn suitor who 'brooded and introspected as he followed her mutely on the foot-tracks, criss-crossing the mountain side' (p. 63). This image of a love-sick, romantic lover is heightened on

their return journey to Malgudi, and the narratee is entertained by Raman's comical actions. He 'desperately wanted to establish union with her, at least verbally'. He enters the bullock cart and whispers: "Don't fear, it's only me, my sweetheart. Don't torment me." (pp. 85, 93). This unusual diction reflects popular western expressions used in Hollywood film romances of the time. However, this relationship is not destined to end with the traditional, happy reunion of lovers. Narayan develops this relationship along similar lines to that of Bharati and Sriram in Waiting for the Mahatma. Bharati forces Sriram to acknowledge the sanctity of a traditional Hindu marriage, and both wait for their marriage to be solemnised by the Mahatma. Daisy spurns Raman's advances until her tasks are accomplished. However, their relationship later flourishes, according to western concepts of love.

Raman and Daisy disregard traditional Hindu norms which dictate the pattern of male-female relationships when they begin an immoral relationship. Raman's nocturnal visits to Daisy's home arouse his conservative Aunt's ire. When he informs her "I am marrying a girl- you saw her the other day here", she retorts: "*That* girl! What is her caste? Who is she?" and goes on to question her parentage. "Isn't she a Christian or something- a name which is ...." (pp. 146,147).

The choice of the name 'Daisy' has been deliberate because of its Christian connotations, although she is a Hindu (like

Rosie in The Guide). Narayan's strategy is to expose Hindu society's hypocrisy in branding any immoral relationship as typically Christian. He shows the fallacy of this type of thinking. Raman and Daisy agree

> that the system called Gandharva was the most suitable one for them; that was the type of marriage one read about in classical literature. When two souls met in harmony the marriage was consummated perfectly, and no further rite or ceremony was called for.
>
> (The Painter, p. 158.)

Skilfully, Narayan blends the concept of a classical *Gandharva* marriage with westernized ideas of living together outside wedlock. Narayan explores this concept of marriage in a social milieu in which traditional Hindu unions have been sacrosanct. The authorial intention is twofold: Firstly, it explores this course of action on the part of young, modern intellectuals who violate custom and religious rites, and, secondly, it highlights the morality that is accompanied by new value systems which begin to impact on Indian society. Orthodox Hindu society rejects such a lifestyle, as is exemplified in the flight of Raman's Aunt on pilgrimage to Benares, where, like Sriram's grandmother, she intends remaining until she dies.

Although Narayan remains non-judgemental of *Gandharva* marriages, he shows the hollowness of Daisy's intention to combine a career with marriage:

> Daisy had laid down two conditions before accepting his proposal. One, that they should have no

> children, and two, if by mischance one was born she would give the child away and keep herself free to pursue her social work. Raman was not to object or modify this in any manner.
> (The Painter,p.158.)

Daisy's magnetic appeal for Raman makes him agree readily: "Whatever you say, I will never interfere. I won't question you. I will be like the ancient king Santhanu ..." (p. 159).

Once again, Narayan is able to transpose successfully an excerpt from a legend from the Mahabharata into a modern setting, thus enhancing his characterization of Raman and Daisy. In a well-researched article on Narayan's use of Indian myths and legends in his fiction, E.J. Kalinnikova highlights the legend used in The Painter, and quotes the conversation between King Santhanu, Lord of the Earth, and Goddess Ganga:

> "O slender-waisted one, o thou of celestial beauty, I solicit thee to be my wife ...."
>
> Of faultless features, the damsel, replied: "O, king, I shall be your wife and obey thy commands. But thou must not interfere with me in anything I do, be it agreeable or disagreeable ... I shall certainly leave thee the moment thou interferest with me or speakest to me an unkind word." The King answered: "Be it so".[22]

Raman's passions allow his baser thoughts ('sex, obsessive sex') to surface regularly. Narayan skilfully blends the characteristics of ancient, legendary figures with the attributes of modern, young intellectuals and creates a *gestalt* which is engraved in the mind of the narratee. His skill is also evident when he creates

characters who constantly face the challenges of orthodoxy and modernity. His intention is probably to show the tension generated when modern Indian women attempt what their western counterparts were doing successfully throughout the world. In the anti-climactic ending to the novel, Daisy, characterized like the Goddess Ganga, displays a certain fluidity in her actions. She reneges on her decision to marry Raman, and decides instead on accompanying the three women from Nagari to their village. Her career takes precedence over marriage and she chooses to promote ideas of family planning there. Any weakness which she displayed in agreeing to marry, is replaced by her single mindedness to pursue her vocation. In the final scene in the novel Narayan reverts to the original image in which she has been projected. She is

> the precise business-like automaton, functioning within an iron-frame of logicality - cold and aloof like an eagle circling high up in the skies.
> (The Painter, p. 175.)

One notes the predatory undertones in the description, with Raman projected as the prey. His plea, "Daisy, you can't leave me like this", together with her reply, "Oh, forgive me for misleading you ....", contribute towards the cinematic melodrama of the scene (p. 180). This effect is carefully created when Daisy's *regal hauteur* disappears and she leaves in the company of the 'Three witches of Macbeth, the sisters of Fate' (p. 181). Daisy's action underscores Chew's observation quoted earlier in this

chapter, that 'Detachment, when it is meaningful, follows after engagement with living'. Raman's relationship with Daisy has in the final analysis been illusory. Normality is restored in Malgudi when the *Gandharva* marriage is not allowed to materialize. Raman returns to the lifestyle that he had hitherto been accustomed. 'The Bordless-that solid, real world of sublime souls who minded their own business' (p. 183).

Narayan's maturity as a writer at this stage of his career enables him to round off successfully certain motifs and themes which he introduced in his earlier novels. The Painter is a watershed novel, and Narayan's exploration of the themes of orthodoxy and modernity, marriage, immorality and debased sexual passions, comes full circle. Furthermore, the characterization of females who range from those who fall within the *Pativrata* tradition in the earlier novels, to the ultra-modern career woman, also reaches finality in The Painter. The use of legendary goddesses is also cyclic. Rangi is the goddess 'carved out of cinder', Jagan goes in search of a 'goddess carved out of stone' and Daisy is like the goddess Ganga, shaped out of water. All in all, Narayan presents a balanced picture of the fluctuations in Indian society. One feels, like Mathur, that 'the wind from the West blows freely and naturally through Malgudi, irreversibly altering its cultural climate and constantly winging seeds which go on sprouting and changing the face of society... (Mathur, p. 36).

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CHAPTER SIX

MALGUDI COMES FULL CIRCLE: MODERNITY, DISILLUSIONMENT AND SPIRITUALITY:

A TIGER FOR MALGUDI, THE TALKATIVE MAN AND *THE WORLD OF NAGARAJ*.

The winds of change which blow through Malgudi disperse not only the seeds of westernization but also, as Narayan illustrates in his twelfth novel, A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), the beginnings of renewed spirituality. The authorial intention in this novel is to counterbalance the degeneracy and depravity which often accompany modernization, and, through Hinduism, to give Malgudians and people in general hope and inspiration for the future.

A Tiger for Malgudi, published when Narayan was seventy-seven, has undertones of disillusionment and cynicism. Nonetheless, Narayan strives to show man the way forward, through self-realization. He achieves this objective through his most radical experiment with the themes of religion and reincarnation in the Malgudi novels. The novelist retains his comic mode and creates an intriguing animal allegory within an innovative style of plot construction and characterization, which earns a distinctive place for this narrative in the Malgudi chain of novels. Narayan's Indian world view acquires a new dimension when he explores the spiritual affinity between man and a tiger, and accords this animal its rightful place in the hierarchy of living beings.

In a rare Introduction, Narayan explains his primary

objectives in the novel. His desire to explore the theme of 'enduring friendship between tigers and human beings' is coupled with his intention to expose man's egocentric nature which denies the possibility that 'other creatures may also possess ego, values, outlook, and the ability to communicate, though they may be incapable of audible speech' (A Tiger, pp. 7-8). These philosophic aims are combined with a specific literary challenge for the author: 'I wished to examine what the result would be if I made a tiger the central character in a novel' (p. 8). However, A Tiger is no fantastical animal fable. The characterization of Raja, the silently eloquent tiger endowed with a human-like intellect and soul, affirms Narayan's literary skills in the 'eighties:

> You are not likely to understand that I am different from the tiger next door, that I possess a soul within this forbidding exterior. I can think, analyse, judge, remember and do everything that you can do, perhaps with greater subtlety and sense. I lack only the faculty of speech.
>
> But if you could read my thoughts, you would be welcome to come in and listen to the story of my life.
>
> (A Tiger, pp. 11-12.)

Endowing Raja with a soul, Narayan concretizes in fiction, Hindu philosophy's law of *karma* and reincarnation. This is the dominant theme in the novel, and the novelist draws on his rich Indian heritage to create an extraordinary character whose credibility is assured in terms of Hinduism. To comprehend Raja's characterization fully one may examine the illuminating explanation of the soul

and *karma* by Swami Prabhupada, of the Hare Krishna Movement:

> The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: The indestructible, transcendental living entity is called Brahman, and his eternal nature is called adhyatma, the self. Action pertaining to the development of the material bodies of the living entities is called karma, or fruitive activities.[1]

Although Narayan appears to bring the theme of religious faith and Hinduism in general to a finality in The Vendor, in A Tiger he rekindles certain basic principles of Hindu philosophy such as man's karmic cycle of life, reincarnation, the transmigration of souls and *samadhi* or state of bliss. This seriousness of theme, which also characterizes The Painter, links the eleventh and twelfth novels. The Painter and A Tiger are also linked architecturally, as Narayan concludes both novels on a note of hope, that there will be a reunion in another *janma*. The life of Raju in The Tiger is the next *janma* which is explored in intriguing detail.

Besides experimenting fictionally with a fundamental aspect of Hinduism, Narayan sets for himself a daunting literary task in plot construction: the use of multiple narrators, one of whom is the tiger whose intellect and egocentric nature parallel that of man. Raja is the first person primary narrator who, through a series of flashbacks, re-enacts his autobiography:

> I recollect my early days as a cave-dweller and jungle beast .... I remember my cubhood when I

> frolicked on the sandy bank and in the cool stream, protected and fed by a mother .... However, she just vanished from my world one evening .... I starved except when I could catch miserable creatures ... and survived somehow. Not only survived, in course of time considered myself the Supreme Lord of the Jungle, afraid of no one, striking terror in others.
> (A Tiger, pp. 12-13.)

Raja's supremacy as predator establishes his identity as a jungle beast, but he is also endowed with a superior intellect. Though bereft of audible speech, Raja is portrayed as a sardonic spokesperson for the animal kingdom, one who dispels man's misconceptions about animals:

> We the denizens of the jungle can communicate, without words, exactly as human beings do - we are capable of expressing to each other sympathy, warning, abuse, irony, insult, love and hatred exactly in the manner of human beings, but only when necessary, unlike human beings who talk all their waking hours, and even in sleep.
> (A Tiger, p. 13.)

