Chapter V
SUPPRESSION OF THE POOR

There are different causes of suffering in this world and poverty is one of the causes of suffering. There are different causes like political, social, religious and so on which make a man suffer. It is true that these are the causes of suffering, but they vary from nation to nation and from place to place; but poverty is the universal problem. Even though a poor is right, he has no right. Apart from the middle-class there are some people from the poor class in the novels of Narayan. The poor are suppressed and made silent either by the rich class or by the society. It is true that there are no characters from the rich class in the novels of R. K. Narayan; but there are some occasions on which it is found that either the representative of the rich class or the rich class is the background in the novels.

At the global level, there are different religions, customs, but the whole world can be divided in two parts on the basis of sex and wealth or capital. The division on the basis of sex is natural, but the division on the basis of wealth or capital is man made. The roots of capitalism are found in the barter system, which started since the dawn of civilization. Chambers’s Twentieth Century Dictionary defines the term capital as “The stock of money used for carrying on any business: possessors of capital collectively, or their political and economic influence and interests: any advantage used as a means of gaining further advantages.” The analysis of the definition of the term shows that the possessor of it automatically gains influence, advantage and the power over those who are not having it. In other words, those who do not possess it will be easily dominated by those who possess it.

It is rather easy to distinguish man from animal and man from woman, but it is difficult to identify who is poor and who is rich. The reason is very simple, in the earlier two cases nature is responsible, but in the later case man is responsible for making such distinction. The division can be made from the
national level to local level. As Gayatri Spivak in her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” makes three groups of elite: national elite, regional elite and local elite, as mentioned in the first chapter of the thesis, the rich can also be classified into national, regional and local level. The British government and the ruling people at the centre are the national rich; Collector, Police Superintendent and Commissioner are the regional rich and Principal, Headmaster, Municipal chairman, sahukar and zamindar are the local rich.

Most of the protagonists in the novels of R.K. Narayan are financially well settled. It is true that they are not wealthy, but the pangs of poverty never touch them. Most of the heroines and the other characters in the novels of Narayan are also from well-to-do families. Narayan prefers to write about the middle class or in other words, about that class of which he is a member and the class which he knows intimately. But it doesn’t mean that there is no poor character in his novels. No doubt the poor characters like the beggars, untouchables, cooks, watchman, drivers and workers are also found in his novels. Narayan does not give them any substantial role to play in his novels; but they appear in his novels as they do in the real life and the consciousness of the middle class people.

In the novels of R.K. Narayan there are three types of the rich. Here one thing is to be made clear that the rich is not a person, but it is the class. It is the class which has its own ideology. It is the group of people who have as opposed to those who do not have. It is their mentality that makes them elite and dominant, which becomes the cause of suppression of the poor. The untouchable boy and their whole community in Waiting for the Mahatma and the class of the professors as in The English Teacher are the regional poor, the shopman and the woman who come to the shop in Waiting for the Mahatma, Mani, the cooks, the policeman as in Swami and Friends, Raju and Gaffur the taxi driver in The Guide, captain, beggars, the cousin in The Vendor of Sweets, peons and clerks are the local poor. British government is the national rich elite. The Collector, Police Superintendent and Commissioner are the regional rich elite. Municipal Chairman, District Judge, Principal, Headmaster are the local rich.
In *Waiting for the Mahatma* the boy of the untouchable community shows how the voices of the untouchables are suppressed. The small shopkeepers are the sufferers who can neither sale British products, nor remain without sale. In *The Bachelor of Arts* the question of status comes between the marriage of Chandran and Malathi. The headmaster in *The English Teacher* is very devoted to teaching and adopting innovative teaching methods, but the adverse effects of poverty are found on his family. In *The Vendor of Sweets* captain, cook and other servants and the beggar are the poor people and Jagan is like a general of military or a kinglet for them.

Shriram, the protagonist of *Waiting for the Mahatma*, tries to make the shopman aware of what Gandhiji is doing for India, who is selling the salt at the price the government have fixed, here it is important to bear in mind that it was the British government.

You might support those of us who are fighting the government on these questions,” said Shriram, “if you cannot do anything else. Do you remember Mahatma’s march to Dandi Beach in 1930? He walked three hundred miles across the country, in order to boil the salt-water on the beach of Dandi and help anyone to boil salt water and make his own salt. (p. 120. WM)

Shriram does not allow the shopman to sell the English biscuits in his shop. He gives a lecture to the shopman on it and makes him realize his mistake. It is true that millions of people have been walking on the way as shown by Gandhiji, but it certainly becomes a great problem for some poor people like the shopkeeper. If he tries to follow the path as shown by the Mahatma, it will become very difficult to run the shop for him and thereby his home. He is not a big shopkeeper who can sell only certain products or who can close the shop or who can throw the things like the English biscuits from his shop. If he does so, it will be a great loss for him which can not be compensated at any cost. Whatever Shriram says to the shopman is true and the need of the time, but it is not affordable for the shopkeeper. Even then he has to follow to Shriram. It is a type of suppression of the shopkeeper. If the shopkeeper follows Shriram or ultimately Gandhiji, there will be the question
of his livelyhood. In the present situation Shriram is the local elite with a cause and the shopman is the local subaltern, who can not raise his voice, but remain as a suppressed.

Poverty becomes the root cause of suffering for the shopman. If he does not listen to Shriram and continue selling English biscuits, other such type of European products and salt at government’s price, he will be called as a selfish person who thinks of his personal interest only and not of the nation; and if he follows the path shown by Gandhiji and listens to Shriram, then he may not be able to run his shop and thereby his home. It means in both the cases he is the looser, a sufferer.

