Chapter IV
SUPPRESSION OF THE CHILDREN

R. K. Narayan is a keen observer of society who concentrates himself largely on family. Family is the smallest unit of society; and children are the important part of the family. It is difficult to imagine a family without children. Family and family life is at the centre of Narayan’s most of the novels. Here one thing is to be mentioned that he has restricted himself to only Hindu middle class family.

R. K. Narayan has shown a great penetration and skill in depicting the colourful world of children. Children have their own joys and sorrows; their own fears, expectations and hopes. Sometimes their fears and expectations are not real; they are the exaggeration of their own imagination, but they feel it as the real one. Narayan’s psychological insight into the nature of the children is the secret behind his successful portrayal of the world of the children. Narayan’s thorough knowledge of children’s liking and disliking; their passive instincts; their simplicity, idiocy, cruelty; their habit of exaggeration with their high imagination helps him in portraying successfully the tender and colourful world of children.

A number of children are there in Narayan’s novels. From his first novel *Swami and Friends* to *The World of Nagaraj* one can meet a number of children. In *Swami and Friends* there are children like Swaminathan, Mani, Rajam, Sankar, Somu and the Pea. In *The Bachelor of Arts* there is Seenu, small brother of Chandran. In *The English Teacher* there is a small girl Leela, daughter of Krishna the protagonist and the children of the headmaster. In *The Dark Room* there are Babu, Kamala and Sumati the children of Savitri and Ramani. One can meet Raju as a child in *The Guide*, Balu in *The Financial Expert* and Babu in *The Man Eater of Malgudi*. In *The Vendor of Sweets* readers meet Mali as a child initially and later on as a grown up man. In *The World of Nagaraj*, a small boy Tim comes in the life of Nagaraj.
A close study of Narayan’s novels shows that he focuses on the relationships of children among themselves, with their parents, grandmother and elders and with their teachers. All of his children belong to Indian middle-class families. These children are the representatives of Indian middle-class particularly Hindu families. They represent middle class Indian culture in respect of their behavior, thinking and attitude towards religion and education. (Gor Forw.).

The world of children is very realistic in Narayan’s novels. His children are true to their types. Gor in his book *The Child in R.K. Narayan’s Fiction: A Study* rightly says that:

Critics may find fault with the characters of Raju and Maragayya, but none can raise a finger against Balu, Balu and other children who are not only realistic but universal in nature. Narayan’s young characters have come out of real earth; have real blood in veins and as such are true to the whole human race. (Gor Intro.17)

*Waiting for the Mahatma* is love story of Bharati and Sriram with a political background. Man loves his own children; he cannot tolerate other’s children, particularly if his beloved takes care of them. There is one incident in the novel where Sriram sees that his beloved Bharati has been taking care of some children in the ashram. There is a dialogue between them, worth mentioning here: “‘who are they?’ asked Sriram with a touch of jealousy. ‘Children, that’s all we know about them,’ she said. ‘Where do they belong?’ ‘Here at the moment,’ she said, and added, ‘They are refugee children, we don’t know anything more about them’” (WM 238 pt. 5). These innocent children are there without fault of them. Riot gave birth to them. Men fight for either with certain or without any reason, but women along with their children definitely suffer a lot without any fault of them. In fact much blood is shed by man in the name of religion. The concept of religion came in to existence to give peace of mind and security to man, and to bring order and harmony in the society. Every religion teaches humanity, but on the matters of religion, man forgets humanity. In East Bengal there is riot between “Hindus versus
Muslims. They are killing each other. Are you not aware of anything?” (WM 230 pt. 5) While talking about the children Bharati says to Sriram:

Don’t ask whether they are Muslim children or Hindu children or who they are. It is no use asking that; we don’t know. We have given them only the names of flowers and birds. Bapuji said once that even a number would be better than a name, if a name meant branding a man as of this religion or that. You see one child was called Malkus, that’s a melody; a girl is known as Gulab, that is a rose. These children must grow up only as human beings. (WM 245 pt. 5)

Really the little children are innocent; they are free from all the socio-religious bindings; they are like butterflies that fly from one flower to other in search of nectar, but it is the society that poisons their mind with so many other things.

Men fight for their own causes. It may be called as war, battle or riot on the basis of its nature, cause and involvement of the people. Whatever it may be, but one thing is very sure that the sufferers are women and children. What Gandhiji says about it is very important to mention here: “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. He walked through villages barefoot on his mission” (WM 243 pt. 5).

Unfortunately for certain children and women their own family is also not safe. Savitri and her three children Babu, Kamala and Sumati suffer a lot in their own family. Ramani, the father of these three children becomes a cause of suffering. He is sharp in contrast to loving and caring father like Krishna, who takes care of his only daughter after the death of his wife; and caring and responsible father like that of Swaminathan’s father, who writes a letter to the headmaster of Albert Mission School for the misbehavior of the scripture teacher in the class and for giving harsh treatment to his son Swaminathan.

In The Vendor of Sweets there are some incidents where Jagan, father of Mali tells his son how he left college when Gandhi ordered them to non-
cooperate. He tells that he has spent the best days of his life in prison. All such type stories are made by him. In *The Guide*, Raju’s mother also tells such types of stories to him. The story about a saint and drought is told by his mother, which he uses in his real life at the end of the novel. The same thing is found in case of Swaminathan in *Swami and Friends*. Swaminathan’s Granny tells him such type of stories. Sometimes these children believe them and sometimes they don’t.

Narayan’s first novel *Swami and Friends* is episodic in structure. The readers witness the antics of a group of school going children at the beginning of the novel. Swaminathan is the protagonist of the novel; he leaves Albert Mission School in the middle. In the end, he returns home, as it is Narayan’s style of finishing the novel by bringing the protagonist on the same track which he once left. Swaminathan and his friends are presented as the playing, giggling children who are always busy in making mischief. Through the portrait of child world, children like Swaminathan, Mani, Rajam, Somu, Sankar and the Pea come out of the pages of the novel as living figures having flesh and blood.

The characters and incidents in the novel act and react with one another in a very natural manner. The plot, though episodic moves in a logical sequence. The place of action i.e. Malgudi governs the plot of the novel. Malgudi provides a distinctive setting to the novel through the background of South Indian community, rooted truly and deeply in the Indian cultural tradition. Swaminathan’s teachers at Albert Mission School like Mr. Samuel, the headmaster, D. Pillai, his parents and in particular his Granny provides the adult interest. Swaminathan and his friends Mani, Rajam Somu, Sankar and the Pea add charm to school life. Narayan reflects on the naughty nature of the school boys in *Swami and Friends*. The tricks that Swaminathan and his friends play are generally played by such school-going children. Swaminathan’s reluctance for Monday symbolizes the regular school work of every week makes the students reluctant; they are unwilling to go to the class even after the freedom of Saturday and Sunday. It shows that they are forced to do the same work even though they are least interested in it. Here their interest does not matter, but the tradition matters. Narayan probes in to the psyche of the
children through these children. Children are forced to study and to go to school, for them school, subjects and teachers are not the things of interest, but forced one. In fact for students school should become a place where they should go willingly, subjects must be of their interest and teachers must be their senior friends.

The children in Narayan’s fiction are quite intelligent and witty in everything except in their studies. Every Monday is a black Monday for Swaminathan because it means the world of discipline and study and the termination of his playful activities. He becomes unhappy and wonders at the instructions of his father to study even during the vacation. Balu in *The Financial Expert* also has dislikes for the studies. Raju as a child in *The Guide* is also much similar to Swaminathan, the protagonist of *Swami and Friends*. Raju, like Swaminathan, reluctantly goes to school and instead of paying attention to his teacher and the books takes much interest in other things.

“When he is asked to manage a shop at the railway station, he accepts it gladly as it helps him “achieve a very desirable end—the dropping off of my school unobtrusively’’” (qtd. in Gor Intro. 16). When Raju’s mother tells him to study, he says that: “I’ll go out and play and won’t trouble you. But no more lessons for the day, please” (Guide 13 ch. 1).