From this and other extracts it is clear that Narayan's style of story-telling is direct, transparent and succinct, and the diction is lucid and arresting. The novelistic technique by means of which an animal speaks may be rare in modern day fiction, but it is a renowned feature of Sanskrit classical literature. Saxena tells us that Narayan

> borrows a leaf from Visnuraman's masterpiece to tell the story of his tiger from infancy to his old age, but he happily blends the animal world of the *Panchatantra* with the human world of his modern Malgudi with its 'creative' circus and film-shooting.[2]

Raja's life in the animal world of the Mempi Forest is joined through a series of causal links with the 'human world' of 'modern Malgudi'. As in the case of human beings, his life is characterized by a pre-determined cycle of existence with its cathartic experiences, firstly in the jungle, and secondly, in Malgudi. Fate determines the course of his life when a tigress, his consort and their cubs are killed by hunters. Grief replaces pride. In a graphic scene Raja's human-like sorrow is juxtaposed with the dehumanising qualities of man who raids the jungle for his sport:

> I cried in anguish and desperation - but silenced myself and crouched unobtrusively when I noticed far off in the valley down below a line of men passing, pulling and pushing an open cart on which were laid out the cubs and their mother. The men were singing and shouting vociferously, and did not hear my cry. I had thought till now that our jungle home was impregnable, ... Now human feet had strayed in ... and that brought to my mind strange forebodings.
> (A Tiger, p. 21.)

Raja's poignant grief is coupled with 'a blind impossible anger' which rekindles his savagery: 'I just wanted to dash up, pounce upon every creature, bite and claw and destroy', instinctive desires that are soon realized (p. 22). When the villagers drove their flocks home each day, he 'pounced upon the last animal in a column, seized its throat, and made off with it' (p. 23). Raja's acts of retaliation are in keeping with the *karmic* law of action and reaction, and are ironic as the hunter becomes the quarry: Raja is hunted down by irate peasants as well as by Captain,

proprietor of the Grand Malgudi Circus.

Raja reminisces about these traumatic experiences whilst spending his final days in a zoo. Raja pays the price for his actions when he is trapped by Captain and taken to the Grand Malgudi Circus. Captain, the arrogant ringmaster, exemplifies man's cruelty towards animals when he quells Raja's spirit, by starving him and confining him to a cage for days without the company of other tigers. Raja recalls this phase of his life graphically:

> That was probably the way he worked, driving me on to look on him ultimately as my Saviour. He was considered to be an expert in animal training and deeply versed in their psychology.
> (A Tiger, p. 42.)

In the extract cited, Raja's 'saviour' is in fact his destroyer whose cruelty breaks his spirit, but the 'expert' in animal psychology is unable to avert his own destruction by the tiger.

In the circus enclosure, during training, Raja succumbs painfully to mental and physical mortification. The animal training routines in the circus ring unleash in Captain, a brutal force that matches the tiger's ferocity when he was Master of the jungle:

> He was uttering a command in a voice which could be audible in the next jungle. He held a long whip in one hand and a chair in the other. He lashed my face several times. My face smarted. I had never experienced such pain before. When I tried to ward off his attack, he wielded the chair as a shield. With my paws I could only hit the chair, and he constantly poked my face with it. He commanded,

> 'Run, run,' and kept repeating it with every lashing.
>
> To my shame and dismay, this was being watched by other animals, beyond the enclosure.
> (A Tiger, p. 43.)

In this part of the novel, Narayan emphasises the bestial side of man's nature which is capable of perpetrating fiendish acts of violence especially on defenceless animals. The circus atmosphere is oppressive and the circus ring is marked by a sense of desolation and despair, as Raja is put through his paces. Noel Perrin comments succinctly on the themes of violence and non-violence in the novel:

> The real subject of *A Tiger for Malgudi* is the principle of non-violence, epitomised comically by the timid townspeople and seriously by Master. Raja himself is, of course, the epitome of violence. His two conversions to non-violence - by force when he's with the circus, by spiritual teaching when he's with Master - represent right and wrong paths for India itself, I think.[3]

Interesting as Perrin's remarks are, his critique fails to examine Raja's characterization nor the principles of Hinduism implicit in the novel.

The animal-onlookers in the circus enclosure are also personified and in a spirit of camaraderie, they encourage Raja to accede to Captain's commands. They exclaim: 'Run, run, come on!', 'He wants you to run round and round as if stung by bees at your backside', and, 'He is a madcap and we must learn to live with him. We are in his hands' (p. 44). Such exhortations are both comical and pathetic. The animals empathise with Raja in his plight, and he is

grateful that 'mutual communication was one privilege left for us animals: human beings could not interfere with our freedom of speech because they never suspect that we have our own codes, signals, and idioms' (pp. 44-45).

Through a portrayal of Captain's brutal training methods, Narayan is satirizing the circus world. The cynical commentary of the circus animals who refer to their Master as a 'tyrant', 'madcap', 'simpleton' and 'damned fool' who 'thinks that he is the Lord of the Universe', exposes Captain's egocentric nature and his arrogance (pp. 44, 45). Narayan's objective is to show that 'man assumes he is all-important, that all else in creation exists only for his sport, amusement, comforts or nourishment' (p. 8). The ironic contrast between the animals' intelligence and the portrayal of Captain's savagery reflects Narayan's disillusionment with men like Captain. The Grand Malgudi Circus symbolises the chaos and moral aberrations of a sector of Malgudi community.

Narayan's craftsmanship in plot construction and his talent for individuation are evident when he provides Raja and the circus animals with an intellect and spirit which rival that of man. The underlying rationale for such passion can be found in the Hindu conceit of the transmigration of souls:

> The living entity in the material world carries his different conceptions of life from one body to another as the air carries aromas. Thus he takes one kind of body and again quits it to take another.

> Here the living entity is described as *isvara*, the controller of his own body. If he likes, he can change his body to a higher grade, and if he likes he can move to a lower class.
> (Bhagavad-Gita, pp. 722-723.)

Narayan's introductory remark that the hermit and the tiger were 'brothers in previous lives'[4] has set the scene for his exploration of the concept of transmigration of souls, and the Indian reader certainly would readily accept Narayan's personification of the tiger. Western readers who may be sceptical of the Hindu concept will nevertheless find Raju's autobiography most absorbing.

Edmund Fuller, for one, reveals his fascination with the novel:

> [Narayan's] mortal hand and eye have gentled lovingly the tiger's fearful symmetry in a charming novella .... He is the narrator, except for a few third-person interludes. Don't question the logic of this; it is the given premise of the tale.[5]

Raja's spiritual transformation and ultimate self-realization is preceded by an identity crisis. He evokes our pity as he acknowledges his vanquished position: 'I had thought in the jungle that I was supreme. Now that was gone . I was a defeated king, and Captain was the unquestioned suzerain' (p. 46).

Moral aberrations upset life's balance, as exemplified by the themes of human corruption and the predatory nature of man as evident when Captain is motivated by financial gain to join forces with Madhusudan (Madan), the Cine-Director and Producer. The latter's false values and unprincipled

stand in film-making are reflected in his philosophy that

> Life is created and made possible only through sex and violence, no use fighting against it, shutting one's eyes to the facts of life ....
> (A Tiger, p. 71.)

When Madan sees Raja nipping off a goat's head at the circus, he is inspired to make a film with Raja as main actor and with Jaggu, the moron. Captain trains Raja ruthlessly for the film shoots. In one of his flashbacks, Raja recalls vividly the strong emotions he experiences during the filming:

> He tucked his whip under his arm and brought out a novel object, which shot out a tongue of metal; at its touch I felt blinded with a strange kind of pain and helplessness, and ran out of the cage. Anything to escape the touch of that vicious tongue. I just collapsed on the ground outside the cage, my legs aching with all that jumping to catch the dangling lamb of the previous day.
> (A Tiger, p. 98.)

When Captain continues to use the electric shock stick, the tiger's ferocity returns and he retaliates instinctively:

> ... I just raised a forepaw, taking care to retract my claws, and knocked the thing out of his hand. The blow caught Captain under his chin, and tore off his head. It was surprising that such a flimsy creature, no better than a membrane stretched over some thin framework, with so little stuff inside, should have held me in fear so long.
> (A Tiger, pp. 99-100.)

Pandemonium ensues, and Raja makes a bid for freedom, scattering actor, cameraman, cameras and zoom lenses in all directions. The narratee's sympathy lies with Raja, and Captain's death is poetic justice. The film scene in the

novel is a melodramatic interlude which is similar to the farcical scenes during the filming of 'The Burning of Kama' in Mr Sampath. Even in the 'eighties Narayan remains cynical of the Indian film industry, a cynicism that extends to animal trainers like Captain who resort to violence in order to satisfy their greed. Ironically, Raja regains his self-identity through violence. He regains his freedom, restores his self-esteem and re-asserts his supremacy. Yet Raja has entered a retrogressive phase in his development, similar to an earlier, irrational experience which he came to regret. At that he said: 'I feel that I should not have chosen the easy path - of raiding villages' (p. 31). This statement elicits the following comment from Atkinson:

> It is because Raja forgets who he is that he becomes careless and is transformed into the unnatural creature who performs for circus patrons and film directors.[6]

Atkinson's comments are valid, and show the importance of self-identity for animal and man alike. In his discussion of the 'general theme of spiritual transformation',[7] however, he appears to overlook the important interplay of violence and non-violence. In satirizing the violence of man and beast alike, Narayan highlights the Gandhian principle of non-violence.

Yet, in the context of Hinduism, Raja is far from reaching self-realization. It is only when he meets Master, the

swami, who is to become his spiritual mentor, that he is finally set on the right path to self-realization. Raja experiences divine love when he seeks sanctuary in a nearby school and settles down to sleep in the Headmaster's office. The second comic melodrama begins to unfold, and Raja notices 'a very dignified man jumping on his table and heaving himself up into an attic' (p. 102). Narayan renders an entertaining account of the ridiculous actions of the acting headmaster, teachers and Chairman of the 'Save Tiger Commitee' who argue over Raja's fate. The comedy is heightened when Alphonse, the 'good *shikari*, [with] a licensed double-barrelled gun' makes ludicrous attempts to rescue the Headmaster (p. 105). The rescue bid becomes a fiasco when he falls into a drunken stupor.

The absurd antics of these secondary characters create a comic interlude which provides temporary relief from the violent scenes witnessed a little earlier. At the school Raja meets his new master who, in an authoritative manner, offers to remove Raja from the school premises. The swami reprimands a teacher who refers to Raja as a 'brute', stating: 'Never use the words *beast* or *brute*. They're ugly words coined by man in his arrogance' (p. 103). The dialogue which follows hints at the swami's mystical nature and the scepticism of the onlookers:

> Someone said, 'What a reckless man you are! Who are you? 'You are asking a profound question. I've no idea who I am! All my life I have been trying to find the answer. Are you sure you know who you are?'

> 'Crazy beggar - with a tiger in there ready to devour us, but for the strong door.... There is no time for useless talk. Let us get on with the business....'
> (A Tiger, p. 103.)

The ascetic's comments are true to his characterization. In the Introduction Narayan explains the nature of a true swami:

> When one is seized with a passion to understand one's self, one has to leave behind all normal life and habitual modes of thought. One becomes an ascetic; the terms *sannyasi, sadhu, yogi,* or *swamiji* indicate more or less the same state.
> (A Tiger, p. 8.)

Master's metaphysical queries about man's existence in the universe and cosmos are signs of his progressive self-realization. Through his yogic powers he subjugates Raja's ferocity:

> 'Understand that you are not a tiger, don't hurt yourself. I am your friend....' How I was beginning to understand his speech is a mystery. He was exercising some strange power over me. His presence sapped all my strength ...I tried to hit him but my forepaw had no strength and collapsed like a rag.
> (A Tiger, p. 125.)

Once again, in the Malgudi novels, Narayan uses an esoteric experience successfully. Master's non-violent intervention has rescued Raja as well as the crowd gathered at the school. Raja begins to experience the force of divine power for the first time and it starts to purge his emotions.

The critic J.K. Biswal describes the novel as an 'almost spiritual odyssey of... Raja's life' and points out that it

is significant that 'the tiger appropriately enough, meets his master in a school, where his first education is to start'.[8] Under the psychic spell of Master, Raja leaves the school premises peacefully, exemplifying Narayan's belief that 'deep within, the core of personality is the same...and with the right approach you could expect the same response from a tiger as from any normal human being' (A Tiger, p. 9).

Narayan has used Raja's life story to symbolise the saga of Hindu man's journey through life towards self-realization. Raja and Master fall into the category of characters 'rooted' in Malgudi and its ethos, as Anita Desai says, whilst Captain who 'travels constantly with the Grand Malgudi Circus and devises new ways of adding to its fame and coffers', is an 'uprooted' character.[9] One notes that both the 'rooted' and 'uprooted' characters experience many difficulties in establishing a proper self-identity in Malgudi.

Back in the Mempi Forests, under Master's able tutelage, Raja is intrigued to learn of 'the Creator, the Great Spirit pervading every creature, every rock and tree and the sky and the stars; a source of power and strength' (p. 136). The ambience at the swami's retreat is one of peace and serenity. Raja's mind is transformed and he begins to understand his *karmic* existence in relation to the cosmos. He visualises God in his own image as 'an enormous tiger, spanning the earth and the sky', and his psyche

attains a remarkable level of self-realization which is often denied most human beings (p. 136). Michel Pousse examines the religious aspects in the novel and states that A Tiger has a distinct Gandhian message:

> The tiger, man's arch enemy has only known two masters. One who lived by the sword and so logically met his death at the tiger's claws .... The other master spoke of love only and radiating it only brought about more love.[10]

Although this section of the novel is replete with religious references, Narayan does not moralize. In Ranga Rao's 1990 essay, aptly titled 'Contemplative Tiger', he notes the nuances in Narayan's attitude towards religion:

> The same man can seriously talk of 'need for prayer and meditation in daily life', yet he declares: 'Religion is not a thing that anyone can openly avow - it's like one's underwear'.[11]

One becomes aware of the burgeoning bond of friendship between the 'Guru' and the 'Chela' (Saxena, p. 114). To an extent, Raja's path to self-realization, parallels Master's journey to a state of *samadhi.* Raja begins to understand the *karmic* laws which bind man to earth and tries 'to attain some kind of purification by reducing the frequency of seeking food' (A Tiger, pp. 137-138). Narayan has succeeded in developing Raja's character fully. It is not surprising that, Saxena accords it a distinctive position in the chain of Malgudi novels:

> The novel is Narayan's masterpiece (no other word for it). Gripping stuff, all of it, but of differing grades, one is easily tempted to give the first place

. to the last written.

(Saxena, p. 161.)

Biswal, too, lauds Narayan's technique:

> The unmistakable signs of Malgudi life as well as the brilliant style of Narayan noticed in all his earlier novels are once again here.
>
> (Biswal, p. 114.)

To Narayan, Raja is a fictional creation who embodies his ideals. Rao quotes the following excerpt taken from his interview with the novelist in 1988:

> Q: 'What would you rather be in your next birth?'
> A: 'A contemplative tiger.'
>
> (Rao, p. 85.)

One might ask why Narayan prefers to emulate Raja rather than Master in the next *janma*. Perhaps he is disenchanted with man's superior intellect, which becomes obsessed with materialism before it aspires towards self-realization.

Master's penance, prayer and meditation bring him closer to God. When he refuses steadfastly to accede to his wife's pleas to return to his family, his renunciation is final: 'my past does not exist for me, nor a future. I live for the moment, and that awareness is enough for me' (p. 148). The critic, R. Ramachandra, examines this statement and categorizes Master as a 'liminal' or 'borderline' person, and refers to Narayan's 'fascination for people who are at the borders of social life'.[12] Raja, too, may be regarded as a 'liminal' figure when he begins to live on the

periphery of jungle society. Narayan's portrayal of these 'borderline' characters reflects his in-depth knowledge not only of those who fall within the mainstream of middle class Hindu society, but also of those who live on its social fringes.

Thus when Raja's physical faculties are impaired through old age, he is sent to a zoo where he becomes the 'Contemplative Tiger'. Master bids farewell to Raja stating optimistically: 'Both of us will shed our forms soon and perhaps we could meet again, who knows? So goodbye for the present' (p. 152). Master, like Raman in The Painter, cherishes the hope of a possible meeting in the next *karmic* cycle.

Though the parting is sad, A Tiger ends on a positive note, with Master and Raja progressing satisfactorily towards self-realization. This signifies the triumph of man and animal over *karmic* bondage. *Moksha*, or eternal bliss, is inevitable. This is the ending towards which Narayan has been working in his exploration of the theme of Hinduism and reincarnation. Thus, for the first time, Narayan brings his novel to an optimistic, climactic ending. This change in plot construction heralds a changing authorial attitude towards life in the 'eighties and 'nineties. In Talkative Man (1986) and The World of Nagaraj (1990) Narayan's tone is light-hearted as he focuses once again on the oddities and idiosyncrasies of middle class Hindus caught up in the matrix of modern

society although he continues to focus on social concerns which plague modern India.

Narayan makes the transition in subject matter with ease from a talking tiger to a garrulous journalist. Madhu, renowned in Malgudi as the "Talkative Man" or TM, is the chief protagonist in the thirteenth Malgudi novel. Narayan's style of narrativity comes full circle in the Talkative Man, when he endows TM with a dual function as raconteur and Universal Correspondent. The plot reveals a reversion to the oral style of story-telling. In the opening lines of the novel TM asserts bluntly:

> They call me Talkative Man. Some affectionately shorten it to TM: I have earned this title, I suppose, because I cannot contain myself. My impulse to share an experience with others is irresistible, even if they sneer at my back. I don't care. I'd choke if I didn't talk, perhaps like Sage Narada of our epics, who for all his brilliance and accomplishments carried a curse on his back that unless he spread a gossip a day, his skull would burst.
>
> (Talk. Man, p. 1.)

The author had already revealed some of the exploits of this inveterate gossipmonger and newshound in his short story, 'Lawley Road', where he informs the reader that he is 'trying to make a living out of news-reports to an up-country paper which paid ... [him] two rupees for every inch of published news',[13] hence he visits the Municipal Chairman's office constantly for news. In the present novel, his favourite venue is The Boardless Hotel. As first person narrator he enthrals his group of friends with

gripping stories and enchants the reader with anecdotes. In his role as freelance journalist for Madras-based newspapers, he tries to satisfy an ambition not only to be news-gatherer in Malgudi, but also to reach out beyond its borders, and including Madras, which to most Malgudians, is the Mecca of India. A self-styled 'monologist', he entertains Varma, the proprietor of The Boardless, with his story of Dr Rann (Talk. Man, p. 2). He recalls this period of his life vividly:

> I met him for the first time at the Town Hall reading room. Those were the days when I was struggling to establish myself as a journalist. They used to call me Universal Correspondent since I had no authority to represent any particular publication.
> Still, I was busy from morning till night, moving about on my bicycle or on my neighbour Sambu's scooter. I was to be seen here and there, at municipal meetings, magistrates' court, the prize distribution at Albert Mission, with a reporter's notebook in hand and a fountain pen peeping out of my shirt pocket.
> (Talkative Man, p. 3.)

After the seriousness of A Tiger Narayan's wit and mischievous humour return in Talkative Man, The illustrious title, 'Universal Correspondent', that he assumes is pompous and comically ironic. Not only is his locus of operation confined to Malgudi with its one hundred thousand inhabitants, but he is not contracted to any newspaper, making *ad hoc* freelance contributions to papers at random, in the hope that his report would be printed. In his own words: 'I liked to be active, had dreams of becoming a journalist, I can't explain why' (p. 4).

His work as a journalist complements his favourite pastime as story-teller, who moved with his ear close to the ground and exchanges gossip primarily with Jayraj, 'photographer and framer of pictures at the Market Arch', Gundu Rao, the municipal horticulturist, and Gaffur, the taxi-driver. (pp. 4-5). In his characterization of TM,as he is commonly referred to Narayan returns to the *harikatha* tradition of oral story-telling which, in all likelihood, inspired his own novelistic and journalistic career. However, TM is the modern, urban version of the traditional rural story-teller whom Narayan describes in 'The World of the Story-teller'. To the Indian village community: 'The source of enchantment is the story-teller in their midst, a grand old man who seldom stirs from his ancestral home on the edge of the village, ...' [14] His *modus operandi* is radically different from TM's and his narrative audience comprises the simple, rural folk who 'at the end of their day's labours in the fields, ... silently assemble in front of his home .... 'and 'the story-teller will dress himself for the part by smearing sacred ash on his forehead and wrapping himself in a green shawl....'[15]

TM symbolises Narayan, the master raconteur himself, who, for over half a century, has captivated readers in India and abroad through his short stories and novels. TM as story-teller and the eponymous journalist on a bicycle, belongs to a dying breed internationally in the modern technological world of news-gathering and news-reporting.

His illustrious family, too, is fast becoming a rare phenomenon in Malgudi:

> I belonged to one of those Kabir Street families which flourished on the labours of an earlier generation. We were about twenty unrelated families in Kabir Street, each having inherited a huge rambling house stretching from the street to the river at the back. All that one did was to lounge on the *pyol*, watch the street, and wait for the harvest from our village lands and cash from the tenants. We were a vanishing race,....
> (Talk. Man, p. 4.)

This group of privileged inhabitants, though free from the traumas which their less fortunate fellow-citizens face in their daily battles for survival, differ in their lifestyles from their elitist counterparts in western society. Narayan satirizes Kabir Street's aristocrats:

> Their descendants, so comfortably placed, were mainly occupied in eating, breeding, celebrating festivals, spending the afternoons in a prolonged siesta on the *pyol*, and playing cards all evening. The women rarely came out, being most of the time in the kitchen or in the safe-room scrutinising their collection of diamonds and silks.
> (Talk. Man, p. 4.)

The extracts quoted reveal their peculiar lifestyle which is characterized by old world charm. To the critic, Michiko Kakutani, Malgudi is 'endowed with the sort of bustling timelessness you find in old-fashioned folk-art paintings'.[16] To the narratee abroad it would appear as if these Malgudians lived in a time warp. Narayan deliberately denies them the lifestyle of opulence and splendour which is characteristic not only of the rich and famous abroad but also of Indians in India. Perhaps

Narayan's intention is to ensure that Malgudi's rich people remain relatively unspoilt by the trappings of affluent, western society. Yet, in doing so, Narayan limits the action in which his characters can engage in the plot. This is evident specifically in Talkative Man where TM's characterisation is sketchy, lacking the fullness and complexity we have come to expect of Narayan. He rejects Kabir Street's bourgeois lifestyle: 'This sort of existence did not appeal to me' (p. 4). The lifestyle he has sought as a journalist and raconteur does not arrest the narratee's attention.

Although TM's lifestyle is mundane, Narayan captivates his readers with the interlocking anecdotes of the protagonist, Dr Rann and his wife Roja. Rann's character is developed in the novel through a series of striking incongruities which amuse the reader. At the Boardless TM holds his audience spellbound by highlighting the absurdities in the appearance and lifestyle of the exotic researcher, Dr Rann, who once visited Malgudi:

> He had blonde hair, a touch of greenish-blue in his eyes, and borderline complexion - unusual for an Indian of these parts.
> (Talk. Man, p. 3.)

Rann's Caucasian looks and bearing are deceptive, as TM reveals his true identity as 'a pure Indian from a

southernmost village named Maniyur, ... so commonplace that it escapes the notice of map-makers and chroniclers' (pp. 2-3). One is made to understand this incongruity through TM's mischievous allusion to Rann's ethnic origin: 'A Company of British, French or Portuguese soldiers must have camped at Maniyur ... and, in the intervals of fighting, relaxed by philandering among the local population' (p. 3).

The extracts quoted exemplify Narayan's return to the style of portraiture of his early novels: comic-ironic descriptions, with traces of melancholy. Rann is one of Narayan's unique creations: he is the only Anglo-Indian who features prominently in a Malgudi novel. Yet, in the rest of his fiction, Narayan ignores the fact that there are Anglo-Indians in South India and that they constitute an integral part of the population on the sub-continent. As Rann does not belong to the mainstream of Malgudi's population, he may be categorized as one of the 'liminal' characters in the novel who, as an alien, lives on the periphery of society. By contrast TM is a 'rooted' character, firmly located in the Malgudi milieu. Rann, however, appears to be a misfit. His peculiar style of dressing is due to a psychological need to gain acceptance through his western style of dressing. On seeing him in the library TM observes:

> I threw a brief glance at him and decided he was an oddity - dressed as he was in a blue suit, tie, and shining shoes, and holding a felt hat in hand.
> (Talk. Man, p. 6.)

Furthermore, he adopts a haughty attitude towards his fellow citizens, compensating for an inferiority complex. These characteristics are exemplified in his relationship with TM and other Malgudians. When the two leave the library to find a suitable spot to talk, Rann tries 'to conceal his disgust at the spectacle of Malgudi citizenry.'"How is it so many are asleep at this hour?" he asks (p. 7). When he enquires "Is there a bar or a restaurant where we may possibly find a quiet corner?" TM retorts with fiendish delight (p. 7):

> "No bar or a good restaurant" I said and added, "nor do we have an airport or night club except Kismet in New Extension, not very good I hear ... we have only toddy shops, ..."
> (Talk. Man, p. 8.)

In his critique of the novel, Bruce Bawer summarizes the relationship between these two characters as follows:

> At the center of the book is the contrast between the unpretentious, talkative, Malgudi-bound TM and the pompous, laconic, globe-trotting Rann.[17]

Although different in character, they are bound by the same desire to establish a proper self-identity within Malgudi society. TM searches for fame as a journalist and Rann is yet to find himself through the mists of illusory, intellectual pursuits.

Narayan cultivates an aura of mystery around the distinguished visitor who informs TM that he worked 'on a United Nations Project' in Timbuctoo, and was gathering

research data in Malgudi to submit a report to his headquarters (pp. 9, 10). This eminent international scholar is an incongruous figure in the simple Malgudi setting. Narayan undercuts his importance and holds him up for ridicule by placing him in a grossly uncomfortable station waiting room: Rann pleads with TM and the librarian: "I say, my friends - the bugs are eating me up every night. Do something" (p. 16). When Rann suggests that he should write to the Railway Board, TM makes a witty retort: "No use, the bugs being a part of our railway service - they are service bugs actually" (p. 16). But his sardonic humour misses its mark when Rann takes it literally and replies: "Oh, I didn't realize" (p. 16).

The extracts manifest, once again, Narayan's characteristic wit and humour after his philosophic deliberations in A Tiger. Dr Rann's psuedo-sophistication arouses TM's ire and he responds with sarcasm and cynicism. TM also assumes the role of a self-deprecatory Malgudi citizen who is prepared to laugh at himself and the small town's shortcomings, and its inability to cater for the suave gentleman, whose worldliness is both alluring and irritating to the journalist.

Rann's pretensions of being a member of a so-called superior class of intellectuals and his superficial values are exposed when he turns the station waiting room into an hotel guest room, which he occupies for three weeks, in spite of the station-master's outrage: "He can't make the waiting

room his father-in-law's house ... rules don't permit more than eight hours stay between trains" (p. 17). Rann is a parasite and conman who capitalizes on the hospitality of Malgudi's good-natured citizens like TM and the station - master. The former becomes the good Samaritan who takes the visitor under his wing and not only pays for his stay at the station, but also accommodates him under his own roof, when their house-hunting efforts are fruitless.

Rann retains the air of a foreign dignitary when he is safely ensconced in TM's house so that he might complete his research and write 'a book on a vital theme' (p. 10). However, TM in turn exploits Rann's presence to advance his journalistic career. He writes a newspaper article on the 'Timbuctoo Man' with 'a word picture of Rann in his three-piece suit' (p. 29), but, to embellish his contribution he needs a picture. Thus he engineers a visit to the Marble Arch with Rann, to enable 'a phantom at the threshold of Jayaraj's dark chamber' to photograph Rann surreptitiously (p. 38). Narayan ridicules TM's action as it is as unscrupulous and unethical as Rann's past activities, which will be revealed later in the novel. TM's idiosyncratic behaviour lends credibility to Anita Desai's contention that

> Like all Narayan's characters [the protagonist of *Talkative Man*] has his unobtrusive eccentricities - sufficient to give him individuality, but not such as to make him grotesque or bizarre. He cannot hold his tongue, he must share every experience with everyone ....[18]

TM's penchant for sharing gossip extends to his news reports, some of which backfire on him. He gets more than he has bargained for when Commandant Sarasa, Rann's wife, or Roja, as she was known in her youth, a pistol-carrying 'officer in the Home Guards at Delhi' recognises her long-lost husband from the newspaper photograph and comes to Malgudi in search of him (p. 59). TM's admiration for the accomplished gentleman turns to cynicism and mistrust after he meets the Delhi lady who tells him that she is Rann's wife, 'perhaps the only one wedded to him in front of the holy fire at a temple' (p. 39). Through TM's eyes Narayan sketches a humorous picture of Commandant Sarasa:

> ... a six-foot woman (as it seemed at first sight), a dark-complexioned cropped head, and in jeans and a T-shirt with bulging breasts, the first of her kind in the Malgudi area.
>
> (Talk. Man, p. 39.)

Narayan pokes gentle fun at the large Indian woman in American-styled attire who behaves like a 'queen' at the station (p. 40). In his characterization of Commandant Sarasa, Narayan reveals his fascination with modern, career women in India. With the exception of Daisy in The Painter, he does not generally explore their proficiency as workers at their place of employment, but focuses, rather, on their marital relationships and the impact they have on the men. The possibility that this incongruous couple, the Amazon-like woman and the 'London man' could be married to each other, adds to the mystery which surrounds Rann's past (p. 38).

In characterizing this odd couple Narayan returns to his pattern of antithetical characters. He continues to explore the nature of human relationships in this novel through TM's interaction with his circle of friends at The Boardless, Rann and Commandant Sarasa. To the clan in the hotel, TM is a raconteur *par excellence*, to Rann he is the hospitable Malgudian whom the stranger befriends, and to the deserted wife Roja, he is a patient listener as she unburdens her marital saga of days gone by with the object of enlisting his help to locate her errant husband. TM, however, remains loyal to his new acquaintance, the reason being perhaps, psychological. As Rann is an Anglo-Indian, he reveres his intellect, and holds him in high esteem. It is also likely that TM suffers from an inferiority complex, therefore he views Rann, the exotic stranger, as a person with a superior intellect.

Gerald Mangan draws a parallel between the narrator of *Lawley Road* and the Talkative Man and goes on to state that '"TM" has a pliable nature as well as a long nose, and it's this combination that embroils him in the odd affair of Dr Rann ....'[19] The critic explains the relationship between TM and Rann as follows: 'His initial deference to Rann as an "international figure" is plainly symptomatic of old forms of subservience, which still tends to overvalue all things European' (Mangan, p. 306). Yet TM's respect for Rann does not cloud his judgement of the latter. On hearing Roja's story his perception of

the researcher begins to change. Thus he is angered by Rann's persistent smugness:

> Rann was in his kimono when he opened the door, on my knocking repeatedly, with a scowl on his face. I resented his attitude: in my own house he was a visitor to whom I'd offered asylum for no clear reason .... Yet he behaved as if I were a hotel steward violating the privacy of a guest.
> (Talk. Man, p. 42)

Rann's supercilious attitude is unwarranted, and TM looks forward to ruffling his guest's feathers with some shocking news. He muses: 'I knew his flamboyance and foreign style would be punctured' (p. 43). Subtly, TM uses Roja's presence in Malgudi to gain leverage over Rann who drew closer to him and depended on him for news of the lady visitor. Like Rann before her, Commandant Sarasa had settled in comfortably in the station waiting room against the wishes of the station-master, whom she bullies. She is determined to locate her wayward husband. Rann's haughtiness begins to dissipate when he is presented with news of the spectre from his past, and TM takes advantage of the opportunity to strengthen their relationship:

> It suited me, too. I took advantage of his leniency and the half-open door policy to step into his room informally for a chit-chat now and then. I'd walk in and make straight for the easy chair without any preamble.
> (Talk. Man, p. 47.)

The extract cited reveals the ludicrous situation whereby the owner of the house feels like a privileged guest who is granted an audience by the visitor in his home. TM, who is

gregarious by nature, is really a lonely bachelor who compensates for his isolation by story-telling. He is also able to empathise with Rann in his plight and accedes to his request: "Don't betray me .... just help me now by leaving me alone and without mentioning me to that person whoever she may be, in jeans and T-shirt. I'll explain everything when the time comes" (p. 50). Rann's *façade* begins to disintegrate, yet he neither admits nor denies the existence of a wife thus deepening the mystery which surrounds his past.

TM's macroscopic narrative of Rann encompasses the romantic mini-tale of courtship and marriage narrated by Commandant Sarasa. The narrative, in which she unburdens her ambivalent feelings towards Rann, is entertaining, both for TM and the reader. Narayan succeeds in making the reader empathise with Roja in her plight as abandoned wife. One understands her ambivalent feelings towards her husband and her belief in the sanctity of marriage, which make her continue to search for a husband who had been nothing more than a philanderer. In this manner Narayan focuses on serious issues such as marital infidelity and debauchery. Roja wrestles with a desire to punish Rann: "You must help me get at him ... a strange character. Sometimes I have felt like wringing his neck but on the whole I'm very fond of him, although I'm not sure what I'll do if I set eyes on him" (pp. 53-54). Yet she wishes to be reunited with him. One of the pivotal points in the novel's

structure is story-telling and TM, the chief narrator, is relegated to the position of secondary narrator, when Commandant Sarasa unfolds her tale. TM proves to be the 'long-nosed news-hound' who 'smells' a sensational story when he listens in awe as Roja reveals Rann's abominable activities of the past:

> "A regular lady-killer, sir; the only one who could survive was myself. I've been to the capitals of the world, hunting for him with the help of the Interpol and met only the poor wrecks he left behind when he vanished.
>
> (Talk. Man, p. 55.)

Narayan entertains the reader with his description of the 'womaniser', whose infidelity and debauchery have been comically enough, brought to the attention of Interpol. It is ludicrous that this eminent organisation should be burdened with the problem of tracking down a 'lady-killer'. Yet Roja is serious in her efforts to be re-united with her husband.

Kakutani tries to unravel the mystery surrounding this couple by posing the following questions: 'Who is telling the truth here? Does Rann really work for the United Nations? Or is he using a phony identity as a cover for his own nefarious past? Did he really abandon this woman, as she claims?' (Kakutani, p. 308). TM, the master story-teller, does little to establish the truth as his gratification as a journalist comes from mere news-reporting. He has now cultivated the art of listening. Roja rambles on, unfolding a tale of star-crossed lovers,

abduction, elopement and finally marriage against the wishes of tyrannical parents. Her story ends anti-climactically when she states that her husband could never forgive her for her "sworn statement read out at court" accusing him of abduction - thus "He didn't come home one evening" (p. 71).

Through the relationship between Roja and her husband, Narayan explores the theme of marriage and, more specifically, marital infidelity. Although Roja's tale is a typical account of an amorous couple who defy their parents to marry, only to be cheated of permanent happiness through some flaw, its theme is universal. Roja is occasionally melancholic but she is not portrayed as the heart-broken, pathetic wife. Her massive frame, brash and domineering manner, run counter to this image. Although TM is captivated by the commandant's tale , he remains loyal to his own sex and does not reveal Rann's whereabouts. Roja's story is a dramatic interlude within the greater framework of TM's narrative and Narayan uses this strategy successfully, not only to enhance TM's tale, but also to satirize the plots of Indian films which often followed the same course of melodrama.

TM's narrative to Varma and company does not end with Roja leaving Malgudi without her husband. Rann displays bravado once he escapes detection by Commandant Sarasa, and now begins a relationship with Baby Girija, the librarian's granddaughter. Narayan portrays Rann as the modern day Casanova, flaunting his prowess as a lady-killer, impressing

Baby and her grandparents, and ingratiating himself in their favour by appearing to tutor Girija in her studies. The old librarian's statement: "Girija is lucky .... He seems to be an expert in certain subjects" (p. 88), and his wife's declaration: "He is such a simple man - absolutely without conceit - considering his status ", reveal Rann's hypocrisy and guile (pp. 88, 91).

TM is incensed by Rann's outrageous behaviour and begins to 'have suspicions about Rann's background' (p. 85). He examines Rann's 'briefcase and a portfolio of letters - quite a handful' to discover that 'Like our gods, he seemed to have a thousand names' (p. 85). Rann's briefcase symbolises his iniquitous past, and as long as it remains shut, his past activities are safely concealed. Once opened it reveals that Rann of a thousand aliases had consorted with multifarious women throughout the world. Sadly 'there was a common feature in every letter: the cry of desertion' (p. 85). Rann's letters and Journal entries depict him as a sociopath, who like Vasu, is hoist with his own petard. At this stage in the narrative, TM changes from relatively passive onlooker and story-teller, to active participant in re-uniting Roja and Rann, albeit for the wrong reasons, as I shall show.

The last scenes in the closing chapter of the novel are melodramatic, and have a surrealistic touch. At the Lotus Club's Silver Jubilee function, Rann, 'in the full regalia of his Oxford blue three-piece suit', delivers the keynote

address on 'Futurology' (p. 103). With 'the theatricality of a Seventh Day Adventist' he focuses on the Cannibal Herb which would cause 'the collapse of this planet about A.D. 3000' (p. 105). When Rann describes the cannibalistic qualities of the killer weed, Narayan is, in my opinion, drawing an analogy with Rann's lecherous and parasitic lifestyle. According to Rann this weed has fantastical qualities: 'it fattens itself on other plants. Where it appears no other plant can grow. It swallows every scrap of vegetation near at hand ....' (p. 105). The Cannibal Weed symbolises Rann's corrupt lifestyle which, in the manner of the Venus flytrap, ensnares females only to destroy them emotionally. At the end of his treatise he is at considerable risk.

Like an oracle Rann details the catalyclysmic potential of the weed ending on a bizarre note of 'millions and billions of skeletons of humans and animals strewn about' (p.107). The women become hysterical and 'a gang of toughs approached the dias, armed with the legs and remnants of the splintered chairs' to vent their fury on the prophet of doom (p. 108). This scene is farcical. TM rescues him timeously from the mob which is about to lynch him, and leads him out of the Town Hall, where he is taken to a car in which officer Sarasa is waiting, opportunely, to re-claim her husband. In keeping with his comic mode, Narayan metes out an appropriate punishment for Rann - his reunion with his estranged wife. TM has engineered Rann's return to his wife

and protected Girija from becoming another one of his victims.

However, because Narayan upholds the sanctity of marriage and advocates harmonious marital relationships, he does not let this relationship work. Rann's 'tethered domesticity' lasts barely six months when he deserts Roja once again, and goes off with another woman (p. 118). Narayan shows that a person of Rann's character is incorrigible. Through Rann's actions, Narayan reinforces the theme of marital infidelity and debauchery and draws attention to the plight of women who are the victims of man's moral aberrations. Rann's humorous farewell note shows his impudence and reveals that he will continue wilfully to breach society's norms and morality: "Good-bye dearest. I have to be off again. It was lovely while it lasted - thanks!" (p. 118).

The protagonist in Talk. Man appears to be more like a caricature in comparison with the protagonist in his own story. Rann's character is complex and eclipses that of his creator, TM. This difference in characterization might be a deliberate part of Narayan's narrative strategy to highlight the main character in the story, rather than the story-teller who narrates the story. Another reason may be the brevity of the novel, being as it is only 123 pages in length. In his Postscript, Narayan justifies the brevity by stating that 'Talkative Man, the narrator, had nothing more to say' (p. 120). The novelist maintains: '... I do

not concern myself with quantity while writing', yet he speculates on an alternative ending for the novel, should he have increased its length. Commandant Sarasa would have mustered up sufficient courage to say "No. Let *him* undertake the pursuit this time when he is finally let out of prison' (pp. 122-123). In this ending, Commandant Sarasa would triumph over adversity and Rann would get his just deserts. Nonetheless, in spite of the novel's shortcomings, the three stories are woven into the fabric of the novel successfully, creating an unusual narrative in which the humorous side of marital infidelity receives attention.

Narayan sustains this holistic appeal in his fourteenth and last Malgudi novel The World of Nagaraj (1990), in which he brings the themes of marriage and the conflict between orthodoxy and modernity to a successful conclusion. Talkative Man (1986) and The World of Nagaraj are linked thematically and structurally and share the same light-hearted approach to theme and character. Significantly, Narayan's Indian world-view in the 1990's is free of disillusionment and disenchantment. Yet, at the time, the Indian sub-continent was racked by large-scale violence, communal riots and political turmoil, precipitated by several factors. Conflict resulted from the clash between Hindus and Muslims, as well as from the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations on affirmative action programmes for the scheduled and

backward castes.

Nonetheless, Narayan remains relatively unperturbed by these events. In The World of Nagaraj, Malgudi is not idyllic but it symbolises a town at peace with itself. Nagaraj, the protagonist, represents the complacent and serene Malgudian: 'You could not find a more contented soul in Malgudi at that moment' (p. 16). Narayan succeeds in creating Malgudi's relatively peaceful ambience by accepting life's ills philosophically. Through his translucent style, sparkling wit and humour he constructs his plot around Nagaraj's daily round of activities, making him function within his own insulated little world, like that of his creator.

Malgudi's evolution is orderly and Narayan uses characters like TM and Jayaraj, who feature prominently in the Talk. Man and The World of Nagaraj. Certain themes are repeated and this links the thirteenth and fourteenth novels, Talk. Man and The World. The theme of harmonious marital relationships, which Rann is unable to enjoy as he rebels against 'tethered domesticity', is exemplified through Nagaraj and Sita's relationship in The World. Although Nagaraj feels he a 'a prisoner of domesticity' it is a light-hearted view of his harmonious relationship with Sita. Nonetheless, he is ever mindful of the possible pitfalls of domesticity. Thus he muses: 'Have to be careful and diplomatic all the time, the tightrope walking called domestic harmony' (p. 4). The numerous connecting

links between Talk. Man and The World lead one to the conclusion that the fourteenth novel is, in many respects, an extension of the short thirteenth novel.

In Talk. Man, Rann and Commandant Sarasa exemplify modernity, whilst Tim and his wife Saroja in The World are typical of Malgudi's modern youth. The Kismet hotel is the epitome of modernization in Malgudi. In The World, TM explains to Nagaraj why Tim, Nagaraj's nephew, and other young men frequented Kismet in the New Extension: 'A sort of club and restaurant and bar - started by a North Indian - very popular and fashionable' where one could enjoy 'Anything from ice cream to whisky and soda, and dinner if ordered -' (p. 59). To Nagaraj, who is steeped in traditional values and standards of morality, Kismet might be 'such a horrible place that one should not be seen there' and 'whisky' was definitely a 'horrible word' (p. 59).

Like Rann's briefcase which symbolises his licentiousness in the modern world, the Kismet hotel symbolises degenerate westernization in Malgudi in the 1990's. Yet Nagaraj and other Malgudians learn to tolerate its existence. This change in attitudes may be easily comprehended because one of the concerns of this thesis has been to trace aspects of the impact of westernization on Malgudians. In The World, Malgudi learns to flow with the tide. According to its creator, he can shape it at will, because it is a fictional town. Narayan explains this viewpoint in an interview with Susan Croft in 1983:

> "An imaginary town like that has great possibilities. You can make anything of it, whereas if you set your town in a real place you are bound by the geography and its existing structure. But in a place like Malgudi, though the heart of the city may be fixed, it can expand."[20]

Besides its concrete topography, Narayan endows Malgudi with certain qualities which are timeless. Kabir Street's century-old homes, owned by the landed gentry, have borne silent witness to Malgudi's evolution over the years. Its wealthy occupants have led their traditional and orthodox lifestyles, enjoying financial independence and elevated status in society. Like TM in Talk. Man, Nagaraj belongs to this exclusive band of people. In providing both these protagonists with similar backgrounds, Narayan forges a link, once again, between the penultimate and final Malgudi novels. Nagaraj reflects on his comfortable position in life which he accepts philosophically:

> He walked home, the back of his mind worrying over something. He wished he could define the worry and exorcise it. He found he had nothing to worry about. 'Thank God I don't have to think of money. I'm not greedy, that's why I'm happy. Even after the division of property, I get a thousand rupees from the bank deposits left by my father.
> (The World, p. 4.)

However, like TM, Nagaraj's character lacks depth and vibrancy. His characterization is deliberately low-key as Narayan creates him as a Malgudian of average intelligence and intellect, whose character and personality are bolstered by inherited wealth and status. His daily schedule of activities revolves around mundane tasks which might not be

gratifying to the intelligent and discerning Malgudian: 'After his morning coffee, he stepped out and strolled along to wake up his friend Jayaraj, the photographer, who slept on a bench in front of his shop at the market archway' (p.1). After a friendly exchange of news, he visits the market, then returns home. 'After his bath he took his ochre dhoti and the wrap ... [and] entered the puja room .... Now in his ochre robe he felt transformed' as he prayed and meditated, undisturbed, for a half hour each (p. 12).

This activity is followed by a visit to Coomar's Boeing Sari Centre, which displays Raman's signboard prominently. Here Nagaraj worked as an accountant, but in keeping with his generosity of spirit he 'worked free for Coomar, no pay packet at the beginning of a month. "I don't need it, and this arrangement leaves me free to come and go when I like ...."' (p. 24). Nagaraj's lifestyle is neither arresting nor challenging, and his wealth is not utilized either to generate more cash in terms of modern day economics, or to improve the lot of his less fortunate fellow-citizens. He appears to have a fairly narrow vision of life. Nonetheless, he is at peace with himself and the world, and this, perhaps, is Narayan's message in his final Malgudi novel.

Interspersed with his activities are his efforts to gather research material to write a book on the sage Narada, but he procrastinates and does not complete the task. This is Nagaraj's cosy and sheltered lifestyle, yet, Narayan

remains non-judgemental, respecting the ordinary lives of people who comprise an integral part of Malgudi society. Nagaraj does not appear to have any specific objectives or aspirations in life, yet he is contented. Narayan may be criticized for creating characters without well-defined goals in life. In an interview with Stephen Graubard in 1989, at the time when he was writing The World of Nagaraj, he makes his authorial standpoint clear:

> Graubard: Do you read reviews of your books? To what extent are you affected by criticism?
>
> Narayan : Earlier, I never read reviews of my books because I did not want to become self-conscious. Now I may occasionally read them, but they do not bother me. Critics say that I don't talk of the aspirations of the people, of the political agony that we have gone through, and of all those plans for economic growth. I am not interested in that. I am interested in human characters and their background. That is important for me; I want a story to be entertaining, enjoyable, and illuminating in some way.[21]

There is little doubt that Narayan achieves these objectives even in his last novel, The World. Narayan's characterization of Nagaraj's mother and other wealthy inhabitants of Kabir Street is amusing and enlightening. His father's prosperity had also enabled his mother to live a life of luxury and she was the envy of the neighbours. In one of his flashbacks, Nagaraj recollects the image his mother portrayed when his father was still alive:

> ... when her husband was living she used to be radiant with diamonds and clad in gold-laced saris, never going below a certain standard of dress and decoration, so that the neighbours always remarked, 'She's like Goddess Lakshmi and rules the family like a queen!' Some called her vain and showy - 'Wants to impress us with her diamonds and brocade. We know how this family came to be rich - moneylenders, actually ....'
>
> (The World, p. 32.)

Nagaraj's mother's showy display of wealth arouses ambivalent feelings in her neighbours. This image and the Indianness of the description are captivating. In Talk. Man Narayan has already focused on Kabir Street's affluent women, who are ostentatious and egocentric. He depicts them as matriachs who ruled their families with an iron fist. Narayan's on-going interest in this stratum of society makes him reflect their leisurely lifestyles repeatedly. In the extract quoted Narayan's humour is remarkable because it opens up new vistas of comedy for the narratee. Ramesh K. Srivastava pays tribute to Narayan's humour:

> The greatest contribution of Narayan is his humour .... His humour is a magnet that attracts every reader, a wind that sows the seeds of pleasantry, a light that brightens a thousand faces and a refreshing cool shower of rains that kindles the drooping spirits of people and fills them with a promise of new life.[22]

Through his impish humour, Narayan alludes to the possibility that the wealth of the aristocrats had been accrued through illegal means. Nagaraj and Sita, however, who represent the younger generation of Kabir Street's bourgeoisie, are not satirized in the novel, as they live

simply and do not exhibit their opulence. Sita is the typical Hindu housewife who works industriously - cooking, sweeping and cleaning. She appears to have little time to emulate her mother-in-law's earlier habit of ostentatious dressing.

One of Narayan's limitations in The World, as well as in Talk. Man, is that he does not introduce new and challenging motifs and themes. Although his characterization remains praiseworthy because of his in-depth understanding of human nature, he misses the opportunity to present his narrative audiences at home and abroad, with refreshing and challenging themes. Instead, he sustains themes such as the conflict between orthodoxy and modernity as introduced in the first novel in 1935.

In The World Narayan highlights the dichotomy between orthodox and modern lifestyles and the tension which is generated when they are juxtaposed with each other. He shows that Kabir Street's aristocracy cannot identify with those who enjoy the hedonistic lifestyle which the Kismet hotel symbolises. The novelist also highlights the cold war between the daughters-in-law and their mother-in-law, because of their radically different habits and attitudes. In a flashback, Nagaraj recollects the domestic conflicts that were ready to surface when his brother Gopu and his wife Charu lived at home with his parents:

> When she got a feeling that Gopu was dependent

> solely on his wife, she would offer her creation to the daughter-in-law. 'Let Gopu taste this too. He will like it ...' Sometimes the daughter-in-law would agree and carry a dish to his room, but more often say, 'No, Mother, don't trouble yourself. He'll not eat it.' It was a state within the state.
> (The World. pp. 29-30.)

In this novel he examines a variety of relationships which have one common factor: their fragility. In the extract just quoted, Gopu's mother clings, psychologically, to her son, silently resenting his waning dependence on her and his increasing attachment to his wife. Charu tries tactfully but firmly to assert her authority as wife and to foster and nurture a proper rapport between herself and her husband. Thus she prepares her husband's meals herself. In a charming scene of cosy domesticity, Narayan counterpoises orthodox and modern lifestyles, cheek by jowl:

> Sister-in-law Charu was allotted her corner of the kitchen along the eastern wall. She set up a little stool, and mounted a kerosene stove on it and beside it a little platform on which she arranged a set of aluminium saucepans and ladles, etc., and she stood over her workshop, frying and sizzling delicacies for her husband. This position had the advantage that she could work with her back to her mother-in-law, who squatted on the floor in front of her mud oven at the other end, which was an age-old equipment of her kitchen.
> (The World, p. 30.)

In addition to the pictorial appeal of this extract the reader becomes aware of the cordial, yet independent relationship of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in the joint family system. Before long, however, the presence of the 'kerosene stove' and the 'mud oven' in the same kitchen,

will set Charu and her mother-in-law on a collision course:

> Mother believed that food cooked over smoky firewood in the mud oven was healthful while kerosene flame caused throat trouble. To prove it she blew her nose and sneezed when Charu lit her kerosene stove. Charu ignored these symptoms and said, 'Mother, a wood fire leads to cold and eye disease, that's what my mother used to say ....'
>
> (The World, p. 30.)

In these charming scenes of domesticity, Narayan captures the tension which arises when the older and younger generations function together, and the fragility of such relationships becomes evident. His emphasis, though, is on the comedy that such relationships generate. The critic Srivasta commends the novelist's power of observation: 'Narayan has a photographic eye for an object. He looks at it as if through a magnifying glass and catches it in its various hues' (Srivastava, p. 79). In the extracts cited, Narayan's style is direct and the images he depicts are suffused with Indianness. Another critic, K.C. Bhatnagar, praises Narayan's use of English, which contributes to his success with foreign readers:

> Narayan seems to be gifted with the English virtue of understatement with a subtle touch of irony, a thing that the English reader can appreciate more than sentimentality and moral preaching.[23]

The textual extracts quoted already underscore the validity of this statement. The Malgudi novels are popular abroad also because 'Narayan establishes a *rapport* with the foreign reader not on the ideational but on the pictorial

level', (Bhatnagar, p. 207). Narayan's humour reflects mundane objects and details in a captivating manner. His comic realism shows that although orthodoxy and modernity appear to be irreconcilable, Malgudians learn to make compromises and to tolerate different lifestyles.

Narayan highlights this point when he explores the relationship between Nagaraj and his nephew Tim. When the latter leaves his father's farm because he had been called a 'donkey' and 'slapped' for not performing some chore, Nagaraj, who dotes on his nephew, is happy to accommodate him and informs him: '"Stay here by all means. I'll be happy ...." He felt his brother was likely to turn up sooner or later and worsen the situation' (p. 38). His fears are realized when his brother arrives and bullies Nagaraj mercilessly over his son:

> 'Where is Tim?'
> 'Gone out', said Nagaraj, somewhat nervously.
> 'It's six-thirty. And he is not home yet!' cried Gopu acidly.
>
> (The World, p. 39.)

With the patience of Job, Nagaraj tolerates Gopu's overbearing attitude. Gopu launches on a vitriolic attack on his younger brother because he does not know about his son's whereabouts:

> 'What are you muttering to yourself, while you have nothing to say to me, and stand there blinking and mumbling like a schoolboy,' sneered Gopu.
>
> (The World, p. 40.)

The partition of the ancestral home, a recurrent motif in the Malgudi novels, invariably estranges brothers, and Gopu maintains a bullying and condescending air towards his younger brother. Tim, however, is adamant about not returning home: 'No, I'm staying here. I may come there for a few days, later, but now I want to be here: I am not coming home' (p. 43). Nagaraj is jubilant about his nephew's forthrightness, and enjoys his brother's helplessness. The latter's 'aggressiveness, conceit and sharp tongue were gone' (p. 43). When Tim retaliates, Nagaraj is secretly pleased. His cowardice, though, places him in a vulnerable position in his own home.

Nagaraj's patience is put to the test later when Tim, now a student at Albert Mission College, keeps late hours and frequents the Kismet hotel. He refrains from questioning Tim because of his timidity and a desire to avoid unpleasantness. Sita, on the other hand, maintains that Nagaraj should discipline Tim: she 'did not share her husband's leniency towards the boy. She felt at times that he would benefit by a sound thrashing .... He was full of charm ... and proved slippery' (p. 58). Narayan links <u>Talk. Man</u> and <u>The World</u> when he endows Tim with some of the same qualities of the 'slippery' Rann. When Nagaraj confronts Tim after one of his drinking bouts at the Kismet, the youngster attributes the odious smell to a deodorant, saying: "Some chap sprayed eau-de-Cologne on me" (p. 60). When Tim continues with his licentious lifestyle

and abandons College, Nagaraj lacks the moral fibre to do anything constructive.

Ironically, Gopu gets Tim married, hoping that marriage would instil in him a sense of responsibility, but this does not achieve the desired end. Tim continues to visit the Kismet hotel. Nagaraj's procrastination and his inability to cope with crises are weaknesses which others exploit. He also allows his nephew to capitalize on his hospitality and his good nature. He lacks the courage to assert his authority over Tim and Saroja when they take liberties whilst they are his guests. To escape becoming involved in Tim's affairs, Nagaraj settles down to writing his book on the sage Narada, a task he had postponed indefinitely, but is disturbed continually:

> ... but now one's ears were assailed with the incessant chatter and giggling emanating from the room until Tim left for Kismet (or wherever it might be) at his usual hour. Saroja then started reading aloud from a cinema magazine, followed by a sudden burst of singing to the accompaniment of her harmonium. It was this part of her programme that distracted Nagaraj most.
>
> (The World, p. 93.)

Nagaraj lacks the courage to speak to her about the loud music. Neither does he enquire about the time Tim spends at Kismet. Through Tim and Saroja Narayan shows that modernization makes youth callous, corrupt and disrespectful. When Nagaraj ignores Saroja's singing, Saroja and Tim pack up, leave Nagaraj's house and stay at the Kismet. Tim questions his Uncle brazenly: "Why did you

go away while my wife was explaining her song and wanted to sing it to you?" (p. 150.) The offence is trivial, and Tim's belligerent attitude indicates the younger generation's changing values, and the fragility of human relations.

Tim and Saroja's return to Nagaraj's house after a brief stay at the Kismet appears to manifest the cyclic nature of things. Sita explains to Nagaraj that they return 'Because they belong to this house - and [have] nowhere else to go' (p. 184). Nagaraj and Sita are elated to see the couple return, in spite of Tim and Saroja's faults.

The novel ends on an optimistic note, that of reconciliation. Nagaraj and Sita compromise their principles and adapt their lifestyles to accommodate Tim and Saroja, whose ultra-modern lifestyle has proved to be disastrous. They remain an imperfect couple, tainted by modernity. Narayan does not allow the hedonistic lifestyle, which the Kismet Hotel symbolises, to triumph. Tim and Saroja's return 'home' is ambiguous as it might indicate a renewed dependence on their elders to take care of them, or it might herald a change to the traditional way of life espoused by Nagaraj and Sita.

Nagaraj, too, has not fulfilled his ambition to write a book on the sage Narada, and the last Malgudi novel ends on this note of uncertainty. Narayan leaves the narratee free to judge the situation and predict its outcome. Malgudi remains

a good, though imperfect world, and Malgudians must learn to adjust in order to survive. Man must graciously accept the pre-determined cyclic course of his life and he must align himself with his Fate and not rebel against it. Such a course will enable him to find his true identity. Modern man must adjust to changing circumstances and endeavour to find peace and contentment in spite of the flux in the world. This is Narayan's universal message in his last Malgudi novel.

END NOTES

1. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, 'Attaining the Supreme', The Bhagavada-Gita As It Is, p. 416. In respect of reincarnation, Swami Prabhupada explains that the 'living entity .... according to his identity with material or spiritual' nature, ... receives a material or spiritual body. In material nature he may take a body from any of the 8,400,000 species of life, but in spiritual nature he has only one body' (p. 416).

2. O.P. Saxena, 'A Thematic Study of " A Tiger For Malgudi"', Glimpses of Indo-English Fiction, p. 162. In 1983 A Tiger was the last Malgudi novel published. In C.D. Narasimhaiah's introductory talk on the Indian English novel, he too, validates Narayan's use of the ancient Sanskrit classic: '...in R.K. Narayan's latest novel *A Tiger for Malgudi* this Indian English writer has returned to the motif of *Panchatantra* and made it credible', The Rise of the Indian Novel, p. 2.

3. Noel Perrin, 'Conversions to Nonviolence', The New York Times Book Review, September 4, 1983, p. 4. Excerpts quoted in Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 47 (1988), 303.

4. R.K. Narayan, Introduction, A Tiger for Malgudi, October 1982, p. 7.

5. Edmund Fuller, 'The Gentleness of a Beast and the Beastliness of Subversion', Wall Street Journal, (August 22, 1983), 14. Excerpts quoted in Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 47 (1988), 302.

6. David W, Atkinson, 'Tradition and Transformation in R.K. Narayan's *A Tiger for Malgudi*', The International Fiction Review, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1987), 9.

7. Ibid., p. 10.

8. J.K. Biswal, 'A Tiger for Malgudi - Narayan's Divine Comedy', A Critical Study of the Novels of R.K. Narayan, p. 111.

9. Anita Desai, 'R.K. Narayan and the Grand Malgudi Circus', Book World - The Washington Post, pp. 3, 9. September 4, 1983, Excerpts quoted in Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 47 (1988), 303. In this article Desai responds to William Walsh's 'theory that the source of Narayan's deceptively gentle and elusive strength as a writer lies in his "rootedness"

as contrasted to the "uprootedness" that is the theme of most western fiction', p. 302.

10. Michel Pousse, 'R.K. Narayan As a Gandhian Novelist', The Literary Criterion, Vol. XXV, No. 4 (1990), 85.

11. Ranga Rao, 'Contemplative Tiger', London Magazine (June-July, 1990), 89.

12. R. Ramachandra, 'Breaking the Borderline: A Note on Narayan's People', The Literary Criterion, Vol. XXIX, No. 2 (1994), 19, 20.

13. R.K. Narayan, 'Lawley Road', Old and New, p. 89.

14. R.K. Narayan, 'The World of the Story-teller', A Story-Teller's World, p. 3.

15. Ibid.

16. Michiko Kakutani, 'Telling Tall Tales', The New York Times (March 14, 1987), p. 14. Excerpts quoted in Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 47 (1988), 308.

17. Bruce Bawer, 'Magician of Malgudi', Book World - The Washington Post (April 5, 1987), 7. Excerpts quoted in C.L.C., Vol, 47 (1988), 308.

18. Anita Desai, 'Malgudi', London Review of Books, Vol. 8, No. 21 (December 4, 1986), 23-24. Excerpts quoted in Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 47 (1988), 307-308.

19. Gerald Mangan, 'Long-nosed News-Hound', The Times Literary Supplement, No. 4357, October 3, 1986, pp. 11-13. Excerpts quoted in Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 47 (1988), 306-307.

20. Susan Croft, 'Interview With R.K. Narayan', R.K. Narayan: A Critical Spectrum, ed. Bhagwat S. Goyal, p. 30.

21. Stephen Graubard, 'An Interview with R.K. Narayan', Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Vol. 118, No. 4 (Fall 1989), 234.

22. Ramesh K. Srivastava, 'What is so great in R.K. Narayan?', Six Indian Novelists In English, p. 74.

23. Dr K.C. Bhatnagar, 'R.K. Narayan: Myth And Reality of Malgudi', Realism in Major Indo-English Fiction, p. 206.

CONCLUSION

From the serene World of Nagaraj in which Malgudians reach that golden mean which lies between orthodoxy and modernity, my thesis goes on to summarize my evaluation of theme and character in Narayan's fourteen Malgudi novels. My study began with an Introduction which started with a resume of Narayan's literary achievements and then proceeded to outline objectives, and the nature and scope of this thesis. This was followed by a summary of the salient points to be discussed in Chapters One to Six. A brief note on terminology followed, and this was succeeded by an examination of the socio-political milieu which impacted on English education in India. The Introduction went on to incorporates a biographical sketch of Narayan, and touched on his contemporaries, Indianness, and his fictional town, Malgudi.

Then followed a chapter by chapter critical analysis of theme and character, examining the novels in chronological order, noting the evolution of Narayan's literary skills and his development of theme and character. A centrifugal pattern of themes was identified, and the study traced the progression of themes from those which are family-centred in the early novels, to those which are community-centred, reflecting social concerns in the later novels. It is evident that for his subject matter, Narayan uses his rich Indian heritage to his advantage, drawing freely from culture, tradition,

religion, moral and ethical codes of conduct, and his experiences of South Indian life. The Indianness in his novels has enabled his local readers to empathise with his Malgudi characters, and it has given the narratee abroad images of exotic Indian life. Narayan has succeeded in exploring diverse themes which are often contentious and challenging, arresting the reader's attention, and at the same time enabling him/her to recognise the universality of these themes.

Narayan excels in his treatment of the themes of marriage, religious faith and Hinduism, and the conflict between orthodoxy and modernity. He reveals his versatility as a writer in his skilful investigation of orthodox and modern concepts of marriage, marital relationships, infidelity and extra-marital liaisons. The reader is provided with a kaleidoscopic view of Indian marriages, ranging from the orthodox union of Savitri and Ramani in the The Dark Room to the *Gandharva* marriage of Raman and Daisy in The Painter of Signs.

In The Dark Room, Narayan's accomplishment lies in depicting the poignant lifestyle of a typical Hindu housewife who is married to a tyrannical husband. Narayan's portrayal of Savitri in the *Pativrata* tradition is sensitive: it shows how Savitri's lack of formal education and her economic dependence on her husband make her a subservient partner in marriage. Although this novel has certain tragic undertones, Narayan's authentic reflection of this aspect of Hindu

marriages finds favour with housewives (and others) who empathise with Savitri.

Narayan displays a well-balanced attitude towards marriage and this is exemplified in Krishnan and Susila's idyllic marriage in The English Teacher. His artistry in portraiture is evident when he captures the sensitivity of an English teacher who sees the world, and his wife, Susila, through a set of poetic images. Narayan captures their wedded bliss graphically, and upholds the power of true love and the sanctity of Hindu marriages by uniting them, albeit metaphysically, even in death. He explores the theme of love and romantic marriage most successfully in The English Teacher, elevating it to the ranks of what must surely be one of the finest exposes of marriage in modern Indian English literature.

Narayan's balanced perception of marriage is evident when he brings *Gandharva* marriages under the spotlight in The Painter of Signs. In Raman and Daisy's relationship he investigates modern attitudes of living together, outside wedlock. In a detached manner, he also portrays the dilemma of a modern, working woman who needs to combine a successful career with marriage. His typical non-moralistic and non-judgemental standpoint does not make him chastise either Raman or Daisy for contemplating an unorthodox marriage, yet subtly, he displays his conservatism by not allowing the *Gandharva* marriage to succeed in the novel. One

gets the overall impression that in his examination of the theme of marriage, Narayan displays an incisive understanding of male-female relationships, and the extent to which culture and tradition impact on any union.

This thesis has indicated that in Narayan's Indian world view, besides depending on harmonious marital, family and social relationships, Malgudians rely on the power of Hinduism to remove obstacles from their path and make them happy and contented individuals. The Lakshmi-worship scenes in The Financial Expert are classic examples of the inhabitants' supreme faith in ritual, such as the propitiation of the gods for personal prosperity.

Narayan's craftsmanship also enables him to interweave religious faith successfully with existential issues, such as man's search for self-identity within society and the cosmos. These points have been illustrated in my critique of The Guide. It has been noted that Raju's quest for a proper self-identity leads him through many illusory paths as Railway Raju, shrewd travel guide, dance promoter and conman, and fake swami, until he finds his niche in society as a true *sadhu* and saint who brings rain to the drought-stricken village of Mangal. Narayan's superb portrayal of Raju's transformation and his ultimate self-realization, earned for it the Sahitya Akademi award for being the best Malgudi novel.

Narayan's treatment of the theme of religion is skilful: In

Waiting for the Mahatma he incorporates the teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita, as they are espoused in Gandhian ideology, He retains his characteristic non-didactic standpoint and does not examine religion *per se*, but reflects the impact of the Gandhi's philosophy on both a national as well as a personal level. His masterful treatment of Mahatma Gandhi as a character in the novels, and his fine portrayal of Bharati as the ideal Gandhiist, who successfully converts Sriram to a Gandhiist follower, is Narayan's fine tribute to the Mahatma.

In A Tiger for Malgudi Narayan deals fiercely with the theme of religious faith and Hinduism. He succeeds in presenting a well-balanced view of Krishnan in his novel. He also shows that a proper self-identity, ultimate self-realization and the state of *samadhi*, are attainable goals in life. Margayya and Raju's search for a proper niche in society is linked to Master and Raja's spiritual aspirations towards ultimate union with the Divine Being. The novel is Narayan's most daring experiment in fiction, featuring a talking tiger that is endowed with a soul. The novel is also distinguished by Narayan's successful examination of the concepts of *karma* and reincarnation.

It must be acknowledged, though, that whilst Master and Raja are rare Malgudi characters who are able to break their *karmic* bondage and come close to *nirvana* or supreme bliss, other Malgudi characters who continue to function within a pre-determined cycle of existence, and who

are unable to evade the vagaries of Fate, are described as fairly optimistic and contented individuals. Narayan reflects a certain degree of disillusionment and cynicism about life when he is confronted with the harsher realities of life. This is evident in his novels such as The Dark Room, The Man-Eater of Malgudi and A Tiger for Malgudi. Yet in both his penultimate and in his last novel, Talkative Man and The World of Nagaraj, he displays a calm acceptance of life the way it is.

The view that emerges clearly is a positive one, Narayan's novels being an affirmation of life and living. Thus, even though Savitri's problems have not been resolved, she returns to an imperfect marriage and an errant husband. Chandran, in The Bachelor of Arts, settles down to a happy marriage, forgetting that Hindu astrology had thwarted his first alliance. Likewise, when Margayya's financial empire crashes, he is hopeful that he can re-start his money-lending business. Both Srinivas in Mr Sampath - The Printer of Malgudi, and Nataraj in The Man-Eater of Malgudi, look forward to resuming their printing activities, even though their lives have been disrupted by adversity. Jagan, too, in The Vendor of Sweets, looks forward to his new *janma* as a hermit, putting behind him Mali and his problems. The actions of these characters reflect the cyclic nature of life which, Narayan appears to tell us, must be accepted with grace. George Woodcock's comments on Narayan's novels underscore these viewpoints; he refers to V.S. Naipaul's

criticism of Narayan as 'a Hindu fabulist', and adds:

> But this, it seems to me, strengthens rather than weakens his power as a writer of social comedy, for comedy is not nihilistic: it demands a tacitly accepted collective view of life and behaviour.[1]

Narayan's faithful commitment to comic realism is evident in his authentic and pragmatic endings in his novels. The pattern which emerges from the structure of the plots is the anti-climactic endings which are a pointer to Narayan's realistic style.

In his appraisal of the conflict between orthodoxy and modernity, Narayan reveals the same perspicacity with which he appraises the themes of marriage and religious faith. In keeping with his comic standpoint, he highlights the comedy evident in such clashes, and focuses on the two main sources of tension, when Malgudians are faced with modernity in the form of westernization and technological and scientific advances: the inability of most Malgudians to reach a desirable level of acculturation, and to attain that perfect balance between conservative and modern lifestyles.

My study has indicated that, on the whole, it is the female members of the older generation who are the custodians of orthodox custom and tradition. Thus Swami's grandmother remains in awe of cricket, and Tate, Sriram's grandmother and Raman's elderly aunt go on pilgrimage to Benares, remaining there in order to await death and the final absolution in the Ganges - one of the most orthodox and

traditional practices in India. Nonetheless, Narayan does not chastise the older generation for clinging tenaciously to old lifestyles.

He may be commended for having documented for posterity many aspects of orthodox Hindu society in a charming and captivating manner. Saxena rightly says: 'Narayan's novels preserve for an anthropologist or social historian many features of a world fast receding'.[2] Similarly, Narayan is not judgemental of modern females like Shanti Devi, Rosie, Daisy and Commandant Sarasa who appear to adapt to modern ways more easily than their male counterparts. He allows his gentle satire and mischievous humour to come to the fore when he captures the comedy evident in their contemporary lifestyles. Like K.C. Bhatnagar one believes that

> To cater both to the East and the West, Narayan in his novels has had to do a good deal of tight-rope dancing in his Malgudi Circus and we cannot but compliment him on his superb performance.[3]

My study of themes indicates that whilst Narayan is to be commended for the universality of most of his themes, he is to be criticized for ignoring contemporary subjects such as war, science fiction, murder, politics and economics, to mention but a few.

A notable omission is also Narayan's apparent lack of interest in women's causes. Narayan is a conservative writer whom feminist critics might chastise for being chauvinistic

and sexist. The Malgudi protagonists are almost exclusively South Indian males. One notes, though, that a pattern emerges of female characters whose portrayal is challenging, such as Savitri in 1938, Susila in 1946, Bharati in 1955, Rosie in 1958 and Daisy in 1976, who act as foils to their male counterparts. Furthermore, Narayan's compassion towards his female characters, and his magnificent portrayal of the dedication of women like Bharati and Daisy to their respective vocations, will meet with the approval of female critics.

One wonders whether Narayan's characterization of males would find general favour with members of his sex for they are portrayed in the anti-heroic mould. Their judgement is often impaired by illusion, they are not generally goal-orientated and their aspirations and achievements, with the exception of those of Raju, Krishnan, Master and Raja, seldom transcend the mundane and the ordinary in life. The Malgudi protagonists are not characterized like traditional heroes, but their merit lies in coming to terms with the stresses and strains of everyday, ordinary living in Hindu society.

From 1935 to 1990 Narayan's skill in capturing the nuances of Malgudi society and the continuing challenges which its inhabitants face, hardly falter. The Nationalist and Gandhian movements, the inroads of materialism, westernization and the ideals of asceticism, are some of the issues with which Malgudians contend in their daily lives. The town itself evolves from a tranquil dwelling place in

1935, where the chief source of entertainment is provided by the banks of the River Sarayu, to a bustling business and entertainment centre in the 1990's. In The World of Nagaraj, even after a period of sixty-five years of literary creativity, Narayan is able to present Malgudi and its inhabitants from a refreshing angle; he manifests an inexhaustible reservoir of ideas for plot construction and characterization. In the 1990's Malgudi remains firmly rooted in the Indian ethos, yet it shows a remarkable capacity to adapt and change in the face of increasing modernity. Malgudi's concreteness and its flexibility enable it to accommodate increasing urbanisation and westernization and to nurture the growth of its inhabitants. Strandgaard reflects similar sentiments when he states that

> It is important to Narayan to convey to us the sense of belonging to a particular, tangible place, of being involved in the activities and concerns of a clearly identifiable community and of the interdependence of the individual member of this community and his surroundings.[4]

Rann in Talkative Man would be pleased to note that Malgudi, with its Kismet hotel, had progressed sufficiently to cater for his hedonistic lifestyle. Narayan nurtures Malgudi and develops it from 1935 to 1990 as if it were an integral character common to all his novels. Its mystique and eternal qualities continue to pervade the literary world, as Anthony Spaeth notes in his fine tribute to Narayan - author of fourteen novels, more than two hundred short stories and a set of three novellas in The Grandmother's Tale:

> In South India, friezes wrap around tall, narrow towers that lead into temples. One can circle forever, forgetting where one began. So it will be with timeless Malgudi even after its creator concludes his last tale.[5]

My analysis of the novels in this thesis confirms Narayan's creative skills: his fictional town of Malgudi is peopled with realistic characters with credible lives the world over. Malgudi acquires a dynamism and complexity equal to that found in its characters. Narayan's fluid style of writing and his graphic portrayal of Indian reality in the comic mode have enchanted readers. Narayan has also succeeded in ably contextualising myths and legends into modern settings. His masterful treatment of theme and character is the result of fine literary skills, which place him in the ranks of the greatest writers of English fiction in the twentieth century.

END NOTES

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2. O.P. Saxena, 'The World of R.K. Narayan', Glimpses of Indo-English Fiction, p. 335.

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5. Anthony Spaeth, 'Passages from India', Time, (24 August, 1992), 53.

APPENDIX

MY MEETING WITH R.K. NARAYAN

At the home of R.K. Narayan at Yadavagiri in Mysore, I posed my first question:

'What are your views on the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations?'

I had hoped to draw the calm and composed literary giant into a passionate discussion of local politics. He had sauntered into the lounge, smiling and congenial. I observed his lanky figure and good looks. Dressed in his traditional South Indian garb of dhoti and overshirt, he presented a homely appearance. There was no hint of the famous fiction writer and international 'jetsetter' he had become over the years. In response to my question Narayan's face glowed with a mischievous light. He smiled and, feigning ignorance, replied with a chuckle:

'I don't know what you are talking about. What commission?'

We both laughed. We had opted for a friendly chat rather than a formal interview and our conversation proceeded with ease. I recollected momentarily how I had coaxed Narayan by letter from South Africa to allow me to visit him. His personal response, dated 18 May 1990, was heart-warming, yet gently chiding:

> ....I am glad you plan to take up Malgudi for your thesis. I wish you all the success, and hope you will

> get your doctorate in due course. My advice would be that you do your own research to get at material for your thesis, and form your own opinion and conclusions from the texts, and not expect me to explain my work. As a general rule I do not grant interviews. I don't advise you to plan your visit to India just for the sake of meeting me....

I had of course ignored the last two statements, and had contacted him on my arrival in Bombay. I was happy to meet him at last. Earlier I had been received very warmly by an attractive, middle-aged woman who, as it turned out, was Narayan's daughter, Hema. On meeting her my mind flashed immediately to Narayan's compassionate description of Krishnan's young daughter Leela in The English Teacher (1938), and to the reflections on his own daughter in My Days: A Memoir (1973). With precision Hema had been immortalized in these works by a doting father. My thoughts were interrupted by Narayan, who enquired:

'Do you have this kind of reservation in South Africa?' Narayan was referring to job reservation for the underprivileged and lower and scheduled castes in India. I resisted the temptation to inform him of South Africa's official policy of job reservation, but enlightened him instead on the proposed Bill of Rights to be enshrined in a new constitution. He was interested in the turn of political events in South Africa, yet did not wish to become embroiled in discussing the thorny political subject which I had raised. Countrywide, the Mandal Commission's recommendations had unleashed a wave of violence, rioting,

civil disobedience, self-immolation and other forms of anti-Mandal Commission Forum agitation. Yet, in his latest novel, The World of Nagaraj (1990), these events are ignored, and Malgudi remains tranquil. Benevolently, Narayan enquired about my trip from Bangalore through Karnataka, which was in the throes of communal eruptions. I assured him that I had encountered no problems travelling to Mysore. He questioned me about my thesis and informed me where I could locate some of his texts in India. I seized the opportunity to talk about his novels:

'After The World of Nagaraj will there be another Malgudi novel?'

He indicated that he had ceased to write. I was not convinced because it was difficult to imagine this prolific writer laying down his pen finally. During our conversation it was evident that he was reluctant to discuss his literary works, but promised to answer a few questions on his novels before we parted. He intimated that he had just returned to India after spending a semester as visiting Professor of English at the University of Texas, Austin, where he had lectured in Indian Writing in English to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. I indicated that it was a remarkable achievement for a person of his age. Good-humouredly he scoffed at the idea of age being a limiting factor. He recalled discussing his novels with enthusiastic students who, once aroused, bombarded him with a variety of questions on his works.

When Narayan enquired about my travel plans in India, I informed him of my desire to speak to a number of critics. Immediately he directed me to Professor Narasimhaiah, at Dhvanayaloka, close by, in Mysore, and Narayan invited me to stay at this institution which is the Centre for Commonwealth studies in English to continue my research. I was touched by his interest in my work, and his speedy telephone call to Professor Narasimhaiah to facilitate my visit to the Centre. He requested me to return to see him before I left for Bangalore.

After an enlightening meeting with Professor Narasimhaiah, I returned to Narayan's home, eager to ask him a few questions on his novels. One issue that remained in my mind long after I had read The English Teacher came instantly to the fore. I asked:

'Do you still believe that "A profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life? All else is false"' (p. 218).

In the novel Krishnan, who is modelled on Narayan himself, makes this comment when he is overcome by desolation after his wife's death. Narayan had not re-married, devoting himself to his literary career. His reply, tinctured with some sadness, affirmed Krishnan's view in the novel that one is inevitably alone in the world. He quoted instances when one experiences loneliness in daily activities. It was difficult to imagine this humorist, who had created a host of entertaining characters in his Malgudi novels and short

stories, experiencing these feelings. In lighter vein I asked:

'Is the "adjournment lawyer" who is so delightfully characterized by you in your novels, still active in legal practice?'

He acquiesced with a smile, stating that the lawyer was meant to be a 'comical figure'. As dusk was gathering and I had a long journey ahead of me, back to Bangalore, I posed my penultimate question:

'What hopes and dreams do you cherish for India as the world moves towards the twenty-first century?'

In his typical, non-committal manner he replied:

'I am no astrologer. I cannot predict what will happen in the future.'

'Do I take it then that you are happy with India the way it is now?'

'Yes, I am. Very happy!'

He chuckled, once again refraining from discussing a contentious issue. It was time to bid farewell. I thanked Narayan for his hospitality and gathered my belongings, an unused tape-recorder and camera, - unused because Narayan was disinclined to be captured on either.

On taking leave of him, I could not contain my curiosity to

see his famous 'small study - a bay room with eight windows affording [him] a view in every direction', which had been the birthplace of many novels and short stories (My Days, p. 161). Narayan indicated that a mild heart condition prevented him from going upstairs to his study, and Hema escorted me to this room. The novelist had recorded in his memoir that in the 1950's he had 'managed to write a thousand words a day, and completed two novels and a number of short stories', in isolation at his newly built home in Mysore (Mr Days, p. 162). In his study I realized that until the 1990's the panoramic views of urban Mysore and the countryside had inspired his Malgudi novels and other fiction.

As I left, Narayan presented me with an inscribed copy of the Review Guardian, August 9, 1990. Prominently featured on the entire front page were two articles written by the author himself. 'Round trip from Malgudi', described his semester at the University of Texas, and the other 'The Tale of a Tub', was an anecdotal account of an experience in a London hotel. My scepticism that he had reached the end of his writing career was well-founded. A few days away from his eighty-fifth birthday, he had written front-page articles for prestigious newspapers. I returned to Bangalore feeling elated after my exhilarating meeting with the prolific creator of the Malgudi novels.

6 October 1990.

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