The shopman is the double looser and double subaltern. He is a subaltern, being an Indian; here British people are the elite and Indians are the subalterns. The shopman is selling those products which are boycotted by the freedom fighters under the leadership of Gandhiji, as a national policy to free India.

Shriram talks loudly with the shopkeeper, and forces him to destroy the English biscuits. “The shopman looked miserable. What an evil day! What evil face did he open his eyes on when he awoke that morning!” (WM 119 pt. 2) These words of the shopman are very significant. They not only indicate his pitiable condition, but also his faith in the fortune. These words also indicate that the shopman is a man of subaltern mentality; instead of justifying his act, his poor condition, he begins to blame the day, and the evil face that he has seen on that day. In his Introduction to A Subaltern Studies Reader 1986-1995 Ranajita Guha says:

We recognize of course that subordination cannot be understood except as one of the constitutive terms in a binary relationship of which the other is dominance, for “subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up.” (xvi)

The words and the act of the shopkeeper are the suppressed reaction to the forceful action of the local elite, Sriram, a member of an elite group. Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up, says Guha, but here the shopkeeper is neither in a
position to rebel nor in the position to rise up, he merely tries to escape from the situation so that he may survive. The elite groups threaten even the survival of the subalterns.

When Sriram asks to the shopman for some English biscuits the shopman says that there are no biscuits in the shop. Sriram says him that he has made a stock of those biscuits then the shopkeeper says:

I swear by the goddess in that temple. I have no stock, and I swear by all that is holy I will hereafter avoid all English goods. I will fling into the gutter any biscuit that I may ever see anywhere. I will kick anyone who asks for an English biscuit. At least in this village there will be no more English biscuits. (WM 125 pt. 2).

It is true that the whole country is engaged in the freedom struggle, it is also true that the shopman is selling secretly the English biscuits; but for the shopman selling the biscuit is also a matter of survival.

There comes a poor woman to the shop to buy some salt. It is very important to note here that she belongs to that class of poor people who earn regularly, purchase groceries regularly to cook. If they do not work on a day, there can be no fire in their oven and no food to eat; they have to sleep with empty stomach. She comes to the shop to buy groceries by keeping something to cook on oven, when she comes to know that a particular thing essential for cooking is not at her home. To such people, who are hungry and with empty stomach from years together what is the value or idea of national policy of certain leaders to free India? To them to satisfy their hunger is the greatest natural policy, there is nothing wrong if they try to do so.

The woman who comes to the shop to buy some salt says to Sriram that: “The sauce on the oven will evaporate if I wait for your argument to finish,’ and, looking at the figure lying prone on the ground, she pleaded: ‘May I buy my salt at the other shop over there, sir?’” (WM 119 pt. 2) Sriram laughs at this pathetic statement of the poor woman; and says her that she may buy wherever she may like. She does not understand his point of view and explains: “I buy salt once a month, sir. After all, we are poor people. We cannot afford luxuries in life. Salt used to cost——” (WM 119 pt. 2). Sriram says to that woman that
Gandhiji has been fighting with the English government only for them. English government has been taking tax on salt that is why they have to pay so much for salt. The woman is impressed by this statement of Sriram. She says that she never knew that it is so cheap, and the shop man has been putting up the prices of everything nowadays. The poor people gathered around them agree what the poor woman says.

From the above discussion it becomes clear that at the national or regional level the shopman, known as Kanni is a poor man. But if the matter is considered from the local point of view, then the shopman is a rich man. Here it is important to note that Sriram is a local rich man. It is said in the beginning of the novel about Sriram that: “He was a good customer, paid down a lot of cash every day, and deserved respect for his bank balance.” (WM 6 pt. 1). The portrait of some queen, probably Queen Victoria fascinates the adolescent mind of Sriram. When Sriram expresses to have that type of portrait, which is there in his shop. Then the shopman says, “I know you can buy the queen herself, master zamindar” (WM 6 pt. 1). It makes the point clear that adolescent mind of local rich Sriram is not able to understand the problems of the poors.

There is a beautiful incident in The English Teacher, where some of the professors meet in the common room of Albert Mission College. In the afternoon after finishing four lectures Krishna, the English teacher rests in a chair in the common room. There is silence in the room and Krishna does not like it. So he makes a statement to break the silence in the common room, which starts a discussion among the professors of the college. Dr. Menon Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Assistant Professor Gajapathy, Assistant Professor Sastri and Professor Kumar all begin to discuss. Gajapathy, the most loyal professor, asks the staff members how they would treat a student who will spell Kant as Cant. Thereupon Dr. Menon says that it will not bother him. This reply of Dr. Menon shows his liberal attitude which is developed during his stay in America. Then Gajapathy says that there is a merit in accuracy, which must be cultivated for its own sake. Then Krishna says: “Americans spell honours without u” (ET 16 ch. 1). Dr. Menon, who has completed his Ph. D. at Columbia University, adds to it, “Americans are saner than their English
cousins in most matters,” (ET 16 ch. 1). Gajapathy with his life-time loyalty to the English language and people says, “I think the American spelling is foolish buffoonery” (ET 16 ch. 1). Thereupon Krishna says, “If we had Americans ruling us, I suppose we would say the same thing of the English people, ...” (ET 16 ch. 1). The conclusion of the above discussion is that who is the ruling authority i.e. more important; and who is correct, is least important. Though the professors are the intellectual scholars they are the poor and the subalterns in British India. Gajapathy does not accept Dr. Menon’s view that the Americans are far better than their British cousins. He tries to show his loyalty by saying that the American spelling is foolish buffoonery. Here Gajapathy’s double subalternity is seen like that of the poor shopman of Waiting for the Mahatma. First Gajapathy has been trying to show his loyalty towards England, the ruler of British India and then it’s national language English. Here gentle irony of Narayan is clearly seen in this discussion of the professors; his sense of light humour appeals to the readers while reading the defence made by the most loyal Gajapathy.