In *The English Teacher* there is an incident in the chapter of the novel where readers meet a small unnamed boy. Krishna and his wife go to see a house for them. They meet Sastri to show them a suitable house. He sends his servant to fetch the building contractor. And he also sends a boy to keep the houses in the building open. After sometime they go to see the houses. The boy is there waiting for them there. The contractor asked the boy: “Are all the houses open?” To this question the boy replies, “Yes master.” This reply of the boy is very correct and true, but being elite his master the contractor says to the boy, “Don’t say ‘yes’! Keep them open” (ET 58-59 ch.3). The obedient boy says to his master that he has kept the doors of the houses open. Being elite the contractor do not trust the boy and suppresses the poor boy with these words: “You are a careless fool,” he added. “I will pluck off your ear if you aren’t careful!”(ET 59 ch. 3) The contractor scolds the boy without any fault of him
and it is realized by Krishna. “Why does this man bully the young fellow unnecessarily?” I reflected. “Some people are made that way. Perhaps, if a census on this subject were taken, ten thousand persons would be found to be bullying ten thousand others every minute all over the world....” (ET 59 ch. 3). Krishna wants to save the boy from further persecution so he talks about the width of the veranda.

When Susila becomes very ill she remains laying on the bed. She is unable to look after her little daughter. Susila remarks: “The poor child looks an orphan without proper attention.” She uncoiled her hair, oiled and combed it, and plaited it; and then said, “Bring that blue silk frock and shirt” (ET 69 ch. 3). Thereafter Krishna, the father of this little girl orders: “Little one, you must learn to obey your mother in all these matters, without a word....” (ET 70 ch. 3). After listening these words of the father the little child, Leela throws a painted look at him, and goes away from there to the next room of the house. Krishna hears the sound of opening of the box in the next room. Thereafter Susila, the wife of Krishna says, “Don’t be so harsh with her, poor girl!” (ET 70 ch.3). After sometime the child returns with the blue frock and shirt. She says nothing but follows the order of her mother and father without a word; this is how a culture to suppress little girls nurtured in the homes.

In *The English Teacher* readers meet another family of the headmaster where they find the suppressed children. The headmaster belongs to a middle class family. He has completed his B. A.; and he has a fine house in Lawley Extension of Malgudi. But as he loves children and wants to start a school, he leaves the house of his father and began to live independently. It brings poverty to him which disturbs his married life. His wife is not happy with his decision. She thinks that his school is a fool’s idea. So she does not send her children to his school. As a result of it the children of the headmaster wander here and there instead of going to school. The quarrel between the husband and wife becomes the cause of suffering for the children of the headmaster.

The quarrel between the headmaster and his wife reaches to a height. When his wife becomes intolerable for him he decides to cut his all the ties from the family. One day Krishna goes to the headmaster’s home and tells his
wife that it was in her hands to make life of her family happy, but now it is late, for her husband took a decision to live free. Now she is free to live the life as she wants. This news makes her very unhappy and she laments for her mistake. When some people gather there the headmaster says that: “I tell you, friends, no more of this wife and family for me. You may treat me as dead or as one who has taken Sanyas Ashrama” (ET 168 ch.7). His wife protests and cries very loudly. But he is adamant. He further announces that: She will get her money for her monthly expenses, but that is all. They will never see him here again. After listening this she pleads that: “Whatever wrong I have committed forgive me. I will be careful hereafter…” (ET 168 ch.7). He shakes her off without a word. When his children follow him, he says that: “you may all come and see me in school later. But remember you have no father any more” (ET 168 ch.7). In this way the headmaster and his wife become free to live happily, but what about the children. They suffer a lot without fault of their own. The different outlook of looking towards life and the quarrel between the husband and the wife becomes the cause of suppression of their children.

In The World of Nagaraj one meets a child Tim. He is the son of Gopu, the brother of Nagaraj. Gopu lives in a village. When Nagaraj visits, he notices that Tim goes to “a ‘pyol school’—that was a sort of mud platform canopied with thatch and straw and presided over by the local pedagogue who conducted his classes by shouting and flourishing his cane at the children who squatted before him” (WN 35 ch. 3). The teaching method of this school is appreciated by the village elders, who based their educational philosophy on the proverb, ‘The unbeaten child will remain unlearned.’ Really such old methods of teaching suppress the tender voices of the children. The shed of the school collapse in a storm and Tim has to go to town to attend the school. He has to go by bus. He has to walk some distance to catch the bus. If the bus is late, he misses it and do not go to school because the teacher canes him for being late.

One day Tim goes to Malgudi to visit his uncle Nagaraj at Kabir Street. “Nagaraj saved the boy embarrassment by not questening him too closely about his movements but took care to return him to his village in the evening bus” (WN 36 ch. 3). In this way Nagaraj takes care of the tender feeling of Tim. But
the nature of his brother Gopu is not like him. Tim tells Nagaraj that one day his father called him as *donkey*. When he asks his father what is a donkey? His father slaps him. By that time his mother is out otherwise there would have been quarrel between them says Tim to his uncle. One day Gopu and Nagaraj sit on the bench in the hall. At ten pm Tim comes home. His father rebukes him for being so late to return home. Gopu says Tim to pack up his things so they may return home. Silent Tim speaks that: “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” (WN 43 ch. 3). This statement of Tim gives a shock to Gopu. On the next morning Gopu becomes very angry and leaves his house, Nagaraj follows him till the market. Gopu say to Nagaraj that: “You have spoilt him beyond repair: you are Narada, mischief-maker. If he doesn’t want to see, me I don’t want to see his face either, …”(WN 43 ch. 3).

There is the quality of life in the plots of Narayan’s novels. There is spontaneity in the progress and the rhythm of life in the plots of Narayan’s novels. In *Swami and Friends* Narayan portrays both external and internal world of children, and both on physical and psychological levels. School and the school boys constitute the whole charm of the novel. For supremacy there is a conflict among little children. They may challenge and fight, but ultimately compromise and it makes the child world more charming.

*Swami and Friends* is full of child-world. Except parents and teachers almost all the characters including the protagonist are children of eight to ten years. Swaminathan, the protagonist of the novel is eight years old. “Then there was Mani, the Mighty Good-For-Nothing. He towered above all the other boys of the class. He seldom brought any books to the class, and never bothered about homework” (SF 6 ch. 1). He is a good friend of Swaminathan. According to Swaminathan, Mani is the most powerful boy. “He came to the class, monopolized the last bench, and slept bravely. No teacher ever tried to prod him. It was said that a new teacher who once tried it very nearly lost his life” (SF 6 ch. 1). This description of Mani clearly shows what an arrogant and impudent student Mani is! “Mani bullied all strangers that came his way, be they big or small. People usually slunk aside when he passed” (SF 6 ch. 1). It
shows that Mani is such a boy that everybody is afraid of him; the boys of his
class and the strangers also afraid of him. Mani never thinks whether the
opponent is big or small person. To him an opponent is an opponent, and he
has his own ways of treating them. The narrator gives the physical description
of this character in the first chapter ‘Monday Morning’ of the novel. “Wearing
his cap at an angle, with a Tamil novel under his arm, he had been coming to
the school ever since the old school peon could remember” (SF 6 ch. 1). His
dressing style is South Indian and the presence of Tamil novel under his arm
shows the love of the people of Tamilnadu for their mother tongue i.e. Tamil
language. “In most of the classes he stayed longer than his friends did” (SF 6
ch. 1). It means Mani is older than the other students of the class. His studying
in the same class repeatedly indicates that he is not a bright student like Somu.
Swaminathan is a good friend of Mani. “Swaminathan was proud of his
friendship” (SF 6 ch. 1). Mani and Rajam are the important characters in the
novel, next to the protagonist.

Swaminathan honours only four children with his confidence. He likes
and admires them the most in his class. “The first was Somu, the monitor, who
carried himself with such an easy air. He set about his business, whatever it
was, with absolute confidence and calmness. He was known to be chummy
even with the teachers” (SF6 ch. 1). Somu is the counterpart of Mani. He is
very strong and confident like that of Mani. But there are certain similarities
and certain dissimilarities in the characters of Somu and Mani. Both of them
are strong and confident. Both of them are admired by Swaminathan. Both of
them are not liked by the teachers. The narrator says about Somu that: “No
teacher ever put to him a question in the class. It could not be said that he shone
brilliantly as a student. It was believed that only the headmaster could
reprimand him” (SF 6 ch. 1). Mani is the backbencher of the class whereas
Somu is the monitor of the class. Mani has stayed in the same class for a longer
time; it means he is one of the most senior students of the class by age;
whereas, Somu is more or less the ‘uncle of the class’. From the above
description it becomes clear that both of them are physically strong.
Swaminathan admires them. From this it becomes clear that they are the most
dominating students of the class. They not only dominate the students of their class but also the teachers and the strangers. Their physical strength and confidence to beat anyone becomes the source of admiration for Swaminathan; it makes them physical elites of the class whereas Swaminathan, being physically weak, a subaltern of the class.

The third student of the class whom Swaminathan admires is Sankar. The narrator of the novel says that: “The most brilliant boy of the class. He solved any problem that was given to him in five minutes, and always managed to border on ninety per cent” (SF 7 ch. 1). As compared to Mani and Somu, Sankar is a brilliant boy of the class. They have remained in the same class for more than one year whereas Sankar is a meritorious student of the class. Swaminathan admires both who are physically strong like Mani and Somu as well as those who are mentally strong like Sankar. Swaminathan is neither physically strong nor mentally, in other words, he is weak both physically and mentally. Being physically weak, he has love and admiration for both Somu and Mani; and being mentally weak, he has love and admiration for Sankar.

Rumours easily spread about those who are strong and at the top; and sometimes, some of them are converted into beliefs. The same thing happens with Somu, Mani and Sankar. Somu and Mani are physically strong so students believe that the teachers are afraid of them. No teacher except the headmaster could reprimand them. It is not the fact, but it is the belief of the children of the class. There are some other types of beliefs about Sankar in the class.

There was a belief among a section of the boys that if only he started cross-examining the teachers, the teachers would be nowhere. Another section asserted that Sankar was a dud and that he learnt all the problems and their solution in advance by his sycophancy. (SF 7 ch. 1)

What children can imagine about their friends and teachers is a matter of surprise and sometimes of a shock. Really the world of children is really very fantastic.

The world of children is not full of innocence, but it is sometimes cruel, ugly, dominant, submissive and adventurous. They have their own beliefs and doubts. Some students of the class believe that Sankar is not a brilliant student.
“He was said to receive his ninety per cent as a result of washing clothes for his masters” (SF 7 ch. 1). But there are some other students who think that Sankar is really an intelligent of the class. They say, “He could speak to the teachers in English in the open class. He knew all the rivers, mountains, and countries in the world. He could repeat history in his sleep. Grammar was child’s play to him. His face was radiant with intelligence, …” (SF 7 ch. 1). For Swaminathan, Sankar is a marvel. Different students of the class have different ideas about Sankar. It shows how different children have different opinions about one and the same thing or about the same person. There are some admirers of Sankar in the class and some envy his marks. For his admirers he is intelligent and for those who are jealous of him he gets those much marks by washing the cloths of his teachers. What a fantastic imagination of the children, how easy it is to get ninety per cent of marks in the examination!

Swaminathan is such a boy, who thinks that all his four friends should come together and befriend one another. “He was very happy when he made Mani see eye to eye with him and admit Sankar to their company” (SF 7 ch. 1). Swaminathan is a weak boy of the class; he does not want enmity of anybody in the class, but his friend Mani is not like him. He lives life in his own style. “Mani liked him in his own way and brought down his heavy fist on Sankar’s back whenever he felt inclined to demonstrate his affection” (SF 7 ch. 1). Mani’s bringing down his heavy fist on Sankar’s back to demonstrate his affection shows his confidence in his physical strength. Body language of a person speaks more loudly and clearly. It also shows his method of meeting his friends, and his own sense of physical superiority.

Samuel is the fourth friend of Swaminathan, known as ‘the Pea’ on account of his size. In fact there is nothing admirable or lovable in this character except his close similarity with the protagonist. The focus on this character throws more light on the protagonist, and makes the understanding about the protagonist clearer. So the description of Samuel in the novel is worth to mention here.

There was nothing outstanding about him. He was just ordinary, no outstanding virtue of muscle or intellect. He was as bad in arithmetic
as Swaminathan was. He was as apprehensive, weak, and nervous about things as Swaminathan was. The bond between them was laughter. They were able to see together the same absurdities and incongruities in things. The most trivial and unnoticeable thing to others would tickle them to death. (SF 7 ch. 1)

The above description of the Pea shows that Swaminathan likes him only because he is like him; otherwise there is nothing in him that can be admired or loved. As compared to Mani, Samuel is very weak and as compared to Sankar, he is not intelligent. But there is one important thing in him that he is similar to Swaminathan. It is the only reason that makes Swaminathan to have liking for Samuel. Narayan purposefully sketched this character in the novel. There are certain similarities and dissimilarities in Sankar and Mani, similarly there are certain similarities and dissimilarities in Swaminathan and Samuel. Both of them are physically weak, both of them are the poor in studies. But Swaminathan is a Hindu, Brahmin and Samuel is a Christian. It is the religion that brings dissimilarity in them. In this case Samuel is the national elite as he belongs Christian religion, the religion of the ruling British government. Whereas Swaminathan is a local elite by religion, and a subaltern at national level as he belongs to India, a country being ruled by the British government.

One more friend comes in the life of Swaminathan. His name is Rajam. He is a fresh arrival in the First A. On the first day in the class he walks up to the last bench and sits beside Mani very comfortably. After some time Mani gives him a jab in the ribs, which Rajam returns to Mani. This incident shows that one more strong student like Mani comes in the class in the form of Rajam. Rajam impresses the whole class on the very first day of his school. “He was a newcomer; he dressed very well—he was the only boy in the class who wore socks and shoes, four cap and tie, and a wonderful coat and knickers. He comes to the school in a car” (SF 12 ch. 2). The above description of Rajam shows that he belongs to some rich family. As compared to Rajam all other students are poor. All the qualities of Swaminathan’s friends are there in Rajam; in addition to them he is rich too. Rajam is strong and brave like Somu and Mani; he is an intelligent like Sankar in addition to that he is a rich. Rajam is all in
one for Swaminathan. It makes Swaminathan the tail of Rajam, a great admirer of Rajam.

In the scripture period Mr. Ebenezar, the scripture master insults Hindu gods and calls them lifeless, wooden, idols and stone images. Swaminathan does not tolerate it, and he questions Jesus Christ’s existence as a god. In the consequence the teacher tries to wrench his left ear off. Swaminathan narrates the incident at home and his father becomes angry, so to teach a lesson to the teacher Swaminathan’s father writes a letter to the school headmaster. In the letter he complains the headmaster about the bad treatment given to the boys in the school. And the teacher in the school has been insulting and provoking in his references to the Hindu religion.

Swaminathan gives the letter of his father to the headmaster of the school. In response to the letter the headmaster comes to the class of Swaminathan to look into the matter. Students understand the purpose of the headmaster’s visit to the class in the period of Mr. Ebenezar, the scripture master. The headmaster says to Swaminathan to meet him in his cabin. Different reactions are there in the class about Swaminathan’s reaction to the teacher’s treatment in the form of his father’s letter. When Swaminathan comes out of the headmaster’s cabin, the whole school gathers around him. The students of the school express their different views about it.

When Swaminathan tells his four favourite friends what action his father has taken against the scripture master. All of the friends of Swaminathan react in different ways. Different reactions to the same thing indicate their different natures. “Somu was the first to express it, by bestowing on his admirer a broad grin” (SF 8 ch. 2). But Sankar, the brilliant student of the class looked serious and says, “Whatever others might say, you did right in setting your father to the job” (SF 8 ch. 2). Sankar is physically not so strong; and such type of intelligent students prefers parent’s involvement and assistance in such type of matters. So he thinks that whatever is done by Swaminathan is correct. On the contrary, Mani who is physically very strong has a different reaction to the same situation. “The mighty Mani half closed his eyes and grunted an approval of sorts. He was only sorry that the matter should have been handled by elders.
He saw no sense in it” (SF 8 ch. 2). The mighty Mani has his own method of settling such type of matters without the involvement of the parents. He says, “Things of this kind should not be allowed to go beyond the four walls of the classroom. If he were Swaminathan, he would have closed the whole incident at the beginning by hurling an ink-bottle, if nothing bigger was available, at the teacher” (SF 8 ch. 2). But he thinks that there is nothing wrong in what is done by Swaminathan. He thinks that the action of Swaminathan is quite good. It would be worse to remain quiet. Mani decides to wring the scripter master’s neck and break his back if he looks out. Whereas the reaction of Samuel, the Pea is mild, and there is reason for it.

Samuel the Pea finds himself in an acutely embarrassing position. On the one hand, he feels constrained to utter some remark. On the other, he was a Christian and finds nothing wrong in Ebenezar’s observations, which seems to be only an amplification of one of the Commandments. He feels that his right place is on Ebenezar’s side. He manages to escape by making scathing comments on Ebenezar’s dress and appearance.

Here is one important noticeable thing that the reactions of the Hindu students are different to that of the reaction of Samuel, the Pea. The Hindu religion and the Hindu gods are insulted by the Christian teacher in the class. Somu, Sankar and Mani are the Hindu whereas Samuel is a Christian. So it is natural that the reactions of all Hindu students are similar with little difference as per their nature and physic, whereas being a Christian boy the reaction of Samuel is different.

Christian Samual’s reaction is quite opposite. Christian religion is of the ruling government that is the British whereas the persons being ruled are the Hindus. In this sense all the Christian people are of the elite group by virtue of religion of the ruling government whereas the Hindu students belong to the subaltern group. So whenever any member of the elite group tries to suppress the subaltern groups; the reactions of the subaltern people are similar with little difference. Whereas Samuel being a member of the elite group finds nothing wrong in it.
On that day, the students expect that something will happen in the period of the scripture. But nothing happens. Ebenezer goes on as merrily as ever. He takes the trouble that day to plod through the Bhagavadgita, the holy book of the Hindus; but in the hands of Ebenezer, it serves as a weapon against Hinduism. In his period, his tone is as vigorous as ever, but in his denunciation there is more scholarship. “He pulled Bhagavadgita to pieces, after raising Hinduism on its base” (SF 8-9 ch. 2). Thereafter the headmaster comes to the class to look into the matter. But nothing happens. The reason behind it is again the same religious politics. The school is a missionary school run by the Christians with a mission... The headmaster and the teacher both are the Christians; and it is the matter of Christianity versus Hinduism, in such a case how the headmaster can take any serious action against the Christian teacher who abuses Hinduism on regular basis.

Swaminathan, Mani, Sankar, Samuel, Somu and Rajam, apart from these six students there some other students in the class, but they are kept in the background. Even their names are also not mentioned by Narayan. All the actions in the novel are centered on these characters. Swaminathan is the protagonist of the novel, Mani and Rajam are the major characters and Sankar, Somu and Samuel are the minor characters. Mani is with Swaminathan from the beginning of the novel whereas Rajam’s entry is in the second chapter of the novel. Narayan has devoted the whole second chapter ‘Rajam and Mani’ for these two major characters Mani and Rajam. An important thing to note here is that Mani is from the beginning of the novel, he is a good friend of Swaminathan, but the second chapter is entitled as ‘Rajam and Mani’ and not as ‘Mani and Rajam’. Two possibilities are there, one is to focus on the late entry of Rajam the title is like that or because Rajam is brave, strong, intelligent and rich whereas Mani is only strong and brave. Narayan, the great artist portrayed the world of children with these six colourful characters in a very beautiful way. All of these characters have different qualities and different personality traits. Somu and Mani are strong whereas Sankar is a brilliant boy, Samuel and Swaminathan possess the same qualities. Both of them are weak. Neither they have strong muscles like Mani nor have good intellect like Sankar.
They are just ordinary. Rajam is both physically strong like Mani and intellectually like Sankar.

On one evening Mani and Swaminathan went to the River Sarayu of Malgudi. Sarayu is the pride of Malgudi. It is at ten minutes’ walk from Ellamma Street. There is a crowd in the evening on the sand of the River Sarayu. Swaminathan and Mani sat aloof on a river-step, with their legs dangling in the water of the river. They usually go there. Soon they begin to talk about the newcomer Rajam. Swaminathan and all the boys of the school are impressed by Rajam. “There were vague rumours that he had come from some English boys’ school somewhere in Madras. He spoke very good English, ‘exactly like a “European;”’ which meant that a few in the school could make out what he said” (SF 12 ch. 2). Whatever may be the rumour about Rajam, but one thing is clear that he is a good student, but next to Sankar in studies. Many of the students could not dare to speak in English with Rajam. “Only Sankar, the genius of the class, had the courage to face him, though his English sounded halting and weak before that of Rajam” (SF 12 ch. 2). Rajam is a perfect combination of muscle and intellect. He is a rival to Mani. “If Mani jabbed, Rajam jabbed; if Mani clouted, he clouted; if Mani kicked, he kicked. If Mani was the overlord of the class, Rajam seemed to be nothing less” (SF 12-13 ch. 2). Rajam is a regular seventy-per center, next only to Sankar. There are sure indications that Rajam is the new power in the class. Day by day the rivalry between Rajam and Mani increases. It becomes a matter of existence for Mani.

Mani and Rajam also contribute to the main action of the novel besides Swaminathan. Mani who is the strongest power of the class is threatened by another power in the form of Rajam. Mani wants to bundle up Rajam and throw him in the river. This thought of Mani is very cruel and full of criminality. When one dominant is threatened by the other dominant arrival such type of reaction is quite possible. The dominant like Mani tries to protect his area and never allows the other dominant in his area. It is due to the fear of losing his existence as the dominant that makes him to behave like that. It
disturbs the innocent world of the children. Definitely it suits to the character of Mani, but it does not suit a child Mani.

Serious readers of the novel understand that nothing will happen as desired by Mani, but for Swaminathan, who considers Mani as the strongest boy capable of doing anything, it is possible. As per his nature Swaminathan is very much afraid of it. So “Swaminathan expressed a slight fear: ‘You forget that his father is the Police Superintendent’” (SF 13 ch. 2). The words of Swaminathan give a light pause to Mani to rethink the matter. But later on Mani says, “What do I care? Some night I am going to crack his shoulders with my clubs” (SF 13 ch. 2). These words of Mani show his full confidence in his strength and his careless nature. Mani laughs at the cowardice nature of Swaminathan. He calls Swaminathan “a milk-toothed coward”. Mani considers Swaminathan as a very small boy, who is not capable of any such type of adult actions. Thereafter Swaminathan warns Mani for not taking such actions. It is true that Swaminathan loves Mani because of his superior strength at the same time he wants to befriend Rajam. As Mani hates Rajam so to please Mani, Swaminathan calls Rajam as an ass. Mani asks Swaminathan why he was with Rajam? Swaminathan says that he did not go to Rajam but that ass came to him to get a pencil and sharpener. But instead of giving it to Rajam, he told him to go to the shop. He further says, “Oh, there was no comparison between Rajam and Mani” (SF 14 ch. 2). Voiceless Swaminathan, instead of defending his point surrenders to his strong friend Mani. It is true that Mani is his close friend, but even then he could not express his true feelings, for the fear of getting beaten from Mani. The above statement of Swaminathan pleases Mani greatly. For the first time on that evening he laughs very loudly and heartily. He shakes his friend Swaminathan and gives an affectionate twist to his ear. Swaminathan could not tolerate it so he gives a long howl. Thereafter there is some light talk between Swaminathan and Mani on the river-bank on that evening.

When two strong persons come together there starts struggle to keep their influence and dominance over that particular area or the group of the people of that area. In such a struggle for existence the weak is suppressed. In
the struggle of Mani for the dominance in the class on the arrival of Rajam, the weak Swaminathan suffers. He becomes a cord of communication between Mani and Rajam. They sit on the last bench of the class, and Swaminathan sits between them. Mani hates Rajam very much because he considers Rajam as his counterpart. Mani is unable to tolerate anybody as his rival in the class, writes on a piece of paper: “Are you a man?” (SF 14 ch. 2) and gives the piece of paper to Swaminathan to pass it to Rajam. He reads it; and crumples it and throws it away. Mani in the mood of fighting does not like such reaction of Rajam, so he writes on another paper with some addition to earlier and gives it to him through Swaminathan. To which Rajam gives a hot oral reply, “You scoundrel, don’t disturb me,” (SF 14 ch. 2) and crumples the piece of the paper.

All the above mentioned class-disturbing activities goes on in the class. Mani is mainly responsible for the same. After teaching, the teacher asks some questions to Swaminathan and gives him the punishment of standing on the bench, for not answering the question. For Swaminathan it is a matter of double relief. In the first case, he gets rid of from the two strong opponents and secondly, it is somewhat better punishment then to get the cuts from the teacher. It shows the cowardice nature of Swaminathan, and he willingly accepts punishment of standing in the class by comparing it with the rigorous punishment of getting some cuts from the teacher. The other important thing in the above episode is that being weak Swaminathan is misused by the strong Mani. It is Mani who disturbs the class, but the teacher punishes the weak and faultless Swaminathan. In this way the weak is suppressed by both strong-Mani and the teacher. It makes the point clear that the dominant groups suppress the weak.

There is a hot verbal exchange between Mani and Rajam and they decide to meet at the river, near Nallappa’s Grove on the next evening. Mani wants to know whether Rajam would come with guards. But Rajam comes alone without guards. Then Mani expresses his doubt to Rajam: “If anything happens to you, will you promise to keep it out of your father’s knowledge?” (SF 16 ch. 2) It is the fear created in Man’s mind by Swaminathan. Rajam promises him that he will not inform his father. Children are generally afraid of their parents,
and in addition to that Rajam’s father is the Police Superintendent. In such a case, it is but natural for Mani to keep the matter secret. It shows how certain strong children like Mani try to keep secret such type of matters; they do not want to inform their parents and their involvement. It also shows that Mani is very much confident about his strength and power; he is sure that he will do some great harm to Rajam. Similarly Rajam’s reply to Mani also indicates that he is also strong and confident and ready to accept the challenge of Mani and its consequences.

At the river on the next evening, Mani waits with his wooden club and his friend Swaminathan for Rajam, as it is decided. Before the arrival of Rajam, so many thoughts come in Mani’s mind. He thinks about different possibilities after killing Rajam. The thoughts in the mind of Mani are like a soliloquy in a play. There is a conflict in his mind about either killing Rajam or only breaking his limbs. Mani thinks that:

he was going to break Rajam’s head in a short while and throw his body into the river. But if it should be recovered? But then how could they know that he had done it? But if Rajam should come and trouble him at night as a spirit? Since his grandfather’s death, he was sleeping alone. What if Rajam should come and pull his hair at night? (SF 17 ch. 2)

Mani decides to kill Rajam. But he is not ready to meet the consequences of killing Rajam. The way, in which he thinks about the consequences, makes the readers laugh at Mani. It also shows the impact of the customs and the superstitions prevalent in the society. The thoughts that come in Mani’s mind reflect his both innocence and ignorance. When he thinks that he will not tolerate the spirit of Rajam, he immediately changes his mind and thinks that:

After all it would be better not to kill him. He would content himself with breaking his limbs and leaving him to his fate. If he should batter his head, who was going to find it out? Unless of course—He cast a sly look at Swaminathan, who was blinking innocently…(SF 17 ch. 2)

Mani’s thinking reflects his childishness. The way in which Mani thinks not only amuses the readers but also relieves the tension of the situation. After
sometime there is a creaking sound of boots; it is the sign of Rajam’s arrival on
the bank of the river. He is dressed in khaki, and carries an airgun under his
arm, which is given to him by his father on his birthday before a few months
ago. He says to Mani that he is ready to see him. Then Mani says he is late.
Rajam shoulders his airgun and fires a shot in the air that startles Mani. His
club falls down and he stands still. Rajam challenges Mani and says, “You
heard the shot? The next is going to be into your body, if you are keen upon a
fight” (SF 17 ch. 2). This statement of Rajam indicates two things one that he is
ready to fight with Mani and the other is that actually he does not want to fight.
The words of Rajam: “if you are keen upon a fight” (SF 17 ch. 2), clearly show
that he does not want to fight but he is there only to show that he is not a
coward and can accept the challenge.

Terrified Mani says to Rajam that it is unfair to bring a gun there. There
must be a hand-to-hand fight between them. Rajam asks Mani then why has he
brought his wooden club without any information about it? This hung down
Mani’s head. Rajam asks Mani why he wants to fight with him. He has done
nothing wrong against him. This statement of Rajam brings a change in the
relationship of Rajam and Mani.

Then there is some light talk between them. There is change in their tone
of speaking. Mani asks Rajam that why he called him a snake before someone.
Rajam replies instantly that it is a lie; and it makes an end of the enmity and
begins the friendship between Rajam and Mani by forgetting all the anger.
Rajam forwards his hand of friendship towards Mani and he accepts it
willingly. This unexpected situation astonishes Swaminathan. “In spite of his
posing before Mani he admired Rajam instantly, and longed to be his friend”
(SF 18 ch. 2). The friendship of these two mighty friends brings smile on the
face of Swaminathan. Though he is the protagonist, being weak he plays the
role of a silent onlooker. Swaminathan, Mani and Rajam are no doubt friends,
but Mani and Rajam belong to one class i.e. dominant group and Swaminathan
to the suppressed group. The members of such group may change their leader,
but do not become leader. Their happiness and unhappiness lies in the
happiness or the unhappiness of their leader. They do not have their own
identity. The moment Rajam and Mani become friend, Swaminathan starts to dance. Rajam pulls his gun down and Mani puts his club down. They celebrate the new chapter of their friendship by eating the biscuits that Rajam brought with him. Really the world of children is very interesting; all is well that ends well. Keen observer of the child world, Narayan shows how the little children easily forget their enmities and befriend each other unconditionally by forgetting all the past. It is rather very difficult for their parents. In this sense children are wiser than the elders.

By handling this tense situation in the most beautiful way Narayan has shown his craftsmanship. The name given to the chapter i.e. ‘Rajam and Mani’ is very apt. They are the real heroes of this chapter, and Swaminathan is mere a passive onlooker, the only eye witness of the episode. The actions taken by Mani and Rajam are manly, dangerous turned light, whereas the action of Swaminathan is mere psychological. There is only change in the mood of Swaminathan, he becomes tense initially and happy at the end.

Swaminathan’s grandmother plays the role of ready listener to him. He shares with her all his happiness and unhappiness, adventures and all the things that happen in the day. Every day after the night meal he goes to his Granny’s room and he puts his head on her lap. He feels very safe and snug in the faint atmosphere of his granny’s room. There is a close relation between the grandson and the grandmother. Swaminathan tells his grandmother that Rajam is a great fellow. He tells her the whole story which starts with the enmity of Mani with Rajam and subsequently ended in their friendship. He tells her that Rajam has a real police dress because his father is the Police Superintendent, the master of every policeman of Malgudi. Granny is impressed by listening this from Swaminathan. She is in the habit of relating the things told by Swaminathan with either some mythological stories or some stories from her real life. She recalls the days when her husband was with her. Swaminathan’s grandfather was a powerful sub-magistrate of Malgudi; the police force tremble before him. It is an autobiographical element in the novel. In his real life, R.K. Narayan’s grandmother, Parvati used to tell so many mythological stories to him; and she taught him Sanskrit language.
Swaminathan waits impatiently for her to finish the story. By cutting her story in between he says her that Rajam gets ninety marks in arithmetic. This reference to arithmetic is again autobiographical. Narayan’s grandmother taught him arithmetic. Granny tells Swaminathan that he should also get good marks like Rajam. Once again she continues the story of his grandfather to Swaminathan. She tells how his grandfather used to frighten the examiners with his answers. He writes such powerful answers that the teachers sometimes give him two hundred marks. She told that he got a very big medal when he passed his F. A. She continued the story of that big medal and how it was converted into bangles by Swaminathan’s aunt. The conversation between Swaminathan and his Granny is an important part of the novel. It gives a type of psychological relief to Swaminathan. Granny’s room is the place where Swaminathan expresses himself very freely.

Swaminathan impatiently cuts his grandmother’s story once again and says her to listen about his favourite friend Rajam. He tells her that he has killed a tiger with his gun. His grandmother agreed that really Rajam is a brave boy. He narrates the entire story enthusiastically. Once Rajam and his father went to the forest; two tigers came upon them suddenly, one knocked down his father from behind. The other began to chase Rajam; he took shelter behind a bush and shot the tiger dead with his gun. At this moment Swaminathan realizes that his granny falls asleep. He tries to know whether she has been listening to him or not, by asking a question to her.

The way in which Swaminathan tells about Rajam, shows how much he is impressed by Rajam. The way in which the grandmother and the grandson tell and listen to the stories and the secrets of each other shows the close bond of love and affection between them. In India family is an important part of the society. In most of the cases, it is found that the grandfather dies earlier like that of Swaminathan’s by leaving the grandmother to take care of the grandchildren. It is mostly due to the age gap between the husband and the wife. Generally the age gap is from five to twenty years between them, as a result of it the husband dies earlier by leaving behind his wife. She takes care of the grandchildren and there is a close bond of love and affection between the
grandmother and her grandchildren. As the grandmother listens to the
grandchildren and she is not harsh with them so she is liked by the children.
The same type of the grandmother is portrayed by Khushwant Singh in his
short story ‘The portrait of a Lady’. Such type of grandmothers were easily
found in every family before some years, but now a days they are not found
commonly, as the culture of nuclear family began to spread very rapidly in
India.

Children feel very safe and comfortable when they are in the company of
their grandmother. They share their experiences in their life with her, and by
listening to her they get the early lessons in the life. By listening the past stories
from their grandmother children try to understand and shape their future. From
psychological point of view of the children, the existence of grandmother is
very important in the house.

Granny of Swaminathan has not seen Rajam; but from the narration of
Swaminathan, she calls Rajam as a lovely boy, which is liked by Swaminathan.
He says to her that probably she may not believe in what he is talking about
Rajam, but Granny put an end to it by saying that she believes it. From
psychological point of view, who Rajam is not important for Granny, but for
her, her lovely grandson Swaminathan is important. ‘‘Oh, I believe every word
of it,’ Granny said soothingly’’ (SF 21 ch. 3). Swaminathan continues that
Rajam will shoot anyone who will call him a liar. Thereupon Granny begins to
narrate the mythological story of king “Harichandra, who, just to be true to his
word, lost his throne, wife, and child, and got them all back in the end” (SF 22
ch. 3). No doubt at this moment Swaminathan does not like his Granny’s such
stories, but its impact is deep and good also, for such stories are the with a
moral, and one can see R.K. Narayan himself as the good example of it.

On one Saturday Swaminathan sits impatiently in his study. In fact, he is
not interested in the study, but unwillingly he has to study till his father goes
out for the court. How small children like Swminathan wait for the right
opportunity to escape from the home is seen from this incident. Swaminathan,
being a small boy has no absolute liberty to do whatever he likes. He has to live
within the narrow borders of life sketched by his father. Children are generally
not so friendly with their fathers in the Malgudi tradition. As compared to the fathers, they are friendly with their mothers. In other words, they are not afraid of their mothers, but they are afraid of their fathers. A study of the relation between Chandran and his father in *The Bachelor of Arts* and Mali and Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets*, makes this point clear.

As soon as the father of Swaminathan goes out, Swaminathan gets ready to leave the home to wander. Swaminathan goes directly to Mani’s home and calls him out. After sometime Mani comes out from his home in the same way in which Swaminathan left his home. Both of them decide to go to Rajam’s house.

Rajam lives in Lawley Extension. This area is one of the rich localities of Malgudi. Rajam’s father gets a house there because he is the Police Superintendent. There is a policeman in the uniform at the gate of Rajam’s house. The policeman takes Mani and Swaminathan to Rajam’s room. It is a large room with chairs and a big table with Rajam’s books neatly arranged on it. There is a timepiece on the table, it impresses Swaminathan the most. He thinks that Rajam’s father seems to be an extraordinary man. Mani and Swaminathan are the poor boys as compared to Rajam. They do not have either such type of things at their home nor a separate room like that of Rajam. It divides Rajam in one class and both Mani and Swaminathan into the Other.

Rajam comes there, but after some time. “He had known that his friends were waiting for him, but he liked to keep them waiting for a few minutes, because he had seen his father doing it” (SF 25 ch. 3). This practice of Rajam with his friend clearly divides them in to two different classes, namely the rich and the poor. It is not the inborn quality of Rajam, but it is acquired from his father, who is a rich upper police officer. This statement makes it clear that the officers like that of Rajam’s father do not treat their subordinates with due respect and dignity. They make them wait for them. They suppress their subordinates by commanding them. The policeman at the door of Rajam’s house is also a good example of it. It shows that how hierarchy suppresses the subalterns and make the upper officer a dominant one, for power vests in his
hand. Unknowingly Rajam brings it in his friendship in the world of children and becomes the dominant by making Mani and Swaminathan the subalterns.

Children learn most of the things by observing their parents. They try to behave in the same way in which their parents behave. Rajam a keen observer of his father tries to imitate his father, an officer of higher rank. “So he stood for a few minutes in the adjoining room, biting his nails. When he could keep away no longer, he burst in upon his friend. ‘Sit down, boys, sit down,’ he cried when he saw them standing” (SF 25 ch. 3). Rajam tries to behave in the same manner in which his father behaves with other subordinate policemen, the poor boys Swaminathan and Mani, neither could understand it nor could dare to sit. They remain voiceless, suppressed in the rich house of their rich friend Rajam. The rich house in the rich locality of Malgudi makes poor Swaminathan and Mani silent observers, who are the poor from the poor houses of the poor locality of Malgudi.

The three of them talk for a while about their teachers and schoolmates, their parents, toys and games. The games of rich people are also rich, and of the poor people are poor. The poor people cannot afford costly toys for their children like that of the rich people. Rajam is the son of the Police Superintendent, so his father can afford him costly toys. Rajam takes his friends to a cupboard which is full of toys. There are miniature trains, motors, mechanical marvels, a magic lantern, large picture books and many other things. There is also an airgun which Rajam brought on the river bank to see Mani. This gun is given to him as a birthday present. Mani likes it very much and tries to handle it. The airgun of Rajam is a costly and sophisticated toy cum weapon whereas the club of Mani is a cheap and locally available thing. It indicates their economic position. Mani may have a desire to have such a gun, but his father cannot afford it. Poverty becomes one of the many causes of suppression, for the subalterns.

Thereafter Rajam asks Mani and Swaminathan whether they are hungry. “‘No,’ they said half-heartedly” (SF 25 ch. 3). In fact, they are really hungry, but could not dare to say so in front of their rich friend Rajam. Their hunger along with their voice is suppressed. Rajam tries to impress his poor friends in
all the possible ways. He calls the policeman and says, “Go and ask the cook to bring some coffee and tiffin for three’. The ease and authority with which he addressed the policeman filled his friends with wonder and admiration” (SF 26 ch. 3). Here Rajam is the only dominant elite, and Swaminathan, Mani, the policeman and the cook are the subalterns. Dominant elite groups get the early lessons of dominating the subordinates and the non-elites in their childhood. Rajam tries to dominate not only his friends but also his cook and even the policeman at his home. Rajam learns the early lessons of dominance from his father. In this connection Peyman Vahabzadeh in his research article “The conditions of Subalternity: Reflections on Subjectivity, Experience and Hegemony”, makes an important remark, “By definition, dominance brings with it subordination” (Peyman 105).

Everything is smooth inside the class of Swaminathan. He becomes upset; when he knows that his friends Sankar, Somu and Samuel are not happy because of his close friendship with Rajam so they call him as Rajam’s tail. One day in an angry mood, Swaminathan beats Samuel and Sankar and there is disorder in the class as a result of it, friends quarrel and scratch one another. The headmaster’s timely arrival restores peace again in the class. There is order and disorder in the world of little children. They need somebody to control them. The world of children is sometimes ugly too.

The people of Malgudi spend their leisure time on the banks of the Sarayu. They arrange the open meetings on the banks. People of different age groups come there for different purposes; friendships and compromises are made here, old contracts are renewed and business transactions are settled there. It is on the same bank of the River Sarayu, Mani, Rajam and Swaminathan become friends. As they become friends, it is very natural that they should visit one other’s homes.

While describing the routine activities of the school-boys, Narayan is aware of the social segregation between the rich and the middle-class. The class-consciousness comes to the mind of Swaminathan while decorating his study-room to receive his friend Rajam, the son of Police Superintendent.
Rajam’s father lives in Lawley Extension (named after the mighty engineer Sir Frederick Lawley, who was at one time the Superintending Engineer for Malgudi Circle), which consisted of about fifty neat bungalows, mostly occupied by government officials. (SF 24 ch. 3). It is one of the rich localities of Malgudi. Rajam a son of such a rich father promises his poor friend Swaminathan to come to his home. On this occasion, Swaminathan’s request to his grandmother not to call him or to enter his room so long as Rajam stays with him. It shows that he feels that he is inferior to Rajam. When Swaminathan and Mani go to Rajam’s house to see him, the policeman takes them to Rajam’s room.

To Mani and Swaminathan the room looked large. There were chairs in it, actually chairs, and a good big table with Rajam’s books arranged neatly on it. What impressed them most was a timepiece on the table. Such a young fellow to own a timepiece! His father seemed to be an extraordinary man (SF 25 ch. 3)

When Rajam comes to them he says them to sit there and after sometime he takes them to a cupboard and opened it. “They beheld astounding things in it, miniature trains and motors, mechanical marvels, and a magic lantern with slides, a good many large picture-books, and a hundred other things. What interested Mani most was a grim airgun that stood in a corner” (SF 25 ch. 3). In the above two quotations two different things of Rajam catches the attention of Swaminathan and Mani. A timepiece is liked by Swaminathan whereas a grim airgun became the centre of attraction for Mani among all the toys. It shows that the nature of Swaminathan is submissive whereas the nature of Mani is aggressive. This description of Rajam’s room shows that his father is a rich man. Both Swaminathan and Mani’s fathers are poor. The post hold by Rajam’s father, his house, the way in which Rajam kills a tiger with his gun, his room all these things make Swaminathan a subaltern, Rajam’s Tail. When Swaminathan’s friends began to tease him by calling Rajam’s Tail, it shocks him. “This was probably Swaminathan’s first shock in life. It paralysed all his mental process” (SF 31 ch. 4). What the friends of Swaminathan call him; with what name they tease him that makes no difference, but what he thinks as a
reaction to their teasing that is important. Swaminathan broods, “What was wrong in liking and going about with Rajam? Why did it make them so angry?” (SF 31 ch. 4) This reaction of Swaminathan is the clear indication that he has accepted Rajam’s superiority by considering himself inferior to him in all respect. Subalternty is a state of mind.

In fact, one cannot become a subaltern unless and until one accepts mentally the greatness, superiority of the other. The process of becoming a subalternt is more psychological and less physical. When one mentally prepares to accept the greatness and the superiority of the other by considering oneself inferior and subordinate, the process of becoming a subaltern starts from that point and which end in following willingly and happily the commands and orders of that person to whom one has accepted as the superior. Such a person feels nothing wrong in it; and the same thing happens with Swaminathan. He feels nothing wrong in becoming a subordinate to Rajam.

The actions and the reactions of Swaminathan are not the same at all the places. A child who accepts the position of subordinate, a subaltern at one point, the same child does not like the same position at another time. There is an important incident in the chapter Father’s Room. Swaminathan enters in to his class room and a giggle went round the benches. He walks to his seat hoping that he might not be the cause of the giggling. But it continues in the class. To know the cause of the giggle, he looks about. His eyes travel up to the blackboard. Swaminathan’s face burns red, when he reads the word TAIL on the board. He goes to the blackboard and rubs with his own hands. He turns and sees Sankar’s head bent over his notebook, and the Pea is busy unpacking his satchel. Without a word Swaminathan approached the Pea and gives him a fierce slap on his cheek. The Pea burst in to tears and swore that he does not do it. He cast a sly look at Sankar, who is absorbed in some work. Swaminathan turns to him and slaps his face also.

Soon there is pandemonium; Sankar, Swaminathan, and the Pea rolling over, tearing, scratching and kicking one another. And thereafter the bell rings. In the first situation Swaminathan takes the teasing of the children very lightly, and in the second, above mentioned situation his reaction is exactly opposite.
He not only slaps the Pea and Sankar, but there is a fight between Swaminathan and the Pea and Sankar. The ringing of the bell brings a break and a turn also in their fight. When the teacher comes into the class Somu gets up and says, “Sir, please let us go out. We do not want to disturb the class” (SF 39 ch. 5). In this way Somu, Mani, Swaminathan, the Pea and Sankar come to a lonely spot in the field adjoining the school. There is a tense silence for a while, and there begins a hot verbal conflict followed by a physical fight between the two strong opponents Mani and Somu. The fighters go rolling everywhere in the field. Finally, the interference of the headmaster and the peon stop them from fighting. Swaminathan thinks that “the strength that Somu or Mani possessed was not possessed by anyone else in the world” (SF 41 ch. 5). This thought of Swaminathan is the clear indication of accepting Somu and Mani as the most powerful, in other words he himself is subordinate to them. Swaminathan accepts the superiority of three children: Rajam, Somu and Mani.

There is an incident in the novel, where Rajam is found in following his father. When his friends Mani and Swaminathan come to his home, Rajam calls the police man at his home and orders him in the same way in which his father orders. “‘Hey’, Rajam cried. A policeman entered. ‘Go and ask the cook to bring some coffee and tiffin for three’” (SF 26 ch. 3). Here once again it is important to note what the narrator says about Rajam. “The ease and authority with which he addressed the policeman filled his friends with wonder and admiration” (SF 26 ch. 3). One more important thing to note here is Rajam’s treatment to the cook of his home. The cook entered with a big plateful of eatables. He keeps the plate on a table. Rajam feels that he must display his authority. “‘Remove it from the table, you—’ he roared at the cook” (SF 26 ch. 3). The cook removes it and places it on a chair. “‘You dirty ass, take it away, don’t put it there.’ ‘Where am I to put it, Raju?’ asked the cook. Rajam burst out: ‘You rascal, you scoundrel, you talk back to me?’”(SF 26 ch. 3) In the above dialogue between Rajam and the cook, one important thing to note is that Rajam is of eight to ten years old. But he talks like a commander in chief to the cook who is senior to Rajam in age. Here neither the age of the cook nor his work brings any type of respect to the cook. The same is about the policeman.
The language and the tone used by Rajam for the policeman and the cook shows that he is the elite, belonging to the upper class and the policeman and the cook readily obey his orders without any grudge, it shows that they are the subalterns. Of course Rajam uses harsh language and the treatment to the cook and the policeman to impress Swaminathan and Mani. It definitely affects both of them. As a result of it Swaminathan becomes Rajam’s Tail and Mani accepts him as his friend and not an enemy to whom once he wanted to kill and throw into the River Sarayu.

One notable thing in the above discussion is that man gets the early lessons of elite-hood and subalternity from the childhood itself. The feeling of considering himself local elite is seen in Rajam and the feeling of considering a subaltern is seen in Swaminathan; whereas, the case of Mani, a strong counterpart of Rajam is different. He is economically poor, but physically and mentally very strong. He doesn’t have an airgun like that of Rajam’s, but he manages everything with his club, a strong weapon. The conversation between the cook and Rajam needs to be studied further for the better understanding of all these characters.

When Rajam uses the words like rascal and scoundrel for the cook; he does not like it and he makes a wry face and mutters something. He tells Rajam that: “If you are rude, I am going to tell your mother.” Then Rajam retorted, “Go and tell her, I don’t care…” (SF 26 ch. 3). The cook looks up for a moment and lifts the plate and goes into the kitchen by saying that if he wants to eat he may come to the kitchen and eat there. Rajam shouts at the cook and calls him a scoundrel and a buffoon. He goes inside the kitchen and after a while returns by carrying a plate in his hand. To this action of Rajam the reactions of Swaminathan and Mani are very different. “Swaminathan puzzled his head to find out why Rajam did not shoot the cook dead, and Mani wanted to ask if he could be allowed to have his own way with the cook for a few minutes” (SF 26-27 ch. 3). The reply given by Rajam to his friends is also very interesting to note here. “But Rajam set their minds at rest by explaining to them: ‘I had to bring this myself. I went in and gave the cook such a kick for his impertinence that he is lying unconscious in the kitchen’” (SF 27 ch. 3).
The incident is one, but the reactions to the same situation are different. Up to certain extant the cook tolerates the rude behaviour of Rajam, by considering him as a child; but the moment he could not tolerate it, he leaves the place by saying him that he will complain it to his mother. To this action of the cook the reactions of Rajam and Mani and Swaminathan are somewhat the same. They think of teaching a lesson to the cook and set him right. But there is difference in them. Mani wants to handle the situation on his own; Swaminathan thinks that Rajam must shoot the cook dead, whereas Rajam says that he kicked the cook for his behaviour. Here it is important to note that being strong and having confidence in his strength Mani wants to take physical action on his own, whereas being weak, Swaminathan wants Rajam should take the action against the cook. To show his superiority Rajam says that he has already taught him the lesson.

In the chapter ‘School Breaks Up,’ there is an important situation. On the last day of the school, after the examination, “Swaminathan kept close to Mani. Because there was a general belief in the school that enemies stabbed each other on the last day. Swaminathan had no enemy as far as he could remember. But who could say? The school was a bad place” (SF 65 ch. ). Swaminathan, who dared to slap Sankar and the Pea in the class now afraid of getting killed on the last day of the school? He considers school as the dangerous place. In fact he has no enemy, but there is fear in his mind of getting killed. It shows the timid nature of Swaminathan; he does not have that much strength in him with which he can change or manage the situation. Actually there is nothing to worry about it, but as a matter of safety he lingers around Mani, the strongest boy according to Swaminathan. Instead of having trust in oneself; and in once own power, Swaminathan has a lot of trust in Mani. So he prefers to be his subordinate. On the contrary Mani has a lot of confidence in himself. He thinks that he can manage any situation and can deal with any person. Narayan shows that the world of children is also not free from domination and suppression, fear and confidence, superior and inferior and so on.
The day, on which the friends of Swaminathan teases him at the school, he comes back to the home keeps his books, coat and cap. He comes outside the home to play with a paper-boat in a water stream. This incident is small. Narayan describes it in a very beautiful way, and tries to give full justice to little innocent world of the children. He narrates it as follows:

He saw a small ant moving about aimlessly. He carefully caught it, placed it in the boat, and lowered the boat into the stream. He watched in rapture its quick motion. He held his breath when the boat with its cargo neared a danger zone formed by stuck up bits of straw and other odds and ends. The boat made a beautiful swerve to the right and avoided destruction. It went on and on. It neared a fatal spot where the waters were swirling round and round in eddies. Swaminathan was certain that his boat was nearing its last moment. He had no doubt that it was going to be drawn right to the bottom of the circling eddies. The boat whirled madly round, shaking and swaying and quivering. Providentially a fresh supply of water from the kitchen in the neighbour’s house pushed it from behind out of danger. But it rushed on at a fearful speed, and Swaminathan felt that it was going to turn turtle. Presently it calmed, and resumed a normal speed. But when it passed under a tree, a thick dry leaf fell down and upset it.

Swaminathan ran frantically to the spot to see if he could save at least the ant. He peered long in to the water, but there was no sign of the ant. The boat and its cargo were wrecked beyond recovery. He took a pinch of earth, uttered a prayer for the soul of the ant, and dropped it into the gutter. (SF 31-32 ch. 4)

The passage shows Swaminathan’s deep feeling even for the smallest creature like an ant. Definitely the incident shows the innocent nature of Swaminathan, and it also shows the strong grip of religion and customs on his mind. His attempt of rescuing the ant is full of humane feelings where as his last act of taking a pinch of earth and uttering a prayer for the soul of the ant and dropping it in to the gutter shows his strong faith in the religion, soul heaven and hell. Neither it is his intuitional knowledge nor it is taught in the school, but it is learnt by him in his first school i.e. his family. Children get the
early lessons of life from the family by observing the elderly people in the family and its impact is deep that it can be rarely wiped off. It shapes the mindset and the ideology on which they live throughout their life.

“The most enchanting thing among children is their quarrels. How they carry it on for its own sake, without the slightest bitterness or any memory of it later. This is how we were once…” (ET 138 ch 6). These words are written by Narayan in his third novel *The English Teacher*. But its best examples are found in his first novel, *Swami and Friends*. One meets some quarrels like that of Rajam and Mani which starts in the class, and finally ends on the bank of the River Sarayu. Strong Mani challenges his counterpart Rajam, a newly arrived student. Mani challenges Rajam in the class and says him to come to the bank of the river. By accepting his challenge Rajam goes there, and fires from his gun. After some talk there is happy union between them. Swaminathan:

> danced with joy. Rajam lowered his gun, and Mani dropped his club. To show his goodwill, Rajam pulled out of his pocket half a dozen biscuits. The river’s mild rumble, the rustling of the *peepul* leaves, the half-light of the late evening, and the three friends eating, and glowing with new friendship—Swaminathan felt at perfect peace with the world. (SF 18 ch. 2)

By forgetting all this Mani and Swaminathan go to Rajam’s home on the next day.

Really the world of children is very interesting one. But unfortunately it is also not free from all those things which are found among the adults. Society, customs, schools suppress the tender voices of the children. It is true that children learn by way of imitation. What they observe and experience they become.
Works Cited:

