CHAPTER III
TRANSCENDENTAL REALITY

3.1. General

To be born in India, a country of rich cultural heritage, spiritual wealth and glorious past, may be a boon granted to one, for one will be exposed right from one’s infancy to a spiritual environment, where Indian epics and puranas are perpetually discussed. The Indian epics are filled with spiritual wealth, practical wisdom and psychological insight. Hinting at the common tradition of the Indian people, Narayan aptly observes: “The impact of life, the material and the substance of our thought are the same everywhere, in any state. Traditionally, India is the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas. The values remain the same in every village, town or city” (qtd. in Sharan, 1993:331). Every child in India is exposed to this spiritual treasure through various ways. It may be in the form of a tale at bedtime, a grandmother’s tale, a play, a dance drama, a scholarly discussion or a film. It may enable him to draw lessons from them, which could be applied to various life situations in the future. Perhaps as a result of various Karmas in the previous births some may be born in families, which are conducive to spiritual learning. R.K.Narayan belongs to that category. He was brought up in a family where utmost importance was given to religion. He makes it very clear in his memoir My Days. He says: “Next to religion, education was the most compulsive force in a family like ours” (1986:53).

Every human being is said to be caught in the web of Maya in the material world, where the pull is always towards sensuous pleasures, though
they are of absolutely temporary nature. But the struggle goes on and on for more and more sense gratification. In the course of this mad rush everybody forgets the purpose behind human birth. Human birth is said to be a very rare opportunity granted to a living entity with a very definite purpose of going back to godhead. But by nature human beings are rational beings. So naturally every individual may try to demand evidence behind anything transcendental and indulge in mundane arguments. It is stated in *Mahabharata*, Bhisma Parva 5.22

> acintyah khalu ye bhava
> na tams tarkena yojayet
> prakrtibhyah param yac ca
> tad acintyasya laksanam

(Anything transcendental to material nature is called inconceivable, whereas arguments are all mundane. Since mundane arguments cannot touch transcendental subject matters, one should not try to understand transcendental subjects through mundane arguments.) (Prabhupada, *Srila Prabhupada Slokas (Slokas)* 1998:386).

It is a naked truth that every human being at some time or the other in his life is confronted with the question whether God exists or not. Though one may be well versed in all *The Vedas, The Upanishads, The Epics* and *The Puranas*, he may also face this problem, for the Supreme reality is beyond human perception. But if it is based on enquiry, there will be conviction that there is a supreme power behind all that one perceives. The first step that
may lead to this conviction is the answer to the inquiry ‘who am I?’ It is said that the moment one gets the right answer as, ‘I am not this body but a spirit soul’, the major hurdle is over towards one’s spiritual journey. Narayan got this realization as a result of a great personal tragedy of losing his dear wife, Rajam, who almost became a part of his self, though they lived together only for a short period of about four years. It also resulted in the creation of one of the most popular novels of Narayan, *The English Teacher*, in which he has given expression to his thoughts and experiences associated with his wife, alive and dead.

3.2. Turning Point

*The English Teacher* (originally titled as *Grateful to Life and Death*), indeed, initiated a turning point in Narayan’s philosophy of life and creative writing. Commenting on this novel, Suryanarayana Murti aptly remarks: “It marks the turning point in Narayan’s line of thinking” (1987:130). Though *The Dark Room* is the third novel of Narayan chronologically, *The English Teacher* forms continuity with the first two by virtue of it being autobiographical. Narayan depicts his childhood in *Swami and Friends*, adolescence in *The Bachelor of Arts* and married life in *The English Teacher*. So Chandran, the hero of *The Bachelor of Arts*, is grown up Swami who is the hero of *Swami and Friends*, and Krishna, the hero of *The English Teacher*, is married Chandran. In his captivating autobiography *My Days*, Narayan confesses:
More than any other book, *The English Teacher* is autobiographical in content, very little part of it being fiction. The "English teacher" of the novel, Krishna, is a fictional character in the fictional city of Malgudi; but he goes through the same experience I had gone through, and he calls his wife Susila, and the child is Leela instead of Hema. The toll that typhoid took and all the desolation that followed, with a child to look after, and the psychic adjustments, are based on my own experience.

(1986:134-135)

There is a fundamental difference between what one visualizes and what one experiences. It is true in the case of Narayan. Though Narayan had a very clear idea about the Hindu philosophical thoughts, the most vital element of it being the eternal nature of the human soul, he could experience it fully only after he lost his wife. In other words, though Narayan had knowledge of the eternal nature of the human soul, he got an opportunity to confirm it only when he could communicate with the spirit of his wife. Narayan, in fact, tries to establish the eternal nature of the human soul in the second half of this novel. His words in *My Days* confirm it. "That book falls in two parts—one is domestic life and the other half is spiritual" (1986:135).

Though one has got a fairly good spiritual background and awareness about the existence of God, one's faith in divinity may not be complete. It is mainly because he cannot perceive God through his senses, which are imperfect. The remark made by Susila while sending messages to her
husband through 'automatic writing' regarding his inability to believe in the existence of her spirit soul may establish this point. She asks: ‘... How can you believe what you can’t see?’ (*The English Teacher* (Teacher) 1946:116).

It sometimes happens that some get the realization of the Supreme as a result of a great personal tragedy or through pure devotion to the Lord. In the case of Narayan, he could get the realization about the eternity of the soul as a result of a shattering experience of losing his beloved, Rajam. Sundaram rightly points out "Rajam’s death was for Narayan both a shattering and, as it proved, the most rewarding experience. Passing through the dark valley of the shadow of death, he emerged a fuller and a wiser man" (1973:22). His faith in the existence of the spirit soul, caused by this realization, has influenced his philosophy of life considerably and it is well reflected in *The English Teacher* and the subsequent novels.

Almost every other human being in the material world becomes terribly frightened, nervous and bewildered at the very thought of death. It is because he thinks that death is the vanishing point of life. A classic example for this is the concept of death of the headmaster in *The English Teacher*. "... I am not interested in the life after death.... There may be a continuation in other spheres, under other conditions, or there may not be. It is immaterial to me. The only reality I recognize is death. To me it is nothing more than a full stop" (1946:163-164). But Narayan proves this as sheer ignorance. When somebody is dead, it means that the physical body of the person ceases to function in the absence of the soul, which is eternal. So naturally there is life
after death. The soul is eternal, unborn, invincible and inconceivable. But the body is not everlasting. It is changing every moment by the actions and reactions of the different cells in the body. Modern medical science confirms this. So naturally growth and old age take place gradually in the body. As a matter of fact, the body of a human being undergoes six major changes. It is born in the womb of the mother’s body, remains there and suffers for some time, comes out and grows, produces some effect, dwindles gradually and at last vanishes into oblivion. But the spirit soul exists permanently in spite of the fact changes take place in the body. That is the essential difference between matter and spirit. So when the body is destroyed, the soul is not annihilated. *The Bhagavad-Gita* confirms this:

\[
\text{na jayate mriyate va kadacin} \\
\text{nayam bhutva bhavita va na bhuyah} \\
\text{ajo nityah sasvato yam purano} \\
\text{na hanyate hanyamane sarire}
\]

(For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain.) (Prabupada, *Bhagavad-Gita* 1972:100-101).

The soul is invisible, for the size of the soul is one ten thousandth part of the upper portion of the hair point. So the magnitude of the soul is so small that even the most powerful microscope cannot see him. *The Svetasvatara Upanishad* (5.9) confirms this:
balagra- santa-bhagasya
satadha kalpitasya ca
bhago jivah sa vijneyah
sa canantyaya kalpate

('When the upper point of a hair is divided into one hundred parts and again
each of such parts is further divided into one hundred parts, each such part is
the measurement of the dimension of the spirit soul'.) (Prabhupada,

The soul is inconceivable. It is so because no one is able to establish
the existence of the soul empirically beyond the proof of Vedic wisdom. One
has to trust the Vedas completely exactly like one trusts the mother of the
child regarding the identity of the father.

The soul is never born. Anything that is born only is bound to die.
Since the soul has no birth, it does not have the past, the present and the
future. It is simply ever existing and primeval. The soul is spread all over the
body. And the symptom of the soul is perceived through consciousness. The
spreading of consciousness is limited within one's own body. It can be easily
understood from the fact that the pain and pleasure of one body is not known
to another. And so every individual body is an embodiment of an individual
soul. The indication of the individual soul's presence is perceived as
individual consciousness. The conviction that the soul is spread all over the
body might have made Narayan make Krishna, the protagonist, to utter the
following words about the way Susila laughed. 'The soul laughs through the
eyes, it is the body which laughs with lips...' (Teacher 1946:53). Narayan could arrive at such conclusions about the soul only after getting an opportunity to communicate with the spirit soul of his wife.

It is to be remembered that Narayan lost his wife, whom he literally worshipped, in the year 1939. What kind of a happy wedded life Narayan led and how deeply he loved his wife are very clear from his own words. "I could somehow manage to live after her death and, eventually, also attain a philosophical understanding" (My Days 1986:135). Until the day he could attain a philosophical understanding about life and death and accept the death of his wife as a reality, it was a miserable existence for him. "Dismal emptiness stretched before me. There were a hundred mementoes and reminders each day that were deeply tormenting. I could not bear to stay in the room I had once shared with my wife" (1986:136). He was so frustrated that he never thought that he could take any interest in life or creative writing thereafter. But Graham Greene, his friend and well wisher, encouraged him in his letter of condolence: ‘...I don’t suppose you will write for months, but eventually you will' (1986:136). And also Dr. Paul Brunton, a mystic, who came to India to study Indian philosophy and mysticism, gave him a ray of hope by saying: ‘You will write a book which is within you, all ready now, and it is bound to come out sooner or later, when you give yourself a chance to write’ (qtd. in My Days,1986:136). Though Narayan accepted the remarks, he never thought he would write again. But what they said came true. He published his fourth novel, The English Teacher, in the year 1946, about
seven years after his last novel *The Dark Room*. It is dedicated to his wife Rajam. The greatest motivating factor behind this novel is the fact that he could establish direct communion with his wife's soul and collect very valuable information about the existence of his wife's spirit in the world of spirits and the various features of that world. The eternity of the soul as well as the world of spirit is not a new concept to Indians. When Narayan was going through the agony of separation and loneliness, it was one Ragunatha Rao, whom his cousin introduced to him, put the idea of psychic experiments and the possibility of communicating with the spirits through 'automatic writing' into his mind. Srinivasa Iyengar is of the opinion that in India "automatic writing and attempts at psychic contact with the dead are not altogether uncommon"(1962:369). Even though Narayan had no faith in spiritualism, he could not resist the temptation of attempting it, for the intensity of his love towards his wife got increased enormously after her death. So he went to his house one Wednesday evening, the day he used to conduct the psychic experiments, and had an exciting experience when Mr.Ragunatha Rao indulged in 'automatic writing ' in his presence for about 30 minutes, during which time he held a pencil over a sheet of paper and it moved automatically filling the pages in large letters. Mr. Ragunatha Rao, the medium, wrote that the band of spirits was conscious of the mental condition of Narayan after suffering a recent loss and so they wanted to give him relief and comfort informing him the most fundamental truth about death and life after death. "Death is only the vanishing point of the physical framework in
which a personality is cast and functions; that same personality is
unperceived before a conception, and will be lost sight of again at death,
which we repeat is a vanishing point and not the end...." (Narayan, My Days
1986:142).

This is one of the most outstanding pieces of information Lord Krishna
gives Arjuna in The Bhagavad-Gita.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{vasamsi } & \text{jirnani} \ yatha \ vihayu \\
\text{navani } & \text{grhnati} \ naro \ parani \\
\text{tatha } & \text{sarirani} \ vihayu \ jirmany \\
\text{anyani } & \text{samyati} \ navani \ dehi
\end{align*}
\]

(As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly
accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless

A person of Narayan’s background and education would be certainly
familiar with this piece of knowledge present in The Bhagavad-Gita, for this is
one of the most popular verses in it. And when he got the same idea from a
band of spirits, it proved to be thought-provoking. So he started taking more
interest in psychic experiments. It simply meant confirmation to him to the
effect that his wife’s spirit existed. And he almost experienced her
resurrection when he got the message: ‘....The lady wants to assure you that
she exists but in a different state, she wants you to lighten your mind too, and
not to let gloom weigh you down’ (Narayan, My Days 1986: 143).
Being a person who did not have much faith in spiritualism, Narayan did not bother whether it was false or genuine. What was important to him was the sensing of the presence of Rajam in that room. He in fact, claimed that that experience transformed him. Next Wednesday, again he met Mr. Rao and had the experience of communicating with the spirits. In that sitting, though most of the things that Rao wrote appeared to be not convincing, Narayan was impressed by certain references she had made like reference to a piece of jewellery in a box and certain incidents or remarks which took place at her brother's house which could be verified by him at anytime. Urged by her, Narayan verified all those things and came across so many astonishing facts. But in spite of that, he was not in a position to believe them fully. Perhaps they might be the telepathic readings of Mr. Rao, he thought. But he did not give as much importance to it as he gave to the directions she gave him to achieve gradually his objective of communicating with her directly without the assistance of a medium. That is why he says: "... what really mattered to me ultimately was the specific directions that she gave step by step in order to help me attain clarity of mind and receptivity" (1986:145). But it happened to be a very tough exercise to Narayan. It was mainly because he could not think of his wife without mental agony and his mind was always agitated with anxiety about his daughter. Being aware of it, his wife asked him to keep his mind passive and think about her without grief and create a channel to communicate. She told him specifically that she was watching the child and the child knew that she was with her. But the child mistook her
presence as dreams. So she asked him to follow her instruction seriously to communicate with her without being anxious about the child and worrying about her physical absence. Her strict instruction was that he should not try to practise it more than ten minutes at a time, for it might harm his health. Narayan followed her instructions very religiously, though it was a very difficult process. On certain days he tried 'remote sittings' too with Mr. Rao. That means both of them sat at different places far away from each other and mentally linked to each other and Mr. Rao sent him the result of their attempt by post. And in due course Narayan could get rid of even that much of dependence on an intermediary, for he became an adept and managed it himself. About the stage of the climax Narayan has reached, he says:

Following the directions given, I practised psychic contacts regularly for some years, almost every night. I found it possible to abstract myself from my physical body (a process taught by Paul Brunton) and experience a strange sense of deliverance. And then gradually the interest diminished when I began to feel satisfied that I had attained an understanding of life and death. (1986:147)

After gaining this kind of a perfect understanding about life and death, Narayan became balanced and wrote one of the most widely read and deeply discussed novel, *The English Teacher*. It falls into two parts. In the first part Narayan depicts the married life of Krishna and Susila. It is a courtship between the husband and the wife within the social norms prevailing in a cultured Indian society. Baghmar aptly puts it: "With clear and sure stroke of
When the novel opens, Krishna, the chief protagonist, is a lecturer in the Department of English, The Albert Mission College, Malgudi. He stays in the hostel and suffers a boring and mechanical life. After a few months, he leaves the hostel, takes a house on rent and lives with his wife Susila and the daughter Leela. The couple leads a happy and contented life. In the evening when he comes back home from the college, his wife and the child will be waiting for him. Then he takes bath, changes his dress and enjoys coffee in the company of his wife and the child. At night, relaxing in the hall, they happily discuss the affairs in the college and that of their neighbours. On the first of every month he gives hundred rupees to Susila. She not only looks after the household, but also saves a little bit of money from this amount and puts it in the bank. At times they grumble and quarrel on simple things, but forget about them fast. To put it in a nutshell, they are an ideal couple with a little female baby on whom they lavish all their love and affection. On a Sunday the couple goes to Lawley extension in search of a convenient house. While doing ‘house- hunting’, Susila gets into an infected lavatory by mistake and gets infected and falls sick. She ails from typhoid for some days and passes away. Though Krishna and her parents try their best to save her, they fail miserably in their attempt. Susila’s death marks the end of the first part of the novel.
In the second part of the novel Narayan depicts Krishna's gradual adjustments to his life. This part, indeed, gives the supreme illustration of Narayan's tragic vision of life. He decides to bring up his daughter alone without heeding to the advice of going for a remarriage. He finds it extremely difficult to forget his wife and undergoes all sorts of miseries associated with it. At that time he comes across a person, a medium, who receives a message from Susila, his wife, expressing her desire to communicate with him (Krishna). He is a farmer by profession. He sits on a pile by the side of a pond, on the bank of which there is a temple, and elicits convincing pieces of information from Susila through a band of spirits. Krishna gets tempted and takes enormous interest in it. These occult meetings help him understand plenty of things about death and life after death. In the initial stages Susila informs Krishna through a band of spirits about the nature of her existence and her world exactly like Rajam does in the case of Narayan. In the first sitting itself Susila informs Krishna about her inability to communicate with him by herself. 'Here is Susila, wife of Krishna, but as yet she is unable to communicate by herself.' (Teacher 1946:112). In the next sitting the medium finds it difficult to write matching the speed with which the pencil moves on the paper. But afterwards he makes some adjustments like relaxing and controlling himself and then succeeds in writing legibly. On that day he gets the message: '... please understand that this work might revolutionize human ideas, and that you are playing a vital part in it. This is an attempt to turn the other side of the medal of existence, which is called death....' (1946:114).
After a little break, when the medium writes again, he gets the message that Krishna's wife is there and the band of spirits does this work mainly for her sake. She is unable to communicate directly because she is excited so much that she finds it impossible to collect her thoughts directly. When Krishna asks her whether she remembers their daughter's name, she gives the name as Radha. At this stage, he gets very much perplexed and disappointed. But the band of spirits clarifies it as a result of the interference of the mind of the medium and such mistakes take place in the case of proper names at times.

On the following week Susila communicates directly and sends the message: ‘.... And all this interval I have been trying to master the art of communication, and our helpers here have been very good to teach me’ (1946:117).

Krishna had the habit of destroying letters written by him and his wife to each other. In the course of communication, she reminds him of the fourteen letters which are not destroyed by him. She does not remember whether they were written by him or her, but she remembers having kept them somewhere after tying them up in a bundle. She asks him to search for it either in the trunk or in one of the boxes in her father's place. She also refers to a sandalwood casket. She gives even the exact size of the box. 'It is not a very big box, about eight or ten inches long, three inches high and about four inches wide; the lid of the box is not flat but slightly elevated' (Teacher 1946:119). Though Krishna does not succeed in locating them
immediately, he finds them afterwards and is wonderstruck. This experience makes him have complete faith in whatever things she has been saying.

At the next meeting she talks about their child. She tells him that he worries about the child too much. She assures him that she is quite happy in the company of her friend as well as the old lady in the next house. She informs him that on the compulsion of the child the old lady takes her to the nearby school, where little children are being taught, and asks him to put her there, for she is already familiar to the children in that school. It is, in fact, a piece of news to Krishna. On verification he finds it to be absolutely true. It reinforces his faith in Susila’s existence in the world of dead and the information he receives about that world. She informs him that quite often she will be in the presence of their daughter and she (daughter) may take it very naturally for, ‘children spontaneously see only the souls of persons’ (1946:120). That may be the reason why she does not cry when she sees her.

The next sitting proves to be quite disappointing. Except one or two references, whatever she had said was not accurate. When Krishna is very much disillusioned about the proceedings of those days, the medium consoles him saying that it may be due to the fact that their memory is finer and selective. So there may be a material law in operation, “by which unpleasant memories and impressions are filtered and left behind with the physical body”(1946:127).
At the next meeting, on enquiry, she talks about the way they spend time in their world. Time does not exist in that world as it is in the physical world. 'Our life is one of thought and experience.... as in all existence ours is also a life of aspiration, striving, and joy. A considerable portion of our state is taken up in meditation, and our greatest ecstasy is in feeling the Divine Light flooding us....' (1946:130). They have plenty of leisure. Since they do not exist physically they do not require any physical exercise. They too have music that transports them to the higher planes.

By this time, as a result of a series of communications, Krishna realizes that she is enjoying more wisdom than she could while she was on the earth. The moment one goes over there greater wisdom dawns on him. That is absolutely true in her case also. But she remains the same to her near and dear ones. The only difference is that she is without the burden of the physical body. And also there "everything is finer and quicker than on earth" (1946:131).

Another fascinating feature of their world is that there is no gap between thought and its fulfilment. Then Susila informs Krishna: ‘When I think of you or you of me I am at your side. Music directly transports us. When I think of a garment, it is on me' (1946:132). When she thinks about the subtlest perfume, it spreads her being. She enjoys great aesthetic sense of dress and colour. In short she looks the same person as she was on the earth. The only difference is that she is free from all ailments, ills and cares. And finally she assures him that she would go with him that evening when he
goes home and be with him till he goes to bed. And Krishna claims that that evening when he went home walking through the dark night he felt her presence and he enjoyed that experience.

Since his friend, the medium, was ill for a few days and busy with some work, and also out of station for some time, he missed his friend's sittings for three or four weeks. Then suddenly one day he comes forward with an idea of 'in absentia' sitting, which means sitting at different places away from each other and trying to communicate with the spirit of Susila. On a Sunday at four o'clock they try and succeed in their attempt. His friend sends the message by post to Krishna. Very soon she asks Krishna to try to communicate with her on his own without troubling his friend and she instructs him that he should keep his body and mind so perfect that they would be able to become sensitive and receptive. On enquiry she tells him that he should keep his mind free from choking thoughts to become sensitive.

In the next sitting along with his friend in his garden, Susila gives further instructions to Krishna: '....Keep your mind free for impressions just for ten minutes. Just ten minutes of communion and relaxation...' (1946:154). What she means is that his mind should be completely free from grief, for grief stands in the way of psychic development and free communion. That is why she says: '.... To receive impressions from our side, the mind must be calm and unruffled...' (1946:156). She reiterates the fact that he should have the faith about the possibility of her presence and she assures him that as he
progresses he will feel her presence by his side and also very soon she will make herself seen and heard.

She confesses that she is trying to make things easy for his rapid progress. She feels that if he does not get immediate results, sometimes he may lose faith in her presence and thereby leave the attempt of communicating with her. That is why she asks him to postpone his attempt a little while rather than losing faith in it.

Krishna understands her position and follows her instructions religiously for a fortnight. But she is not very happy the way he keeps his mind at the time of his attempt for communication. She says: ‘.... your thoughts must give me greater scope for movement within an orbit of feelings. Your mind may now be compared to the body of a yogi who sits motionless’ (1946:160). She told him categorically that that kind of rigidity should go to enjoy better results.

After a long time he has another sitting along with his friend. On that day she appreciates him stating that he is developing well in his attempt. She affirms that four days back in the dead hours of the night she appeared wearing the dress, which once he said was ‘gorgeous’ and tried to make her presence felt by him. And he went out with her into the garden, walked for a long time, came back and slept again with a faint memory of what had happened. When he gets this piece of message he is overwhelmed with joy because he could recollect whatever things she had said and they were all true. Till then he thought that it was just a dream. But after receiving her
words he realized and cried, "It was not a shadow cast and created by a troubled mind, but the substance.... It was she, it was herself..." (1946:169). This experience initiates a number of questions, incoherent in nature, in his mind. Being aware of all of them she tells him that she will be present at his side whenever he sits for the psychic experience and other times she is present as if she is in the next room. That was an experience, which proved to be an event in his life. He then gets a very clear picture of everything what Susila has been trying to drive home. Being ignited by that he tries his best to gain more mental peace in order to establish direct communion with his wife. Krishna is very much fascinated by the children's school of the headmaster and so he decides to join that school in order to fulfil the headmaster's noble mission, which he calls 'The Leave Alone system', by the help of which he could make the children complete human beings.

Krishna sends his daughter to the care of his parents and resigns his post as a lecturer in English at Albert Mission College. The college arranges a farewell party to Krishna. In his reply to felicitations he makes it very clear that his leaving the college service should not be mistaken as a sacrifice and the truth is that he is doing it with a selfish end. He is simply in search of inner peace and it is his strong conviction that he will attain it if he withdraws from the adult world and goes to the world of children, which "is a vast store-house of peace and harmony"(1946:183). That night, when he goes to bed after returning from the college after attending the send-off party, his mind is flooded with the thoughts of Susila. While chanting her name 'Susila! Susila,
my wife...' (1946:184), he slips into a drowse and dreams his wife and experiences her presence, smell and closeness. With this description of the union of the living and the dead the novel closes. "The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolve. It was a moment of rare, immutable joy—a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death". (1946:184)

Thus if one goes through The English Teacher against the background of what Narayan has described in his memoir My Days, one may realize to what extent this novel is autobiographical and also to what extent Narayan has become wise after gaining a strong and new awareness he has got about life. Nobody can refute the fact that wisdom flows through his pen when he makes Krishna utter the following words in The English Teacher.

Wife, child, brothers, parents, friends.... We come together only to go apart again. It is one continuous movement. They move away from us as we move away from them. The law of life can't be avoided. The law comes into operation the moment we detach ourselves from our mother's womb. All struggle and misery in life is due to our attempt to arrest this law or get away from it or in allowing ourselves to be hurt by it....A profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life.(1946:177)

When one reads through Narayan's Post-Independence novels especially Mr.Sampath, The Guide, The Man-eater of Malgudi, A Tiger for Malgudi and The Painter of Signs, it may be found that The English Teacher serves as a fulcrum or transition period in the literary career of Narayan. It is
mainly because in these novels there is a mind of spiritual maturity exhibited by Narayan. Pramod Kumar Singh may be fully justified when he says "... *The English Teacher* is an intimately personal account of Narayan's quest for a positive philosophy of life and his attainment of spiritual maturity" (2001:117).

3.3 Enquiry

A reader who is well acquainted with Narayan's novel, *The English Teacher*, may not be surprised, when he comes across the character, Srinivas, in his next novel, *Mr. Sampath*, through whom Narayan gives expression to his recent realization about life, and the life after death, which served as a motivating factor behind the creation of *The English Teacher*. One also may not fail to acknowledge that the character of Srinivas is the embodiment of the wisdom Narayan has already imbibed from the Hindu puranic scriptures.

Srinivas is very ambitious to propagate his ideas about the higher values of life through *The Banner*, a Malgudi weekly, of which he is the editor. According to Sharan, "To Srinivas... *The Banner* is the medium of his search for the higher values of life. As a matter of fact, his journal and the ideas related to it never leave him even for a second" (1993:147). Though the novel is titled after Mr. Sampath, who dominates the novel right from the beginning, it may be justified to say that the real protagonist is Srinivas. It is mainly because, it is only through the character of Srinivas Narayan fulfils the objective of imparting the knowledge of his realization to the readers.
Narayan's skill as a novelist lies where he develops the character of Srinivas in such a way that it suits his purpose. It seems to be a very calculative move on the part of Narayan to make Srinivas to take enormous interest in the puranic scriptures like The Upanishads. As a matter of fact, The Upanishads mark the beginning of transcendentental life. To what extent Srinivas is involved in the study of The Upanishads is evident from the following words: “He had settled down in his room with a copy of an Upanishad in his hand. As he grew absorbed in it he forgot his surroundings. He wouldn't demand anything more of life for a fortnight more…” (Sampath1949:12). Right from the beginning of the novel Srinivas shows a philosophic bent of mind, which results in his being disinterested in the activities of the material world. When his elder brother, who looks after his family and Srinivas' family questions about his objective in life, he answers: “There are ten principal Upanisads. I should like to complete the series. This is the third” (1949:12). When his brother tries to remind him of the responsibilities of a householder, all the domestic worries and questions of prestige appear to be very silly to him, for he is basically in search of a solution for a grave problem in his life. The following words hold testimony to it. ‘My children, my family, my responsibility – must guard my prestige and do my duties to my family – who am I? This is a far more serious problem than any I have known before. It is a big problem and I have to face it. Till I know who I am, how can I know what I should do?’ (1949:13). This enquiry about his own self is a very prominent feature of his character. The very fact that he starts this enquiry puts him in a plane much above all the
other characters in this novel. This is not the first time Srinivas refers to this question about his own self in the novel. He has referred to it in the conversation which he had with the old landlord whom he had met while he was desperately in search of a house. When Srinivas tries to open a conversation with him, the old landlord asks him: ‘Who are you?’ (Sampath 1949:9). Then Srinivas puts a counter question: ‘It is a profound question. What mortal can answer it?’(1949:9). What Srinivas means might be that all the living entities grope in the dark without understanding who they are. So it shows that Srinivas’ mind is always engrossed in the problem of the identity of the self. That may be the reason why he keeps on referring to it whenever and wherever he gets an opportunity. For instance, when Mr.Sampath is swelled with prominence, importance and egotism by virtue of being the director of production of the film The Burning of Kama of ‘Sunrise Pictures’, tells Srinivas, the story writer of the film: ‘I’m really puzzled, nowadays, Mr. Editor. … What am I in this scheme of things? On one side I interview actors, artists and musicians, I run about for Somu, doing various errands for the studio, and I have the task of our picture, …. ‘Now what am I?’ (1949:125). Srinivas answers: ‘Who can answer that question? If you understand it, you would understand everything’ (1949:125). This answer has a far reaching connotation which can be understood only by a mind which has got an inclination towards spiritual things that may motivate an enquiry into the identification of one’s own self. And again from the answer of Srinivas, it is evident that the answer to this question will solve all the problems of the living
entities on the face of the earth. It appears as a panacea for all the ills of the material world. And again when he thinks deeply about the state of insanity of Ravi, he asks himself, ‘Who am I to bother about Ravi’s madness or sanity? What madness to think I am his keeper? This notion seemed to him so ridiculous that he let out a laugh’ (1949:208). This shows how deep he is in the Hindu philosophic thoughts, according to which the Supreme Being controls everything. In other words in the scheme of affairs of the material world, the living entities are just the instruments in the hands of the Supreme. And so if one thinks that he is a true performer, he is said to be in a fools’ paradise. Thus whenever Narayan finds it appropriate, he introduces the question ‘Who am I?’ or refers to it, which is the basic principle on which the entire Vedas is built.

One who is a *jnani* or a scholar who is confronted with this question (‘who am I?’) perpetually may be eligible to pursue the study of Vedic literature. And also it may enable him to change his attitude towards the material world, which is said to be a place of eternal misery. It may be hardly possible to come across a living entity who is really happy in this world. And if one says that he is happy, he may mean only the material happiness, which is purely temporary and fluctuating. So, being tired of the miserable existence in the material world, one may be prompted to ask questions about his position as what one is, why one is put in such an awkward position and suffers continuously, where from one comes, to where one goes after death and also what exactly the purpose behind the human birth is. Unless one
becomes aware of one's sufferings and starts questioning why one suffers and seeks a solution, one may not become a complete human being. According to Prabupada, "Humanity begins when this sort of inquiry is awakened in one's mind. In the Brahma-Sutra this enquiry is called brahma-jijnasa. Athato brahma-jijnasa. Every activity of the human being is to be considered a failure unless he enquires about the nature of the Absolute" (Bhagavad-Gita 1972:7). This enquiry into the knowledge about the self may boil down to the question 'Who am I?' Once this question starts haunting one's mind, he is rightly motivated to pursue the search for the ultimate truth that one is not the body but a spirit soul. When one becomes aware of the fact that he is not the body and is a spirit soul, he naturally comes to his real ego. In the Vedic literature (Brahad-aranyaka Upanisad 1.4.10), it is said: "aham brahmasmi. aham—I; brahmasmi—(I) am Brahman or spirit. I (the spirit soul) am Brahman (spirit)" (Prabhupada, Slokas 1998:356). The qualities of a spirit soul are described in The Bhagavad-Gita as follows:

`avinasī tu tad vidhi`

`yena sarvam idam tatam`

`vinasam avyayasyasya`

`na kascit kartum arhati`

(That which pervades the entire body you should know to be indestructible. No one is able to destroy that imperishable soul.) (Prabhupada, Bhagavad-Gita, 1972:96).
Narayan seems to be very keen on injecting this piece of Vedic thought into the minds of the readers, for the same idea is very much echoed in his novel, *A Tiger for Malgudi*. This novel is about a tiger that possesses the soul of an enlightened human being that tells the readers the story of his life. For example, someone among the crowd questions the tiger’s Master, a great saint who has attained great spiritual heights, “...who are you?” (*Tiger* 1986:118). Master replies: “You are asking a profound question. I’ve no idea who I am! All my life I have been trying to find the answer. Are you sure you know who you are?” (1986: 118).

One may be in a position to fathom to which the enquiry about the self is important, when one comes across the reference Narayan has made to it in his *My Days*, that too associating it with a great savant, Ramana *Maharishi*. He says:

Paul Brunton abandoned all his earlier practices when he came to Mysore, and having had the guidance of Ramana, a savant who resided in Thiruvannamalai Hills, he meditated on the question “who am I? The enquiry “who am I?”, he explained, eliminated the self-conscious framework limiting one’s personality, and one attained a great spiritual release. (1986:149-150)

And once one gets the right answer to the enquiry ‘who am I?’, that one is not the body, but a spirit soul, automatically one’s focus may be concentrated on his *karmas*. 
3.4. Karma

After illuminating that every living entity has an imperishable spirit in his perishable body in *The English Teacher* and subsequent enquiry about one's own self in *Mr. Sampath*, Narayan mainly focuses on *karma* in *The Guide* and *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. Since Narayan grew up assimilating the Hindu philosophy, religion and culture consciously or unconsciously, it might have been easy for him to have a definite idea about the concept of *karma*, which is very widely dealt with in the Hindu Vedic thoughts. Ramana is of the opinion that "From early childhood, Narayan because of his family and social background was in touch with the Hindu philosophy, religion and culture, and their influence, both conscious and unconscious, on his mind was profound and indelible" (1993:141). Acknowledging the aforesaid family and social background, Narayan says: "To be a good writer anywhere, you must have roots—in religion and family….I have these things"(qtd. in Ramana 1993:147).

It is believed that in the material world nothing can happen without a cause. In other words the law of causality governs all actions and events in the material world. In the Vedic literature this law of cause and effect is called the law of *karma*. According to Satsvarupa dasa Gosvamy,

> From time immemorial, the *jiva* has been acting in the material world and enjoying or suffering the reactions of his actions. His actions bring about his transmigration from one material body to another. In other words, the *jiva* takes off and puts on bodies
just as one takes off old and useless garments and puts on the new ones. As the jiva transmigrates, he suffers or enjoys the results of his past activities (karma). (1977:28)

It is said that there is a divine spark present in every living entity. At the same time one has to remember that one carries with him the whole of his past. So nobody may be thoroughly bad or totally good, as his present birth is said to be fashioned after the result of his past karmas. Radha Krishnan rightly observes: “There are divine potentialities in even the worst of men, and the worst sinner has a future even as the greatest saint has had a past” (1983:129). Raju, the protagonist in The Guide holds testimony to it.

The motivating factor behind the creation of The Guide was the reports Narayan heard of a famine and the incident in which some Brahmins prayed to God for rains in knee-deep water for twelve days and then it rained. In his My Days, Narayan reports:

At this time I had been thinking of a subject for a novel: a novel about someone suffering enforced sainthood. A recent situation in Mysore offered a setting for such a story. A severe drought had dried up all the rivers and tanks: Krishnaraja Sagar, an enormous reservoir feeding channels that irrigated thousands of acres, had also become dry, and its bed, a hundred and fifty feet deep, was now exposed to the sky with fissures and cracks, revealing an ancient submerged temple, coconut stumps, and dehydrated crocodiles. As a desperate measure, the municipal
council organized a prayer for rains. A group of Brahmins stood knee-deep in water (procured at a great cost) on the dry bed of Kaveri, fasted, prayed, and chanted certain mantras continuously for eleven days. On the twelfth day it rained and brought relief to the countryside. (1986:166-167)

The major characters in *The Guide* are Raju, Rosie and Marco. The protagonist, Raju, was born and brought up in a lower middle class family of Malgudi. Though he did not have proper education, he learned a lot from his acquaintances with various types of people whom he served as a railway guide and also from the pages of magazines, newspapers and old books he kept for sale in his shop on the railway platform. It is worth noting how he learned things that proved to be a great asset for him in the future.

During the interval between trains ... I read stuff that interested me, bored me, baffled me, and dosed off in my seat. I read stuff that pricked up a noble thought, a philosophy that appealed, I gazed on pictures of old temples and ruins and new buildings and battleships, and soldiers, and pretty girls around whom my thoughts lingered. I learned much from scrap. (*The Guide* (Guide), 1958:49)

Though his father thought that Raju was a dull-headed boy he proved to be a master in his profession as a guide. That was the reason why he could acquire a title as 'Railway Raju' among the tourists who came to Malgudi for sight-seeing.
The day, Raju met Rosie, marked the beginning of a stormy career ahead for both. His infatuation with her was simply irresistible. According to him, 'She was not very glamorous, if that is what you expect, but she did have a figure, a slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a complexion not white, but dusky, which made her only half visible—as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice' (1958:65). The first thing she asked Raju after landing at Malgudi was whether he could show her a king cobra which would dance to the music of a flute. Marco, her husband, was quite disinterested and tried to discourage her. But Raju was anxious to please her, for she appeared to be a 'divine creature' to him. He wondered how Marco could be so harsh with such a tender and beautiful being like her. He, in fact, started hating him. He managed to take her to a snake charmer with the help of a guide. When he started playing on his gourd flute, the cobra "raised itself and darted hither and thither swayed" (1958:68). Rosie watched it and "stretched out her arm slightly and swayed it in imitation of the movement; she swayed her whole body to the rhythm ..." (1958:68). That indeed gave enough clues to Raju that she had enormous talent of a dancer inherent in her. Marco was a scholar perpetually interested in things like frescoes of Mempi Caves, and as Inder Nath Kher said, was a "cold intellect searching for meaning in history"(1984:126). Rosie was the daughter of a temple dancer. She "comes of a family which has, through countless generations, helped in preserving the cult of this art of dancing in India and has formed a link between the ancient glory of this art and its modern
representation" (Balbir Singh, 1988:66). But Marco considered her interest in dance as unhealthy. Raju, a trickster, exploited the difference between Marco and Rosie to his own benefit and tried to win Rosie's love despite the fact that she was the wife of another person. Anything, which was interesting to Rosie, was irritating to Marco. So when Raju pretended to be interested in things in which she was interested, especially dance, it was easy for him to win over her. But Marco was completely unconcerned about her interest in dance. "Dead and decaying things seem to unloosen his tongue and fire his imagination, rather than things that lived and moved and swung their limbs" (Guide 1958:81-82). Rosie was so much obsessed with the dream of becoming a dancer that when Raju encouraged her at every stage of her attempt to realize her dream, she forgot her husband and everything associated with the sanctity of married life and moved towards Raju even without her awareness.

Marco was very much agitated when Rosie asked for permission to become a dancer. She worsened it further when she told him that she danced in front of Raju and he was transported. Provoked by that, Marco went on asking so many questions regarding the details about her relationship with Raju, including the time and place they spent together. After answering all his questions she broke down and cried. Though she pleaded for forgiveness afterwards, Marco could not forget and forgive her. He said: 'You are here because I'm not a ruffian. But you are not my wife. You are a woman who will go to bed with any that flatters your antics. That's all. I don't, don't want you
here, but if you are going to be here, don't talk. That's all (1958:152).

Afterwards when he left for Madras, he refused to take her along with him. Rosie joined Raju and lived in his house against the wishes of his mother. That marked the beginning of Rosie's career as a professional dancer. Within a very short period of time she reached the pinnacle of glory as a professional dancer under a new name, Nalini. Raju played remarkably well the role of an impresario and became not only popular but also very rich. So naturally they changed themselves to a rich life style. As days passed, Raju became more and more possessive of Rosie. He was so possessive of her that he never entertained anybody approaching her directly. It proved to be very embarrassing to Rosie and at times it led to heated arguments between them.

To make things still worse, at that time Marco's book entitled 'The Cultural History of South India' appeared in print. Though Raju received a copy of it, he hid it from Rosie. But, when Rosie saw the photograph of Marco in the Illustrated Weekly of Bombay, she became very anxious to see the book. “The photograph was published along with a review of his book, which was called 'An epoch-making discovery in Indian Cultural History” (1958:199). Rosie was offended very much and she asked him why did he hide it? She said: '... anything happening to him is bound to interest me....' (1958:201).

Raju started wondering over a distinct change coming over her. When he questioned her, she said: 'After all, after all, he is my husband' (1958:201). When Raju was trying to patch up the differences with her, there came a letter addressed to 'Rosie alias Nalini'. The letter came from a lawyer's firm in
Madras asking for her signature on an application for the release of a box of jewellery. The letter said:

Madam, under instruction from our client we are enclosing an application for your signature, for the release of a box of jewellery left in safe custody at the bank of .........., in the marked place. After this is received we shall proceed to obtain the other signature as well, since you are aware that the deposit is on your joint names, and obtain the release of the said box, and arrange to forward it to you under insurance cover in due course. (958:205)

Raju was excited over getting more jewellery for Rosie. But his possessive nature prevented him from showing the letter to her. His mind was very much agitated over so many questions like 'Why this sudden generosity to return her an old box? Was he laying a trap for her, or what was it?' (1958:206). It was his conviction that showing that letter would be suicidal. Finally he forged her signature and mailed the document for which he was caught and sent to jail for two years. That marked the end of Raju's role as the lover as well as the manager of Rosie. What she said at that time about Raju is very significant. 'I felt all along you were not doing right things. This is Karma. What can we do? (1958:216). What is implied in her words may be that one has to pay for one’s deeds in this birth itself or may be that he is placed in a situation like this due to his karmas in the previous births. When Raju was released from the jail there was a sign of remorse in him. The
period of imprisonment seemed to be a transition period for him during which he was matured to a very great extent. That might be the reason why he decided to be away from people and places familiar to him and be in an old temple on the bank of a river, still undecided where to go. It was at that time, Velan, an idiotic rustic came to the scene and mistook Raju for a holy man. At that point of time, Velan was in a great misery caused by his sister, who was very obstinate and had refused to marry a man of his choice. So Raju's presence there was a blessing in disguise. He sought his help to change her mind and give her consent to marry his cousin's son. Assuming great importance Raju said: 'Bring her over; let me speak to her, ...' (1958:16). Velan's problem was solved by itself somehow. But the irony was that the credit went to Raju. He complimented him and said: '.... Things may look easy enough for a giant, but ordinary poor mortals like us can never know what goes on in other people's minds' (1958:29-30). Everybody in the village started believing that he brought a great change over Velan's sister through some kind of mystic power. Perhaps, it might be a result of this, or his appearance, or the gullible nature of the villagers, sainthood was thrust upon Raju gradually. Raju exploited the situation, for it was a question of his existence. The villagers fed him, consulted him and listened to his religious discourses. Thus the people not only looked after him, but also fed his ego. At that juncture the village was hit by a drought and Raju was forced to take the ritual of fast in order to please the God of rain to put an end to the famine caused by the drought. The comedy behind the whole episode is that Raju
did not think about venturing on such an almost impossible task even in his wildest dreams. It all happened merely because Velan's brother, 'one of the lesser intelligences of the village' (1958:98), did not receive properly what Raju asked him to convey to Velan and his people. Raju was greatly worried about the quarrel erupted between a shop owner in the village and Velan and his associates as a result of the shop owner's greed which made him exploit the prevailing situation caused by the drought by charging exorbitant price on commodities like rice. Raju's only intention was to put an end to the fight, which was about to become very deadly. He thought that he could succeed in his motive by playing on the sentiments of the people. So he asked Velan's brother to go and tell Velan and his people that he did not want them to fight. Further he said: 'Say that I'll not eat. Don't ask what. I'll not eat till they are good' (1958:100). But it was quite unfortunate that a man like Velan's brother, who was a 'semi-moron', could not grasp exactly what he said. When Velan and his people exerted enormous pressure on him out of their anxiety to know what the Swami had said, he got more confused and blabbered: 'The Swami, the Swami, doesn't want food anymore. Don't take any food to him' (1958:101). When they asked him why, he added: 'Because, because--it doesn't rain' (1958:101). The people believed the version of Velan's brother and started looking at Raju with more reverence and hope. Raju was put in a very awkward predicament. Since there was no opening left for him to escape, he decided to confess to Velan. He said, 'I am not a saint, Velan, I'm
just an ordinary human being like anyone else. Listen to my story. You will know it yourself (1958:112).

After listening to a nightlong confession, Velan continued to address him as Swami and was ready to be his humble servant. Raju was caught unaware. A retreat was almost impossible for him. Quite contrary to what Raju expected, Velan looked at his confession as a mark of humility and godliness. Though he was not serious in the beginning, he decided to do it religiously at a later stage, for he had to acknowledge the devotion and the faith of the innocent villagers, particularly that of Velan which generated an electrifying effect on him. Though the thought of food haunted his mind, he resisted it and thought: ‘If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?’ (1958:237-238). It gave him enormous enthusiasm to go on with the ordeal, for that was the first time he was doing a certain thing with complete involvement and was devoid of the desire for money and love. In other words, that was the first time in his life he was doing something in which he was not personally interested.

Raju’s fast created a sensation all over India. The government and the people showed a lot of concern for the life of Raju, for religious sentiments were involved in it. But Raju was very serious about the purpose behind his fasting and never responded to any kind of suggestion or advice from any corner to end it, though his health had been deteriorating steadily. At the early morning of the twelfth day his condition was very critical and the doctors, deputed by the government, appealed to Velan: ‘Tell him he should
save himself. Please do your best. He is very weak' (1958:246). But Raju ignored it and asked him to take him to the basin of water in the river. When he reached the spot, he stepped into the water, and closed his eyes and faced the mountain and prayed. Velan and another person held him as if he were a baby. Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said, 'Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs – He sagged down' (Guide 1958:247).

Narayan has ended the novel in such a way that it is left to the discretion of the readers to conclude whether Raju is dead or not, and also whether it rained or not. According to David W. Atkinson, "Some critics have argued that Raju undergoes no change and he remains to the very end a man trapped by his own delusions" (1987:26). Balarama Gupta is of the opinion that "It is wrong to believe that Raju who is a selfish opportunist, a crass materialist, and a voluptuous hedonist has all of a sudden become a martyr capable of making grace descend from heavens. The rains he sees (or thinks he sees) are indeed a pathetic hallucination of a starving imposter" (1981:135). But a close reading of the novel may reveal that Raju is not a bad person thoroughly and in the light of which one may be justified to state that the aforesaid views cannot be defended. Though Raju flirts with Rosie, who is another man's wife, he is not always at ease and peace. The following words of Raju may substantiate this point. 'My thoughts dwelt on her golden touch. A part of my mind went on saying, 'No, no. It is not right. Marco is her husband, remember. It's not to be thought of' (Guide 1958:77). And also it is
to be remembered that Raju does not snatch Rosie away from Marco. She
came to him on her own, for which Marco, her husband, may be held
responsible to a very great extent, for in the course of his research work he
always forgets that his wife is a young and healthy lady with usual human
feelings and sentiments. In the prison itself he shows a sign of transformation
by teaching the prisoners and helping the authorities to maintain and promote
orderliness in the prison. And above all these, his concern towards the rustic
and the strong feeling that he should not let down their faith in him force him
to accept the role of a holy man. And though he oscillated till the last moment,
he did full justice to that role ultimately, which might have helped him wash
away his sins. Sharan may be absolutely right when he says:

In course of his ordeals, he changes himself thoroughly and
accepts the challenges of reality. He plays his role of a holy
man with a ring of sincerity and embraces death at the end of
the novel. Thus, ‘Railway Raju’, the guide becomes a ‘spiritual
guide’ and all his imperfection and impersonation turn into a real

According to the Hindu Vedic thoughts, it may be because of the
punya karmas he had performed in the previous births that things happened
for him in such a way during the last phase of his life to enable him to
sacrifice his life for a noble end and absolve his sins. Another possibility is
that the good karma he performed towards the end of his life, while he was
living in the temple, might have helped him perform a spiritual sacrifice before he died. Suryanarayana Murti quite aptly says:

However much sinful one has been in his life, repentance purifies the soul; and a single, wholehearted, pious act coupled with devotion is enough to purge off all evil and regenerates the soul which at the end will be awakened from the dream of life into salvation through death—this is what indeed the scriptures say. And Narayan seems to preach and teach this simple didactic truth in effective terms through his works, *The Guide* in particular. (1987:121-122).

According to David W. Atkinson,

... the law of karma determines what an individual becomes through what an individual does. Karma refers to the law of causation applicable to both physical and moral realm. In the physical universe, every cause produces an effect, while in the individual, every action, good or bad, gives rise to an effect manifested in either the present lifetime or a future lifetime. (1987:16)

This canon of *karma* is applicable not only to Raju in *The Guide* but also to Vasu in *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. *The Man-eater of Malgudi* is generally considered as one of the most successful works of Narayan. Sundaram is of the opinion that "*The Man-eater of Malgudi* may well be regarded as Narayan’s greatest work" (qtd in Sharan, 1993:228). Vasu, the protagonist is
an embodiment of demoniac qualities. By nature he is a sadist. He believes in breaking laws. He is not only an M.A. in History, Economics and Literature, but also an expert in taxidermy. But to him taxidermy is just an excuse for killing animals, for it satisfies his sadistic instinct.

Nataraj, the owner of a printing press in Malgudi, narrates the story. He is just opposite to Vasu in nature. While evil predominates in the character of Vasu, virtue predominates in Nataraj. Sharan is of the opinion that “Vasu, the taxidermist, is a symbol of evil, while Natraj, the printer, stands for the values of a cherished tradition and culture” (1993:228). Nataraj quite aptly calls Vasu “the prince of darkness” (Man-eater 1962:216). His physical appearance and a very rude and assertive way of behaviour make people shudder and suffer, which he enjoys to his heart’s content. This is evident when he takes Nataraj to Mempi forest and leaves him there mercilessly.

By virtue of having a good physique with enormous strength and hard fists, which he was able to build by going through a course in bodybuilding, he comes to Malgudi to prosper as a taxidermist. He has a fairly good knowledge of Mempi Hills, which is by the side of Malgudi and is blessed with rich wild life. His arrival at Malgudi plays havoc in the life of Nataraj, a very meek person who leads a very simple, moderate, peaceful and happy life with his wife and a son with a reasonable income from his press. A single man, Mr. Sastri, who plays the role of a compositor, proofreader and a machine man, assists him. His close associates and constant companions are a poet,
who is writing in monosyllabic verse the life of Lord Krishna and Mr. Sen, the 
journalist whose mind is always preoccupied with Nehru's ideas of thinking.

Vasu makes acquaintance with Nataraj when he goes to his press to 
print his visiting card. Later he manages to occupy the upstairs room in the 
printing press by his assertive and domineering nature. Since then, he has 
been causing embarrassment to Nataraj and his companions in various ways. 
Nataraj becomes completely upset when he spoils the sanctity of his 
premises by accumulating carcasses in his room for stuffing. Vasu is 
licensed to shoot only ducks and deer, but he shoots all animals. Nataraj 
tolerates him to a very great extent. But it becomes almost unbearable to him 
when the neighbours complain about the insanitary condition of the 
surroundings caused by Vasu's nefarious activities. When Nataraj requests 
Vasu to vacate the room, he gets very much agitated and institutes legal 
proceedings against him on the ground that he has harassed him and tried to 
evict him unlawfully.

Though Nataraj escapes from the grip of law with the help of an old 
adjournment lawyer, it leaves a very deep scar of ingratitude in his mind. 
Nataraj proves to be a great fort of tolerance by remaining passive in spite of 
all these, including defiling his room in the upstairs and bringing whores there. 
Rangi, a seductively charming temple woman is one among them. When 
Nataraj comes to know about the tainted women folk visiting Vasu, he is 
worried and says: "I had had no notion that our town possessed such a 
varied supply of women" (1962:111).
The nemesis comes when Vasu decides to shoot down the temple elephant, Kumar, which is the main attraction of the procession arranged in connection with the celebration of the release of the poet's *Radhakalyan*. Nataraj is horrified when Rangi confides to him that Vasu plans to kill the elephant during the procession. It is Nataraj who encourages Muthu, the teashop owner, to bring the elephant for medical treatment. Though the elephant is cured, it is retained at Malgudi to take part in the procession. So Nataraj gets more worried about the threat to the life of the elephant. He informs the people closely associated with the celebration about the wicked plan of Vasu to see the end of the elephant for his selfish gains as implied in his own words: 'I can make ten thousand out of the parts of this elephant—the tusks, if my calculation is right, must weigh forty pounds, that's eight hundred rupees. I have already an order for the legs, mounted as umbrella stands, and each hair on its tail can be sold for twelve annas for rings and bangles …' (1962:173-174). They inform the police too. But the police pleads helplessness, for they cannot proceed against the accused till the crime is committed. In spite of that, a Police Inspector goes to his room and tries to remove the gun to prevent the crime. But the Police Inspector not only fails to remove the gun, but also gets his wrist dislocated.

Vasu is so demoniac in his nature that he is very much committed to the execution of his wicked design of shooting down the elephant without pausing for even a moment to think about the religious sentiments and sanctity attached to elephants, especially a temple elephant. So he waits in
his room with a loaded gun for the procession to pass a particular spot where he could shoot down the elephant. But Nataraj remains restless being anxious about the fate of the elephant. So on the night of the procession, Nataraj boldly makes a last attempt to save the elephant by going to Vasu's room. But he runs back at the sound of an alarm. The next day Vasu is found dead. Neither the post-mortem report, nor the interrogation conducted by the police, solves the mystery behind the death of Vasu. So naturally Nataraj becomes the victim of the suspicion of the people. Though he finds it difficult to stand it in the beginning, he resigns himself to it later. But at the opportune moment Sastri appears on the scene as if sent by God to prove the innocence of Nataraj and reveals the secret that Vasu died by his own strength while attempting to kill a couple of mosquitoes settled on his face and Rangi is a witness to it. With this, normalcy returns to Malgudi, and Nataraj and Sastri get immersed in the printing work.

If one analyses *The Man-eater of Malgudi* deeply against the background of the Hindu Vedic scriptures that one has to suffer his *karmas* either in this birth or in the future births, one may be prompted to come to the conclusion that both are applicable to Vasu. It may be because of his previous *karmas* that he is born with demoniac qualities predominating in his character. And also it may be because of his *karmas* in the present birth his sudden death is brought about by his own brutal physical strength with which he has been indulging in all sorts of sinful activities, especially depleting Mempi forest of its wild life, shooting down pets like dogs and cats, making
blasphemous comments on a sacred bird like an eagle after killing it and above all these stooping down to the level of aiming at killing a temple elephant.

3.5. Re-incarnation

After focusing on *karma* in *The Guide* and in *The Man-eater of Malgudi*, Narayan focuses on re-incarnation in one of his most widely read and acknowledged novels, *A Tiger for Malgudi*. It "...is a gripping, charming and lively tale of a tiger, Raja by name, who ruminates on his past. The most striking thing about the novel is that here Raja is endowed with an intelligent personality and later on spiritualised by the mysterious powers of his Master" (Sharan 1993:288). The concept of *karma* and re-incarnation is nothing new to the Indian readers. It is an integral part of the Hindu Vedic culture. But the living entities, except a very few, deliberately refuse to accept it, for they are too much attached to the prospect of enjoying the sensuous pleasures in the material world. Prabhupada seems to be at his best when he says: "The mistake of modern civilization is that man does not believe in the next life. But whether he believes or not, the next life is there, and one has to suffer if one does not lead a responsible life in terms of the injunctions of authoritative scriptures like the *Vedas* and *Puranas*" (*The Law of Nature* 1991:72).

Every other reader and critic of Narayan may accept hands down that Narayan's genius is deeply rooted in the Hindu religious thought of which the concept of *karma* and re-incarnation is an inbuilt component. Narayan
confirms it in an interview. "We cannot get away from that tradition. I studied, with the help of a Sanskrit Scholar, our classics in their original form. And in my language, Tamil, I read the Ramayana written by Kamban" (The Indian Literary Review, 1978:7). It may be because Narayan has assimilated the thought content of the Hindu religion so well that it gets reflected in most of his novels. Mofizar Rahman is of the opinion that " Narayan's novels reflect his belief in the doctrine of karma-yoga" (1997-98:192).

Hinting at the reflection of the canon of karma-yoga in the novels of Narayan, Brodov says: "The action one has done cannot be destroyed until it has borne its fruits; no power in nature can stop it from yielding its results. If a person does an evil action he must suffer it" (qtd. in Mofizar Rahman, 1997-98:192).

The Tiger for Malgudi is almost an autobiography of Raja, an eleven-foot tiger. So naturally the central consciousness in the novel is the tiger "through whose eyes the worlds of the human and of the animals are shown quite amusingly" (Rangan 1997:76). Though the tiger is in a beast form, he has got all the sensibilities of a human being. This can be confirmed from the words of Narayan himself. "...He is a sensitive soul who understands life and its problems exactly as we do...." (Tiger 1986:175).

Every living entity is said to be transcendental by virtue of having a soul in him, which is nothing other than an eternal divine spark. This celestial soul may not feel at home in a material body. But the jivas have different kinds of bodies and nature fashioned after their karmas in the previous births.
This indeed contributes towards the varieties of agony and ecstasy in the material world through which the jivas should pass. According to The Bhagavad-Gita,

\begin{align*}
\text{sattvam rajas tama iti} \\
\text{gunah prakrti-sambhavah} \\
\text{nibadhnanti maha-baho} \\
\text{dehe dehinam avyayam.}
\end{align*}

(Material nature consists of three modes---goodness, passion and ignorance. When the eternal living entity comes in contact with nature, O mighty-armed Arjuna, he becomes conditioned by these modes.) (Prabhupada, Bhagavad-Gita1972: 685-86).

The material nature as well as a living entity or jiva is the energy of the Supreme Being. The difference is that the material nature is the separated energy of the Supreme whereas the jiva and the Supreme are eternally linked up. The jiva is not only part and parcel of the Supreme Being, but also conscious. The material nature or prakriti is also conscious. Just like a human being is bound by the modes or gunas, Raja, the tiger, which plays the central character in A Tiger for Malgudi, is bound by the modes of nature. The mode of passion (rajas) predominates in the nature of the tiger in the cubhood and youth. Under this mode, the tiger lords over all the living beings in the forest.

Under the growing influence of the mode of passion, it is quite natural on the part of a jiva to long for sense gratification which may result in desire and lust. Lust breeds anger, which in turn may lead to bewilderment and
finally to delusion. Raja, when he is under this mode, becomes fully conscious of his growing physical strength and his pride bred out of this prompts him to entertain the thought of subduing every other animal or bird in the forest. While asserting his power, one day he encounters with a tigress, which ends in their union and his becoming a father of a litter of four cubs. At this stage a great change comes over his being even without his awareness. He gets caught in the web of attachment. He loves his partner and cubs and suffers from the same kind of insecurity to which every other 'jiva' is subjected perpetually in the material world. “... there was the danger of the cubs slipping and rolling down into the ravine. We had to save them from destruction every other minute” (Tiger 1986:22). One day the tigress braves the boundary of the human habitation in quest of her prey and is killed along with her cubs. Thus Raja loses his life partner and the cubs. This ignites his anger and he decides to avenge the human beings. So, stirred by anger, he leaves his natural habitat and prowls in the villages. ‘A blind, impossible anger stirred within me: I just wanted to dash up, pounce upon every creature, bite and claw and destroy’ (1986:24). Since he is blinded by anger, he loses the sense of understanding and wisdom. The human beings get horror-stricken and react to his presence in their habitation and seek the help of the District Collector. At that time it happens that the owner of 'The Grand Malgudi Circus', who announced his name as Captain without any ground to support it, goes to the Collector's office to renew some licence and comes to know the whole episode of the tiger’s presence in the village. He gets excited
by the news and tries to capture him. Though Raja avoids meticulously all the traps laid for him, he fails to resist the temptation of pouncing upon a lamb kept by Captain in order to capture him. He pounces upon the lamb and gets trapped.

In the next stage of the tiger's life, *tamasic* mode (mode of ignorance) predominates. Quite appropriately Captain names him Raja, for he has the appearance and demeanour of a *Raja* (king). So Captain rushes to the conclusion that he would be an asset to his circus company. Motivated by that conviction he takes great interest and trains Raja for his circus shows. Though it is absolutely a new experience to Raja, he surrenders completely to Captain, for he inflicts acute sufferings on him. The tiger undergoes the regular training with great pain. Captain proves to be very harsh with the animal and shows no symptom of any consideration to its hardships caused by immobility, loneliness and above all these the agony of hunger to which he is subjected as a punishment for disobedience. Since the tiger does not have any other option, he changes himself gradually and listens to Captain and picks up the lessons properly and does justice to them. It is mainly because, if Captain is pleased, the tiger gets enough rest, food and sleep. The tiger does not have the bothersome business of hunting for its food in the forest. Any *jīva* may enjoy it when it is under the mode of *tamas*, for "Indolence and inertia characterise *tamasic* nature" (Rangan 1997:79). But in the course of performing the act of drinking and sharing milk with a goat, the tiger forgets his present position and comes under the influence of his old nature of
violence and nips off the goat's head. But before the spectators in the Circus tent become aware of what has happened Raja is put back in the cage and the Circus show is carried on by the Clowns. They divert the minds of the audience so much that no question was asked as to how the preceding item had ended. This particular episode is filmed by a filmmaker in sixteen millimetres even without the knowledge of Captain. The filmmaker starts contemplating taking a film after seeing the Tiger’s performance on the goat. He tells Captain: “Captain, ever since I saw Raja’s surgical performance on the goat, I have been thinking of a story in which I could put him to proper use…” (Tiger 1986:77). The filmmaker, Mathusudan, addressed as Madan, cine-director and producer, proves to be very ambitious and desires to shoot an international picture with Raja as the central character. He signs an agreement with Captain and the location for shooting the film too is decided. It is a wooded area, quite near to the highway in Malgudi. The filmmaker is so much excited that he feels ‘as if he had produced a picture and received the Oscar’ (1986:89).

Raja feels extremely pleased when he is brought to the set. It reminds him of the good old jungle days and gets an irresistible craving for freedom. The set is made ready for a fighting sequence between Raja and a wrestler, Jaggu. But Jaggu is completely horrified by the sight of the tiger and runs away from the spot. So Captain and the filmmaker decide to shoot them separately and join them through an optical printer. They want to shoot Raja standing on his hind legs. It proves to be a very painful exercise for Raja and
every time he tries he fails miserably. But Captain tries his best to make Raja do what the cameraman expects by subjecting him to whipping, hitting and yelling. The process goes on and on and they never get the exact posture they want. Finally they dangled a lamb before the tiger in order to keep him stand on his hind legs. But the moment he tries to reach the lamb, it is raised higher and higher. Raja is so much tempted that he tries his best to reach the lamb. In the course of doing that he stretches his body completely and stands up like a human being. But he finds it difficult to keep the balance and so falls down forward. Since the film makers are not satisfied, the process continues. At last the tiger becomes tired and decides not to obey Captain. At that juncture Captain leaves his whip and makes use of an electric needle. The agony he experienced is clearly revealed when he narrates his experience. "He ... brought out a novel object, which shot out a tongue of metal; at its touch I felt blinded with a strange kind of pain and helplessness and ran out of the cage" (1986:113). The tiger just collapses on the ground outside the cage. But captain grows impatient and wants the tiger to get up and do the same thing in front of the elusive lamb. But the tiger refuses. So Captain hits him on his nose as usual to make him obey. In spite of all these, on that day it does not happen to work to the desired result of captain. It only stirs his anger. The tiger being completely fed up with the whole procedure of pain and weariness and also excited by a feeling of liberty if he could escape from the long captivity, decides to disobey Captain once for all. The tiger thinks: 'why should I fear this creature no bigger than my tail?' First time in my life
such an idea was occurring. So far I had never measured him. But today he looked puny to me in spite of all his yelling and angry gestures' (1986:114). But Captain remains obstinate and decides to use the electric needle when his yelling and whipping do not work. It is quite unfortunate on the part of Captain that on that day he goes beyond the margin of safety in the course of his trying to hurt the tiger with the electric needle to make him submissive. When Captain thus advances, the tiger raises his forepaw and knocks the instrument out of his hand. It was a stroke of great misfortune that the blow caught Captain under his chin, and tore off his head. And the tiger escapes his captivity. He starts walking on the road with the only intention of seeking a place where he could take rest and sleep for some time. He takes rest at the door of Anand Bhavan for a moment and then continues his walk with an unmindful and unconcerned attitude despite the fact that the people cause a lot of commotion around him. Finally he walks into a school, enters the headmaster’s room and sleeps under the table. The headmaster escapes to the attic of the room and remains there. The tiger feels very much at home in the room as if he were back in the Mempi Cave and starts sleeping comfortably without bothering about what the crowd gradually accumulated is doing. The people locked him in and feel safe. The tiger feels relaxed and goes on sleeping. It is evident from the behaviour of the tiger that he is under the mode of tamas.

After a fairly good sleep the tiger experiences peace. This is an indication of his inclination towards the mode of goodness (sattvic). The mode
of goodness is the one in which one may understand the signs of God. To attain this state of mind, one needs a spiritual master. Any spiritual aspirant may agree readily that the path of spiritual realization is very difficult. But it may become less difficult under the blessings and care of a spiritual master. Prabhupada rightly observes:

The path of spiritual realization is undoubtedly difficult...mental speculation or dry arguments cannot help lead one to the right path. Nor by independent study of books of knowledge can one progress in spiritual life. One has to approach a bona fide spiritual master to receive the knowledge. Such a spiritual master should be accepted in full surrender, and one should serve the spiritual master like a menial servant, without false prestige. (*Bhagavad-Gita* 1972:262-263)

In the case of the tiger, the spiritual master comes on his own to save him from the hostile crowd. The presence of Master in the head master’s room, where the tiger has been sleeping unmindful of the inimical crowd, holds him under a spell and he feels that he loses all his strength. When the tiger tries to make a useless attempt to attack Master, he tells him: ‘Leave that style out. You won’t have use for such violent gestures anymore. It all goes into your past’ (*Tiger* 1986:145). The tiger is placed in such a helpless situation that he becomes subdued.

Master does not condemn violence and also readily accepts it as a natural condition of existence. Man is also an aggressive animal. But he
should learn how to get rid of it by virtue of exercising the reasoning power, which he is endowed with. No jiva can practise violence just as no jiva can avoid old age and disease. This is the law of nature. In other words “…violence cannot be everlasting. Sooner or later it has to go, if not through wisdom, definitely through decrepitude, which comes on with years, whether one wants or not” (1986:145).

Master transforms the tiger with his meaningful and persuasive philosophical discourses and intends to take him to the peak of the Mempi Hills. When they are about to start, he instructs him not to look at the human beings who are vulnerable to the presence of a tiger, which is let loose. He says: “….This is one of the rules of yoga to steady one’s mind, to look down one’s nose and at nothing beyond. That’s one way not to be distracted and to maintain one’s peace of mind. I would ask you to keep your head bowed and cast your eyes down and make no sort of sound…” (1986:149). One who is well acquainted with The Bhagavad-Gita may be prompted to believe that Narayan’s deep knowledge in it might have motivated him to write these lines, for they resemble to some extent the following verses from The Bhagavad-Gita.

\[
\text{samam kaya-siro-grivam} \\
\text{dharayann acalam sthirah} \\
\text{sampreksya nasikagram svam} \\
\text{disas canavalokayan} \\
\text{prasantatma vigata-bhir}
\]
bhrmacari- vrate sthitah
manah samyamyamac-citto
yukta asita mat-parah

(One should hold one's body, neck and head erect in a straight line and stare steadily at the tip of the nose. Thus, with an unagitated, subdued mind, devoid of fear, completely free from sex life, one should meditate upon Me within the heart and make Me the ultimate goal of life.) (Prabhupada, *Bhagavad-Gita* 1972: 320-321).

The tiger's ferocious nature is calmed by the power of Master's suggestion alone. Master is neither an ordinary man nor an animal trainer. He is different from Chandran of *The Bachelor of Arts*, who is completely a fake swami, and Raju of *The Guide*, who remains to be a counterfeit swami till he is forced to make the spiritual sacrifice. Master is a genuine swami who is endowed with the sacred power of transforming a ferocious tiger. Once he was a man of property, esteem and prosperity. He took part in active politics including the famous Quit India Movement. But later, one day, he left home at midnight renouncing everything including his wife and children as a result of an inner compulsion more or less like Siddhartha. At present he stands almost as a synonym of perfection that man can reach through the pursuit of ancient wisdom.

The tiger too is not an ordinary animal. It is evident from the thought of Raja while he is in the zoo. "You are not likely to understand that I am different from the tiger next door, that I possess a soul within this forbidding
exterior. I can think, analyse, judge, remember and do everything that you do, perhaps with greater subtlety and sense. I lack only the faculty of speech” (Tiger 1986:11-12),

Raja accepts the mystic as his Master. Master and the disciple spend their days fruitfully in meditation and philosophic discourse based on the Hindu Vedas and Upanishads in the Mempi Hills away from the madding crowd. Sharan observes rightly: “They passed their days in philosophical speculations which largely rested on the message of the Gita” (1993:303). May be because he comes gradually under the mode of goodness by virtue of his association with his spiritual guru, he is now in a proper frame of mind to receive instructions from him and make endeavours to follow them. According to Prabhupada, “In the mode of goodness, one can see things in the right position, one can hear things in the right position and one can taste things in the right position. One becomes cleansed inside and outside” (Bhagavad-Gita 1972:692).

Narayan further reveals his mastery over the Vedic thoughts when he makes Master impart one of the greatest pieces of Vedic wisdom to Raja while warning him that the bondage in this material world would start with the eye. ‘The eye is the starting point of all evil and mischief.... mind follows the eye, and rest of the body is conditioned by the mind....’ (Tiger 1986:155). Thus it leads to a chain of reaction of complications. Raja starts acting in accordance with the instructions he receives from Master. So naturally he avoids gazing at sense objects. But Master, who succeeds admirably in the
case of the tiger, fails miserably in the case of his fellow men. He finds it extremely difficult to convince them that the tiger is a friend. When he talks about life, death, the theistic teachings of The Bhagavad-Gita and God, he finds in Raja a better audience. But the only difference is that while to Master God is “the Creator, the Great Spirit pervading every creature, every rock and tree and the sky and the stars: a source of power and strength”(1986:157-158), to the tiger it is “an enormous tiger, spanning the earth and the sky with a tail capable of encircling the globe, claws that could hook on the clouds, and teeth that could grind the mountain, and possessing, of course, immeasurable strength to match” (1986:158). Master tells him that there is nothing wrong in his imagining God as a super tiger. A devotee can worship God, as he desires. The Bhagavad-Gita confirms it.

\[\begin{align*}
\text{yo yo yam yam tanum bhaktah} \\
\text{sraddhayarcitum icchati} \\
\text{tasya tasyacalam sraddham} \\
\text{tam eva vidadhmy aham}
\end{align*}\]

(I am in everyone’s heart as the Supersoul. As soon as one desires to worship some demigod, I make his faith steady so that he can devote himself to that particular deity.) (Prabhupada, Bhagavad-Gita1972: 395-396).

Raja and Master grow old in companionable silence. As old age advances Raja learns to appreciate the companionship of the forest animals. At this point of time he would have realized that self-realization can come only
through acceptance rather than rejection and renunciation alone can lift him above all illusionary pursuits and worldly ambitions.

The moment the master understands that time has come for him to attain samadhi, he makes arrangements for Raja spend his days peacefully and meaningfully in a zoo. Now the tiger is forced to sacrifice his freedom for security. Before sending him to the zoo, Master explains quite distinctly his philosophy of life: “No relationship, human or other, or association of any kind could last forever. Separation is the law of life right from the mother’s womb. One has to accept it if one has to live in God’s plans.” (Tiger 1986:174). He gifts Raja to the zoo reminding the zookeeper that he is only a tiger in appearance. As a matter of fact, Raja proves to be an asset to the zoo with his renewed shine on his coat by bringing excitement and happiness to all the visitors to the zoo, especially children.

Narayan closes the novel as it opened with Raja in the zoo hinting that both Master and the tiger have the next life to look forward to. ‘….Before we drove off my Master thrust his hand through the bars and whispered to me, Both of us will shed our forms soon and perhaps we could meet again, who knows? So goodbye for the present’ (1986:176). These words affirm Narayan’s strong conviction that the soul is eternal and death is not the vanishing point of life. When Master says, ‘perhaps we could meet again’, what Narayan implies might be that whether they take rebirth or not depends on their karma. No living entity can exercise any kind of control over it. Narayan focuses on the aspect of karma when he makes Master attribute to
the tiger's *karma*. He says: 'You probably in a previous life enjoyed putting your fellow-beings behind bars. One has to face the reaction of every act, if not in the same life, at least in another life or a series of lives' (1986:48). The very fact that the tiger gets associated with the spiritual master stirs in him an inner compulsion to ask the most fundamental question about his own self as who he is. This moment actually is the realization of his own self and the spiritual journey.

3.6. Conclusion

Thus, it may be evident from the discussion held in this chapter that Narayan has succeeded to a remarkable extent to enlighten his readers about the various aspects of the Vedic thoughts, namely the immortality of the soul, the inner compulsion a *jiva* may get sometime or other in one's life to make enquiry about one's own self, the significance of one's *karma* and the most inevitable reality of re-incarnation fashioned after one's *karma* to which every living entity is subjected. It is because Narayan has achieved this philosophical understanding of life, and the life after death as a result of the sudden demise of his wife and his contact with the spirit soul of his dead wife, he could express it so convincingly in his novels that follow *The English Teacher*, which is said to be the most autobiographical of all his novels. In other words, *The English Teacher* can be considered as a great landmark in the life of Narayan, which provides a turning point in his philosophy of life as well as literary career.