British liked only those Indians who were loyal to them. They favoured and gave chance only to those who were loyal to them. As a result of it; a group of British loyal emerged in India; which not only marred their spirit, but unfortunately created a cult of such people who later on became a race in India. Such loyal people began to live the physical life by selling their souls. This is one of the many adverse effects of colonism.

Gajapathy who is loyal to the British remains loyal throughout the novel. His loyalty to the British Principal Mr. Brown is also seen in the novel. On the day of send-off programme to Krishna all the professors assemble there to give send off to Krishna. Mr. Brown is late, and it becomes a matter of anxiety for Gajapathy. Krishna, the narrator of the novel narrates it as: “Gajapathy was highly nervous and excited, and wriggled in his chair. He kept muttering ’Why is not Brown here yet?’” (ET 181 ch. 8). On the arrival of Mr. Brown all the teachers including Sastri, Rangappa and Gajapathy rush forward to receive him. There is some light conversation between Krishna and Mr. Brown. Gajapathy joins the conversation without any invitation and tries to please Mr.
Brown. It is also one of the many attempts of Gajapathy to please his boss. Here the attempts of Gajapathy please his boss and puts him in very awkward position, but it does not make him shy; which is a good example of subaltern mentality. Subalternity is not something concrete, but it is a state of mind where a man thinks only about his boss’s or elite’s liking or disliking; and he has no choice of his own.

Prof. Gajapathy is not a poor man like the headmaster of *The English Teacher* or the woman of *Waiting for the Mahatma*; but he is a subaltern at the regional and local level. He lives a life with the fear of losing the job and becoming very poor if he does not show any loyalty towards his boss and the British. While taking refreshment after the send-off speeches when eating some sweet Brown says, “This is also a variant of *jilebi*, isn’t it?” (ET 182 ch. 8) Thereupon Gajapathy quickly replies, “I suppose so, sir,...” (ET 182 ch. 8). Though these professors may teach that man is the creator of his own fate, they remain happy in pleasing their boss Mr. Brown, who is the representative of the British and the creator of their fate. They don’t have a free will. They will do everything only to please their boss. For them pleasing their boss is the ultimate way to survive or to retain their job. “Politics need not butt in everywhere. There are times when I wish there were no politics in the world and no one knew who was ruling and how,” said Gajapathy. (ET 16 ch. 1). These words of Gajapathy are as empty as his flattery of Mr. Brown and the British.

In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Mr. Natesh, the Municipal Chairman is the local elite who dominate the local people of Malgudi. In the context of Malgudi he is the elite, but local; but in the border context he is a subaltern. He is the local leader and Municipal Chairman. He manages all the programs in Malgudi. He lives in his *palatial house* in the aristocratic Lawley Extension of Malgudi. It is the biggest and the best furnished house with all luxurious and a stylish modern touch. As he says, “I have spent two lakhs on the building, my garden and lawns alone have cost me twenty-five thousand rupees so far.” (WM 38 pt. 1).

There are only two buildings which are very costly, luxurious, and stylish. They are the palatial house of Mr. Natesh which is the private property
of Mr. Natesh and the Circuit House which is sometimes called as the Glass house, by virtue of a glass-fronted bay room from which the distinguished guests could watch the wild animals that are supposed to stray near the building at night in those days. It is compared to the Birla House in Delhi and Calcutta. “The citizens of Malgudi were very proud of this building and never missed an opportunity to show it off to anyone visiting the town and it always housed the distinguished visitors who came this way.” (WM 38-39 ch. 1).

There is a discussion everywhere in Malgudi about the arrival of Mahatma Gandhiji to Malgudi. People discuss where the Mahatma will stay in Malgudi. According to the people of Malgudi the Mahatma will stay either at the Circuit House, where the only special guests are allowed to stay, or at the palatial house of Mr. Natesh, the Municipal Chairman of Malgudi. There is a very interesting discussion among the reception committee of the Circuit House. “The dissenting voice in the Reception Committee said, ‘Is it the privilege of the ruling race alone to be given the Circuit House? Is our Mahatmaji unworthy of it?’” (WM 39 ch. 1) If the Mahatma of this nation is unworthy to stay in the Glass House, then who is worthy to stay there? To this question the answer is there in the discussion of reception committee of the Circuit House. The answer is that any member of the ruling race alone is worthy to stay in it. The Circuit House is available only to the ruling race i.e. British. The Circuit House and palatial house of Mr. Natesh are the two rich or elite places in Malgudi. These two places are of the rich people and only for the rich people. Whereas the place where the headmaster stays and runs his school, the place where the poor woman stays and the place where the untouchables of Malgudi stay are the local poor or subaltern places in Malgudi.

From the above discussion it becomes clear that the people along with the places are also divided into the two categories of the rich and the poor or elite and the subaltern. The interesting thing is that certain places and dwelling places became elite, only because the rich and elite people live there and the poor and subaltern work there. The workers in the palatial house of Mr. Natesh and the reception committee and other workers in the Circuit House are the poor and Indian subalterns. The shocking thing is that the Circuit house is the
pride of Malgudi for the local subalterns or the people of Malgudi. “The citizens of Malgudi were very proud of this building and never missed an opportunity to show it off to anyone visiting the town and it always housed the distinguished visitors who came this way” (WM 38-39 pt. 1).

The narration of these two places comes in the novel when the question arises where Gandhiji will stay in Malgudi. The Collector, who is the custodian of British prestige, says that the Circuit House is available for Mr. Gandhi and not for the Mahatma. In India people call a Mahatma to a person who has minimizes his needs, renounces the luxurious life-style and devotes his life in the service of the people. The person Mr. Gandhi has now become the Mahatma, it becomes clear from this statement. “Mahatma Gandhi wishes that no particular trouble should be taken about his lodging, and that the matter may be conveniently left over till he is actually there” (WM 40 pt. 1). In this sense the Mahatma, who has become a problem to the British is not allowed; but the British government is ready to allow Mr. Gandhi to stay in the Circuit House. Now the question comes how the Mahatma will stay in that house which is the rich; a place prohibited for the poor. So he prefers to stay at that poor place where the rich does not like to go.

All the preparations are made to receive the Mahatma, but everything is closely inspected by the British officers to take care that nothing should be there insulting to the British government. It shows how the elite have to remain alert to retain their dignity and respect and keep the subaltern suppressed. When it is decided that the Chairman will read his address of welcome on the Mahatma’s arrival then: “The collector had taken the trouble to go through the address before it was sent for printing in order to make sure that it contained no insult to the British Empire…”(WM 41 pt. 1). A lot of care is taken by the Collector to read the welcome address of Mr. Natesh, the Chairman. “He had to censor it in several places: where the Chairman compared Malgudi to Switzerland…” (WM 41 pt. 1). It shows that the Indians were not having even the freedom of speech. Though Mr. Natesh is the local elite, he is a subaltern for the British Empire. In this connection it is important to note what Peyman Vahabzadeh in his research article “The Conditions of Subalternity: Reflections
on Subjectivity, Experience and Hegemony,” says: “The local elite must face dominance that emanates from the colonial power” (Peyman 106). Mr. Natesh and so many like him are the local elites, but in the broader context they are non elite. It is true that they dominate the local non elite, but they are dominated by the British or the colonial power.

Gandhiji comes to Malgudi, but instead of staying at palatial house of Mr. Natesh, Gandhiji prefers to go to the place where the untouchables of Malgudi live. The Mahatma enters in a hut. It is one of the dozen huts belonging to the city sweepers who lived on the banks of the river. It is the probably the worst area in the town, and an exaggeration even to call them huts; they are just hovels, put together with rags, tin-sheets, and shreds of coconut matting, all crowded in anyhow, with scratchy fowls cackling about and children growing in the street dust. The municipal services are neither extended here nor missed, although the people living in the hovels are employed by the municipality for scavenging work in the town. They are paid ten rupee a month per head, and since they work in families of four or five, each has a considerable income by Malgudi standards. If the hovels of this area are compared with the palatial house of Mr. Natesh, Circuit House or any other house like that of Rajam in the Lawley Extension of Malgudi, then it can be said that the huts and the area where the sweepers live are the poor; and the palatial house, Circuit House, Rajam’s house and Lawley Extension are the rich. The dwellers of these areas and the houses are called as the poor and the rich respectively. Richness has prosperity, light, happiness, cleanliness and dominance whereas poverty has unhappiness, darkness, dirt, hunger, suppression and voicelessness.

These men, who has been living in the huts spend less than a tenth of their income on food or clothing, always depending upon mendicancy in their off hours for survival. Deep into the night their voices could be heard clamouring for alms, in all the semi-darks streets of Malgudi. Trouble-some children are silenced at the sound of their approach. Their possessions are few; if a cow or a calf dies in the city they are called in to carry of the carcass and then the colony at river’s edge brighten up. “Reformers looked on with wrath
and horror, but did little else, since as an untouchable class they lived outside the town limits, beyond Nallappa’s Grove, where nobody went, and they used only a part of the river on its downward course.” (WM 37 pt. 1). This is the background of the life of the poor untouchable people in whose camp Gandhi decides to stay during his visit to Malgudi. Most of the poor untouchables are born as the subalterns and died as the subaltern. A study of Hindu religion and the customs show that subalternity is thrust upon them.

The poor people work for the comfort and luxury of the rich. The poor people clean and maintain the houses and other things of the rich people, in return the rich people give them some money or food to survive and a lot of orders and warnings, so that they may remain in their service forever. There are some bungalows and certain rich houses of the rich people in Malgudi. There are certain rich areas. All these places are maintained by the poor people. These rich people have their own or government vehicles for their comfort, but these vehicles are maintained and driven by the poor.

The sweepers in Waiting for the Mahatma maintain the cleanliness of the rich areas of Malgudi. But they live in the very dirty place where no elite likes to go. The cook who cooks rich food for the family members of the rich people could not give the same to his own family members as seen in Swami and Friends. Reception committee members and the workers of the Circuit House as in Waiting for the Mahatma, could not give the same luxury to their family which the elite enjoy at the Circuit House. As in The Guide, Joseph maintains the cleanliness and neatness of the rich house of Marco cannot afford the same for himself and his family. Gaffur who gives a good service to the tourists, could not use the taxi for the same purpose for himself. Taxi is a means of his daily livelihood, and not a thing of comfort. Marco, who is habituated to the good service of Joseph, expects the same from his wife Rosie.

There is a chapter “The Coachman’s Son” in Swami and Friends. In this chapter Narayan portrays the miserable conditions of the poor. Swaminathan, the protagonist of the novel is very much passionate about getting a hoop. He dreams of it day and night. “He feasted on visions of an ex-cycle wheel without spokes or tyre. You had only to press a stick into the groove and the thing
would fly” (SF 66 Ch. 10). To fulfill his dream he begs everyone from his father to a municipal sweeper to give him a cycle wheel. His dream is very fantastic; one day he opens his heart to a coachman who is very sympathetic. He agrees with Swaminathan that his existence without a hoop is difficult. So the coachman says him that he will arrange it him if he gives five rupees to him. “This was an immense sum, which Swaminathan hoped to possess in some distance future when he should become as tall as his father. He said so” (SF 67 ch. 10). At which the coachman says Swaminathan to give him six paise to start with; in a short time he would make it six annas, and after that convert it to six rupees. Swaminathan could spend five rupees out of six on the hoop and the balance of one rupee just he pleases. All the doubts in the mind of Swaminathan are swept away by the coachman. He tells Swaminathan how he will convert copper coins into silver and silver into gold with the help of yoga and the suitable herbs. Swaminthan trusts it, and goes home to get six paise. He asks his Granny to help him, but she is found helpless. The same is the case of his mother. His father rejects hid demand so finally Swaminthan turns to god to help him. He asks for the help from his friend Mani but he is helpless. It shows the poor condition of Swaminthan and his friend Mani. If their friend Rajam could have such a desire he could have easily got not six paise, but six rupees. In this way money suppresses the desire of poor Swaminathan.

Anyhow Swaminathan manages to give some paise to the coachman to convert them to six rupee, so that he may fulfill his dream. Whenever Swaminathan goes to the coachman to ask about the money he put him off with some excuse. After some days the coachman says that he does not know Swamonathan nor he took any money from him. It gives a shock to Swaminathan. He tells the whole incident to his friends Mani and Rajam. So to help their poor friend they make a plan to kidnap the coachman’s son. Swaminathan has to show the house of the coachman. Till they reach the home of the coachman Mani changes his plan. He shouts at Swaminathan and the people of that locality come there. The description of the crowd that gathers there makes it clear that how pitiable condition of the people is!
A motley crowd gathered around them, urchins with prodigious bellies, women of dark aspect, and their men. Scurvy chickens cackled and ran hither and thither. The sun was unsparing. Two or three mongrels lay in the shade of a tree and snored. A general malodour of hencoop and unwashed clothes pervaded the place. (SF 75 ch. 10)

In fact these people do not live in the houses, but hovels. “And now from the hovel that Swaminathan had pointed out as the coachman’s, emerged a little man of three feet or so, ill-clad and unwashed”(SF 75 ch. 10). All the description of the people of this locality shows the poverty of these people.

There are some poor people in The Vendor of Sweets like a cook, a captain, a cousin, a watchman and a beggar. Jagan runs a shop of sweets in Malgudi. He has some servants at his shop. There are two cooks—one is the head cook and the other is his assistance—in his shop. There is a boy at the front stall of the shop. There is a watchman at the door known as a captain. He is an ex-army man in khaki. These servants serve with a great loyalty to Jagan. By putting them on work Jagan gets a good profit, but they get in return, nothing more than that with which they can survive. The captain at the door is a retired army man; once he has served the nation, but now working as a watchman. The boy at the front stall collects money throughout the day and gives his master Jagan. When a beggar comes before the shop Jagan cries: “Captain, that beggar should not be seen here except on Fridays. This is not a charity home.” (VS 12 ch. 1). Jagan is like a kinglet to these servants. By the end of the day Jagan puts a huge brass lock on the door of the shop and commands: “Captain! See if the lock is all right” (VS 14 ch. 1). He says to the captain to be watchful and the captain gives him a military salute, and that is the end of every day. The cousin who remains very loyal to Jagan gets only responsibility and nothing else.

All the above mentioned things about the poor, workers, drivers, cooks, watchman, coachman and sweepers show one thing in common i.e. the suppression. Poverty suppresses their living style, desires, hygiene and above all their voice.
In *Swami and Friends* there is an incident where Narayan shows how the regional rich or elite dominate the local poor. By observing the parents, even their children also get the early lessons of dominance from their parents and feel proud to follow their parents. Mani and Swaminathan are the poor friends of Rajam. Rajam is the son of a regional rich. His father is the Police Superintendent. After the happy union on the bank of the Sarayu, Mani and Swaminathan go to their rich friend Rajam’s home. He makes them wait for him, as he has observed his father doing so with his subordinates. After some time he comes there like his father and command his poor friends to sit down. Rajam asks them: “Are you fellows, any of you, hungry?” (SF 25 ch. 3) Swaminathan and Mani reply half-heartedly, “No”. Are they hungry or not cannot be said certainly, but their reply ‘no’ certainly indicates that they are suppressed by watching the richness of Rajam’s home. It is important to note the tone and the way in which Rajam orders to the policeman and the cook of his home. “‘Hey’, Rajam cried. A policeman entered. ‘Go and ask the cook to bring some coffee and tiffin for three.’” (SF26 ch. 3). It is important to note here 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). The cook enters 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 keeps 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).

It is important to note that in the above dialogue between Rajam and the cook, the language used by Rajam and the treatment given by him to the cook is very harsh. It does not suit to his age, but the economic disparity and the elite mentality make him to behave like that. Though Rajam is of eight to ten years old; he talks like a commander in chief to the cook who is senior to Rajam in age. In this connection Rosalind notes that: “Subaltern studies’ (Spivak asserted) does not deal only with subaltern consciousness and action; it is just
as important to see how the subalterns are fixed in their subalternity by the elites...” (Rosalind 20). What the subalterns think is more important than what they do. What makes them to think like that is more important.

Things and situations generate ideas in the mind of man. One’s consciousness and actions are governed by the situations in which one is caught. Here neither the age of the cook nor his work brought any type of respect to the cook. The language and the tone that Rajam uses for the cook shows that he is the elite, belonging to the upper class and the cook readily obeys his order without any grudge, it shows that the cook is a subaltern. Of course, Rajam uses harsh language and gives bad treatment to the cook and the policeman to impress Swaminathan and Mani. It definitely works on both of them, and further it is found that 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 as a local elite is seen in Rajam and the feeling of considering as a subaltern is seen in Swaminathan and Mani. Mani is physically strong but economically poor, it makes him accept Rajam’s superiority. Mani has a desire to have an airgun like that of Rajam, but being a poor he has to manage with his clubs. The conversation between the cook and Rajam needs to be studied further for the better understanding of all these characters.

When Rajam uses humiliating 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 “If you are rude, I am going to tell your mother.” Then Rajam retorts, “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. Thereafter 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. The reaction of
Swaminathan is important to note to this action of Rajam. “Swaminathan puzzled his head to find out why Rajam did not shoot the cook dead...” (SF 26 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). Up to a limit 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 to Rajam’s mother. It shows though the cook is senior to Rajam, but it is of no use, for power of money is more powerful than the customs. A son of rich man inherits the power to dominate the poor.

The policeman at the gate of Rajam’s house is also a poor man in Swami and Friends. Rajam’s father is the Police Superintendent, a senior police officer, who has some policemen at his command. He is a rich man, so lives in the rich locality of Malgudi i.e. Lawley Extension, named after the mighty British engineer Sir Frederic Lawley, who was at one time the Superintending Engineer for Malgudi circle. In the hierarchy of police officers the policeman at the gate of Rajam’s house is subordinate, and Rajam’s father is far higher in the position. Though he is a policeman yet he is like a servant of Rajam’s house. In this way the senior and higher officers treat their juniors and subordinates very badly. In fact, taking Rajam’s friends to his room is not the duty of the policeman, but he has to do it either willingly or unwillingly. The role of this policeman at the door of Rajam’s house is very minor. He has not given any voice, but he remains a silent sufferer.

Though the policeman is a subordinate to Rajam’s father, he is treated very badly even by the small boy Rajam, the son of his boss. The way in which Rajam calls the policeman makes it clear. “‘Hey,’ Rajam cried. A policeman entered.” (SF 26 ch 3). Not only the superior and higher officers, but even the family members of the officer treat the subordinates in the most insulting manner. They are not treated sometimes like even humanbeings also; such type of treatment given to the lower officers, supress their voices. They never dare
to speak, and remain silent like that of the policeman to whom Rajam call as ‘Hey’.

Money matters in almost all social aspects of life. To arrange marriage some things are seen of both the sides. In Hindus to marry a girl, the religion, caste, sub-caste, age, horoscope, social status and above all economic status of the girl must match with the religious, social and economic status of the boy.

Narayan, a keen observer depicts this in *The Bachelor of Arts*. In the eighth chapter of the novel there is a discussion between Chandran and his friend Mohan about Chandran’s marriage and the status of Malathi’s father D.W. Krishna Iyer. Mohan says to Chandran that the lower position of Malathi’s father can become an obstacle between the marriage of Chandran and Malathi. Mohan says to Chandran that: “If the girl’s father were something other than a Head Clerk, and given a hundred more to his pay, I am sure your parents would move heaven and earth to secure this alliance,...” (BA 71 ch. 8). Then disturbed Chandran says, “Money is the greatest god in life. Father and mother and brother do not care for anything but your money. Give them money and they leave you alone” (BA 71 ch. 8).

In the society along with religious customs and social status economic status of the girl’s father is an important thing in the match making issues of marriage. Of course, the issues of caste and sub-caste are important in the marriage, but the economic factor is also equally important. It will not be wrong to say that the caste of the rich class people is different from the caste of the poor people. In this way, society is divided and sub-divided in to different water tight compartments.

Chandran is in hurry to marry Malathi. His mother tells him that she has seen the girl but is not enough. She says that first the astrologer must tell that the horoscope of the girl match with Chandran’s horoscope. The parents of the girl must invite them to see the girl as a matter of formality. “And the terms of the marriage must be discussed and settled...”, says the mother of Chandran (BA 84 ch. 9). Excited Chandran says to his mother that: “But Mother, you won’t create difficulties over the dowry?” (BA 84 ch. 9). Cool and the experienced mother of Chandran says, “We shall see. We must not be too
exacting, nor can we cheapen ourselves” (BA 84 ch. 9). The word ‘cheapen’ used by Chandran’s mother indicates that she considers herself and her family as rich and elite. The word is used in both economic and customary sense. Thereafter the mother of Chandran says to him that if they won’t give the girl to him on the reasonable conditions, she will get a girl thousand times better than that of Malathi. She says that: “We have a status and a prestige to keep. We can’t lower ourselves unduly” (BA 84 ch. 9). After listening to these statements from his mother excited Chandran says that: “You care more for your status than for the happiness of your son” (BA 84 ch. 9). To this excited reaction of Chandran, his mother tells her own past and how her father gave seven thousand in cash to his father, over two thousand in silver vessels and spent nearly five thousand on the wedding celebration. She thinks nothing wrong in it. Rather she thinks that they are worth for more than this. Then she tells generally acknowledged truth in India that: “It is the duty of every father to set some money apart for securing a son-in-law. We can’t disregard custom” (BA 85 ch. 9). In this way maintaining the gulf between the rich and the poor has become a custom in India. Dowry, prestige, status, customs all these things suppress the father of a girl; and the most suppressing thing is that they appear true and correct to most of the people like Chandran’s mother and Malathi’s father.

Religion and customs in India are very strong. They never allow people to question them. They kept the people of certain community there where they were hundreds of years ago. For them time has changed, generations have passed, but the customs have been as they were. “Ganapathi Sastrigal who was match-maker in general to a few important families in Malgudi. He had a small income from his lands in the village; he was once a third clerk in a Collector’s Office, which also gave him now a two-digit pension” (BA 73 ch. 9). Narayan gives such description of Ganapathi Sastrigal, the match-maker of Malgudi. After the retirement from the government service he has settled down as a general adviser of certain families. He is a priest, who performs certain rituals. “He confined his activities to a few rich families in the town” (BA 73 ch. 9). He is such a man who has direct entry in the kitchens of these rich families. He
can read the positions of the stars in the horoscope. He can tell who is the *destined* wife or the *destined* husband of certain boy or a girl. Along with him the other unnamed match-maker to whom Malathi’s father shows the horoscopes are very minor, but very important characters in *The Bachelor of Arts*. These astrologers can read the positions of the stars of others, but unfortunately neither they can read their own stars nor they can change their own fortune. They remain very happy in their poverty and manage their needs with the little income.

Money is a means of making life better, and not an end in itself that is to be understood. The money which is in pocket when enters into mind man becomes like Margayya. In *The Financial Expert*, Margayya becomes mad after money. He evolves a fantastic money circulating scheme. With the help of Dr. Pal he attracts hundreds of subscribers especially black-marketiers who have made stupendous fortunes through foul means during second World War. The entire financial world of Margayya runs on credit. Where he goes wrong is in putting away bags of currency notes in the hastily cleared rooms of his house, instead of starting productive enterprises which would have yielded him a higher interest than what he has promised to his creditors. As a result, a little quarrel with Dr. Pal who helped him in building up his financial edifice, has ruined him completely making him a pauper overnight. “Money is a mixed blessing which can become a curse if not judiciously understood and used. Pursuit of money for money’s sake is fraught with grave dangers both for the society and the individual.” says Ramteke in his work *R.K. Narayan and his Social Perspective* (Ramteke 117).

The financial position of a man determines the status of a man in the modern society. It is the financial position which brings social status to Raju in *The Guide*, to Margayya in *The Financial Expert*. Who knows Raju except certain relatives and friends, but it is money gained through the dance programs of Nalini brings social status to Raju. As a result of it people from different field and of different strarta of society develop intimacy with Raju. Though as per the modern norms of society money brings status to man, it works miracles
and corrupts the man. It is true that money brings status to Raju, but the same money takes him to jail.

Educational institutes and academicians should be far away from any politics. Parents send their children to the schools with a hope that their teachers will impart them knowledge objectively; and their children will rise and shine in life. It is seen that teachers misuse class for some politics. Rich and powerful parents can raise their voice against it, but the voices of the poor parents are suppressed. The poor may speak or complain, but nobody will listen or take action. In the first chapter ‘Monday Morning’ of *Swami and Friends*, Swaminathan opposes the scripture teacher Mr. Ebenezer for his attack on Hindu religion and gods. He tries to inculcate on the tender minds of the students how Lord Jesus is great and real. Being a Brahmin boy, Swaminathan opposes it in the class and tells about it to his father. Swaminathan’s father does not like it so he writes a letter to the headmaster of Albert Mission School. The letter is divided into three paragraphs. A close study of the language and the tone of the letter show voicelessness of the poor. In the first paragraph of the letter Swaminathan’s father writes:

SIR,

I beg to inform you that my son Swaminathan of the First Form, A section, was assaulted by his scripture master yesterday in a fanatical rage. I hear that he is always most insulting and provoking in his references to the Hindu religion. It is bound to have a bad effect upon the boys. This is not the place for me to dwell upon the necessity for toleration in these matters. (SF 5 ch. 1)

The word ‘beg’ in it at the outset of the letter shows that he considers himself the most miserable and poor, and the headmaster of the school as the superior. The words “I hear that he is always most insulting and provoking in his references to the Hindu religion” (SF 5 ch. 1), make one more thing clear, that it is not the first time that the teacher is insulting the Hindu religion, but it is his regular practice of doing the same. It is not the personal attitude of the teacher Mr. Ebenezer, but it is the general mentality of the British people. It is a part of colonism. The British people came to India with a thought that they are
the superior and Indians are the savage, uncivilised. Religion is one of the most sensitive and sentimental things for the Indians.

Indians are very much proud of Hinduism, as it is the oldest religion of the world. To them Hinduism is not only a religion, but a guiding principle in the journey life. The Indians, in general can tolerate up to certain extent any kind of loss, but they can not tolerate anything against the religion and the gods. The loss of liberty is not a great thing for the Indians, but anything against the religion and the gods is not a tolerable thing for them.

Both the British and the Indians are firm on their views that their own religions are the great and their own gods are the real and great. In fact, school is not a place where students should be taught to be religious nor certain things should be imposed on them; on the contrary, they should be made more sensible, sane, open-minded good human beings who may be able to distinguish between good and bad and able to choose the right one.

Swaminathan’s father is aware about the effects of the things taught in the class. Writing a letter to the headmaster on the complaint of the son about the harsh treatment given by the teacher is a sign of a good parent. But throughout the novel, the father of Swaminathan writes only one letter to the headmaster and that to on the matter of religion, and not about his studies or presenty or academic progress. The matters of religion are of out most importance than the academic things.

In the second paragraph the father writes: “I am also informed that when my son got up to have a few doubts cleared, he was roughly handled by the same teacher. His ears were still red when he came home last evening” (SF 5 ch. 1). These lines make certain points clear. They are: first children inform only certain things at home, and particularly the bad treatment given by their teachers; second, the words ‘he was roughly handled by the same teacher’ show that the teacher is ‘handling the things’ and not the students or children. On the earlier day Swaminathan tried to oppose Mr. Ebenezar, who talked ill about Hindu religion and Hindu gods. As a punishment Mr. Ebenezar “tried to wrench his left ear off” (SF 4 ch. 1). As a result of it Swaminathan’s father writes: “His ears were still red when he came home last evening” (SF 5 ch. 1).
It shows that British people were not liberal on the matter of religion. They like only those who accept whatever they say without question otherwise they will punish like Swaminathan whosoever questions them.

In the third paragraph of the letter Swaminathan’s father writes:

The one conclusion that I can come to is that you do not want non-Christian boys in your school. If it is so, you may kindly inform us as we are quite willing to withdraw our boys and send them elsewhere. I may remind you that Albert Mission School is not the only school that this town, Malgudi, possesses. I hope you will be kind enough to inquire into the matter and favour me with a reply. If not, I regret to inform you, I shall be constrained to draw the attention of higher authorities to these unchristian practices. (SF 5 ch. 1)

From the treatment given to Swaminathan, his father comes to the conclusion that the missionary schools are not suitable for the non-christian children, but they are mainly for the Christians. The purpose of such schools was the same; in fact, the word *mission* implies the same.

The complimentary close of the letter also needs attention. Here the father writes: “I have the honour to be, Sir, Your most obedient servant, W. T. SRINIVASAN” (SF 5 ch. 1). In fact, Mr. Srinivasan is not a direct servant of the headmaster of Albert Mission School, nor he is the subordient employee of the headmaster. He is a clerk at the court, even then he calls himself as the ‘most obedient servant,’ it shows that being an Indian he considers himself a servant. It was the general tendency of the common Indians then that they considered themselves as the servants or the subalters. Indians were suppressed by the British, without giving any liberty to them. British people imposed their eliteness on Indians in all possible ways and forced Indians to think that they are subalters. Most of the Indians tried to show their loyalty towards their masters, the British, due to the fear of getting some trouble from the British. Power and domination vest in the hands of the rich, which generates fear and suppression among the poor.

On the international level, during the period of British rule in India; England was the rich country and India was the poor country. Being elite then,
the British people thought that they are the only civilised in the world. They have set out to make the world civilize. They considered the native Indians as the slaves, the poor. They moved and ruled India by considering and unfortunately by making some of the Indians believe that they are rich in all respect, either it may be education, culture, language, manners and so on. The impact of it is so deep that even today also some of the Indians consider the same as the truth. But fortunately some of the Indian scholars and writers thought that whatever is inculcated on the Indians is not the truth. They studied the matter seriously and to their great surprise they understood so many new things which are not as they are shown to the Indians. Some of the best examples of it are seen in the novels of Narayan.

R. K. Narayan, in his first novel *Swami and Friends*, comments on the matter of civilization; in a very artistic manner, through the speech of “an earnest-looking man clad in khaddar”, in the chapter ‘Broken Panes’. The occasion is the protest against the arrest of Gauri Sankar, a prominent political worker of Bombay, on 15th of August 1930. By chance Swaminathan and his friend Mani are there on the bank of the river and they listen the speech. The leader in the khaddar addresses the people of Malgudi:

> Let us remember our heritage. Have we forgotten the glorious periods of Ramayana and Mahabharata? This is the country that has given the world a Kalidas, a Buddha, a Sankara. Our ships sailed the high seas and we had reached the height of civilization when the Englishman ate raw flesh and wandered in the jungles, nude. But now what are we?

(SF 94-95 ch. 12)

The speaker pauses for a moment and says something on the inspiration of the moment, till he gathers his thoughts, and again he continues:

> we are slaves of slaves… ‘Just think for a while. We are three hundred and thirty-six millions, and our land is as big as Europe minus Russia. England is no bigger than our Madras Presidency and is inhabited by a handful of white rogues and is thousands of miles away. Yet we bow in homage before the Englishman! Why are we become, through no fault of our own, docile and timid? It is the bureaucracy that has made us so, by intimidation and starvation. You need not do more. Let every Indian
spit on England, and the quantity of the saliva will be enough to drown England…’ (SF 95 ch. 12)

The speech of the person is very interesting one. One more interesting thing is that Narayan does not mention the name of the speaker, but he simply says “an earnest-looking man clad in khaddar’… The description of the speaker can be divided in to two parts, one is ‘an earnest-looking man’ and ‘clad in khaddar.’ Apparently the speaker is a serious and trustworthy man and his khaddar also speaks a lot about his truthfulness, patriotism; and he is a true follower of Mahatma Gandhi. A serious and impartial study of history also says that whatever is taught and done by the British is not correct in the fullest sense. They taught and done the things in their own interest only, of course certain things done by them are good, but majority of them are fully loaded with a intention to rule India.

The speaker says the mob to recall the past glory of India and the glorious heritage of India. It is the godly land, where the kings like Rama sacrificed so many things only for the sake of truth. The other example of such king is told by Swaminathan’s Granny. She tells “the story of 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). Further the speaker tells the public gathered there on the river bank to remember the bravery and the knowledge as told in the Mahabharata. He tells that it is the land of the great poet like Kalidasa; it is the land of Buddha, who gave the message of kindness, sympathy and forgiveness to the world. He continues: “Our ships sailed the high seas and we had reached the height of civilization when the Englishman ate raw flesh and wandered in the jungles, nude” (SF 94-95 ch. 12). These words of the speaker are very significant. The speech of the speaker shows that India is not a poor country as considered or as shown by the British; but it is a rich country with glorious past. As a result of the freedom struggle, free India became a dream of every Indian. The protagonist of Waiting for the Mahatma, Sriram says to the Mahatma that: ‘It is my greatest desire in life to take a vow to oust the British from India’ (WM 77 pt. 1). In the context of the novel, it is the superficial desire of Sriram, but it is the true desire of the Mahatma, the other great leaders
of his time and their thousands of true followers. As a result of their struggle India became free.

A close study of these poor characters in the novels of Narayan shows that they have neither potential nor desire to break shell of poverty. They will remain there inside the egg unless and until they break the shell. The people of the rich class have been using their skills, energy and time for their own profit. Unless they won’t realise it they will remain like the slaves serving their masters, following the orders of their masters. They are born as the subalterns and will remain as the subaltern. Their masters will suppress them and they will remain happily voiceless.
Works Cited:


