CHAPTER - IV


R.K. Narayan was born on October 10, 1906 at Number 7 Vellala street; in Purasawalkam, Chennai. His mother was Gnanambal and his father was R.V. Krishnaswami Iyer. He was a school teacher working in the education department of the princely state of Mysore. They had eight children. Narayan was the third son. At the age of two he went to live with his grandmother Ammani and his uncle TN Seshachalam in Madras while the rest of his family lived in princely Mysore. He used to visit his parents only in the long summer holidays.

Narayan began his schooling in 1913 in the E.L.M Fabricious Lutheran Mission school in Purasawalkam High Road. He studied there till the third form. In the fourth form he went to CRC high school. The following year Seshachalam got him admission in the prestigious Madras Christian College High School. But Narayan studied there only for one term. Narayan’s father summoned his son to Mysore city following his posting there as Head master of Maharaja’s Collegiate High School.

His father, Krishnaswami Iyer was very strict. He was uncommunicative with his sons. With his two daughters, he was more relaxed. His father was a lover of music. He had a personal library,
comprising books of Carlyle, Ruskin, Walter Pater, Wordsworth, Byron, Browning and Shakespeare. He would spend long hours reading. Under Krishnaswami’s influence, English was the language most in use at home, with much emphasis placed on its correct usage. In terms of religious belief and practice, Krishnaswami Iyer appears to have been distant from any kind of orthodoxy. He was neither religious nor irreligious. He was indifferent in both ways.

Narayan’s academic grades were not of the highest during his school and early College days. Narayan failed two times in the University entrance Examination. On the first occasion he failed in English. In the second occasion he failed in Tamil. In 1926 he succeeded in the university entrance Examination and became a B.A student at Maharaja’s College. Narayan did not graduate at his first attempt. He failed in History. On May 28th 1930 Narayan passed his B.A examination. After his degree he decided to eschew further studies. Since his father he had to earn money for the family. On December 1930 through the intervention of his father’s friend A.R. Wadia, Professor of philosophy at Maharaja’s College and Director of Public Instruction, a teaching post was located at a government school in Chennapatna, the same school in which Krishnaswami Iyer had earlier served as head master. Twice Narayan tried but he was unsuccessful.
In order to earn money for the family, Narayan embarked on a couple of literary projects. At about 1932 Narayan made some kind of attempt to get a job in *The Hindu* as a trainee sub-editor or reporter. But he did not succeed as he lacked contacts. In 1932 G.A. Natesan’s *Indian Review* asked him to review a book titled ‘Development of Maritime Laws in seventieth Century England.’ Although he was not paid for his four hundred word anonymous review, he was thrilled to find himself in print for the first time in his life. In August 1932 issue of *The Indian Review* he published a two thousand two hundred word short story “A Night in a Rest House” published under the name of Mr. R.K. Narayan Swami B.A. It was a story about a man cycling a long way to deliver an urgent letter, stopping for the night at a rest house and menaced by some devilish things getting at him, fleeing the scene. He rode back to the rest house in the morning, where he discovered that the apparition was simply a pile of lime.

A year after his success with the *Indian Review* Narayan had a short piece *How to write an Indian Novel* unexpectedly published by Punch. This brought him a sum of six guineas. In this six hundred and fifty word satirical piece, he pokes sophisticated fun at foreign novelist writing on Indian and also gives guidelines for instant fiction writing. After this he sent in further contributions but none made into print. In 1933 his published
work consisted of a book review, a short story and a satirical essay. In the hope of publication he sent more stories and novel to England.

In spite of the incompatibility of horoscopes Narayan married Rajam, whom he loved, on July 1st, 1934 in Coimbatore. She was a tall, slim and good looking girl. She was soft, gentle and very calm. It was an extremely happy marriage. After marriage Narayan looked for a job as Journalist. In the summer of 1934 he became a Mysore stringer for the official organ of the non-Brahmin movement, The Justice. He got this job through a college friend C Narasimhamurthy, who had just joined the Mysore civil service. His assignment was simply to gather and report local news. Now his mornings were devoted to news hunting from a variety of sources. He left home around nine o’clock. He went about his task on foot to the bazaar, market place, the law court, the police station and the municipal building. By lunch time he had to gather news to the length of ten column inches. He was paid three- and-a half rupees per column of twenty one inches.

In 1934 Narayan got first prize for his short story ‘Dodu’ in literary competition organized by The Merry Magazine published in Madras by the film producer and Magazine Proprietor S (Gemini) Vasan. This Magazine featured humorous skits, cartoons, quizzes and jokes. The success of “Dodu” encouraged Narayan to contribute regularly to The Merry Magazine. In the February issue he began a series titled ‘Letter to a
Netphew', a spoof on pompous letters of advice from elders to the young.
In the June issue he returned to the theme ‘How to write on India’, that had proved such a success with Punch in 1933. Contributing to The Merry Magazine brought Narayan some much needed financial relief. But performing the literary clowning week after week proved a terrible experience. He may have felt a sense of relief when the Magazine stopped publication in 1936. In 1935 Narayan got his story ‘Cacklebury Vs Editor’ published for the first time in The Hindu. It appeared in the newspaper’s weekly Magazine as a humorous skit. It was financial necessity that obliged Narayan to persevere with his reporter’s work. But in August 1935 he resigned from his work.

"I've finished reading the short stories. I think that most of these are excellent and I see no reason why we shouldn't find a paper for them. I get the impression that your friend is a reader of T.Chekhov? If so he has used the influence with more success than most English writers."¹

At this stage Narayan had never read Chekhov – But after Purna had sent him the letter received from Greene he read several of Chekhov's stories and found it wonderful.

By 1935 Purna gave Greene Narayan's novel 'Swami and Friends'. After reading this novel Greene was very much delighted. For Greene:

"the story of a child written with Complete objectivity, with a humour strange to our fiction, closer to Chekhov than to any English writer, with the same underlying sense of beauty and sadness always remained a favourite among Narayan's novels, 'a book in ten thousand"²

Swami and Friends was published on October 24th 1935 by Hamish Hamilton Ltd. But this book did not make Narayan as established writer. His daughter Hema was born on Feb 3 1936. His second novel 'Bachelor of Arts' was finished by March 1936. But his publisher Hamish Hamilton
turned down the second novel because *Swami and Friends* was a failure. It attracted neither the press nor the public. On Feb 28th Krishnaswami Iyer Narayan’s father had died. Narayan’s Second novel *The Bachelor of Arts* came out in March 15th 1937. Narayan’s Second novel, no doubt helped by Greenes’ introduction and by publisher’ promotional efforts, attracted rather more critical attention than the first. *The Bachelor of Arts* did some what better in market than Swami and friends.

In his introduction to *The Bachelor of Arts* Greene had compared Narayan to Chekhov and ever since that likeness has been variously elaborated. “One reviewer ‘CR’ reviewing the novel for British weekly referred to ‘the Chekhovian simplicity of the plot’

Nararyan’s third novel *The Dark Room* was published on October 11, 1938 and received good reviews from western writers. Narayan’s wife Rajam died of typoid on June 6th 1939. It was the most shattering blow of his life. He plunged into a period of darkness from which he took several years to emerge. After his wife’s death he moved to Madras on September 1939. He was in Madras when Britain and France declared war on Nazi Germany. Narayan began to feel the effects of the war. He lost all literary contacts and publishing arrangements in England. Most important of all Greene and Narayan lost contact for four year from July 1939.
The other setback for Narayan the writer was the inability of The Hindu to publish his contributions as frequently as before as there was shortage of newsprint, printing ink etc. During the first half of 1940 Narayan’s eight short stories appeared in The Hindu and in the second half the number decreased to five. In 1941 there were only two stories ‘A Career’ and ‘Iswaran’. In 1942 six stories appeared. In 1943 the number decreased to three short sketches and in 1944 about ten short stories were published and then it increased to seventeen, mostly short sketches during the final year of the war.

In India Radio broadcasting began in 1927. It was owned by Indian Broadcasting Company Ltd. Due to financial problem the company was liquidated within three years. Then the government set up the India State Broadcasting service. In June 1936 it became All India Radio (AIR).

In June 1938 the Madras AIR station was inaugurated. The Director of the Madras AIR station was Victor Paranjothi. He was an admirer of Narayan’s work. He invited Narayan to contribute to the Radio. Narayan readily accepted it and the association continued for three decades. Narayan’s first project was a war-time documentary on the Madras Sappers and Minas. But due to the disagreement with the programme’s producer G.T. Sastri, the project was dismissed. Later Narayan began to deliver radio talks on life and letters.
The famous Tamil writer R Krishmurthy who wrote under the pseudonym of kalki had translated RK Narayan’s Book *Swami and Friends* into Tamil and S.S.Vasan the editor of the magazine *Ananda Vikatan* serialized *Swami and Friends* in his Tamil weekly. In 1941 S.S. Vasan started a film studio in Madras and he invited Narayan to join the team and work full-time in the story department of Gemini Studio. Narayan was not prepared to join on a full time basis but had agreed to come whenever there was work for him. Narayan worked on story ideas, it involved giving shape to plot outlines, improving the dialogue, and generally applying his literary skills to treatment appropriate to the film medium. Narayan wrote a full length story ‘Miss Malini’ for the film medium. It was a low budget film. It was remembered long after the film ceased showing. It was released in 1947.

A person who meant a great deal to Narayan during his struggle to come to terms with his grief and arrive at a philosophical understanding of life and death was the British mystic searcher after secret truths and writer Dr Paul Brunton. Their first meeting appears to have taken place early in 1941, they remained in close touch for nearly two years.

Due to war all contacts with England were cut off. A quarterly journal *Indian Thought* was launched by R.K. Narayan. The Journal was printed in city power press in Mysore. The proprietor of the press was M.S. Cheluvienceo known as Sampath. But after the third issue Narayan stopped
the publication. One reason was that he did not get enough contributors. When he approached noted writers and intellectuals, most of them were too busy to contribute. So Narayan found himself obliged to turn contributor rather more than he liked. The most important reason for the winding up of the journal was that Narayan found himself distracted from his own writing. Indian Thought was resurrected in a new form. It became Narayan’s publication. The first book published by the Indian thought was Malgudi Days, a collection of nineteen short stories published in January 1943. A few months later came Dodu and other stories. It included a collection of seventeen stories. In 1945 Narayan published Cyclone and Other stories his third collection of short stories.

During the second half of 1944 Narayan resumed his correspondence with Graham Greene. After the war Graham Greene joined as the director of Eyre and Spottiswoode publishing firm. Narayan’s fourth novel The English Teacher was published by Eyre and Spottiswoode in late September 1945. By the end of 1945 Narayan fully emerged from the period of darkness.

In 1956, for the first time in his life, he travelled beyond South India enroute to the United States on a Rockefeller foundation grant, he stopped off in London and had his first sight of Greene, his friend of two decades.

By the second half of the 1950’s Narayan had gained an Indian and world wide public. For the first time in his life, his economic circumstances were comfortable and even prosperous.

The 1960’s saw the publication of two novels The Man Eater of Malgudi (1962) and The Vendor of Sweets (1967). In 1964 appeared Gods, Demons and Others. The Ramayan (1972) and The Mahabharata (1978) made him very popular. His autobiography, My days, was published in the United States in 1974. Two years later came another novel The painter of signs (1976). In 1983 A Tiger for Malgudi was published.


Over the decades, a number of awards and honours came Narayan’s way. In 1961, The Guide won the Sahitya Academy Award- the first work of fiction in English to do so. In 1980, the writer received the Arthur Christopher Benson Award from the Royal Society of literature and in 1987,
the Soviet Land Nehru Award. In 1981, he became an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Honorary doctorates were conferred to him by several universities. He was nominated on more than one occasion for the Nobel Prize although he did not win it.

In 1964 Narayan was awarded the Padma Bhushan. In 2000 he received the Padma Vibhushan. In 1985, he was nominated to the Rajya Sabha for his distinguished contributions to the nation's cultural life. During his six-year term as M.P, he made it a point, during his rare interventions in the parliamentary forum, to speak up for India's children. His observations on the over-burdened school curriculum symbolized by the weighing down of children by their school bags provoked much discussion.

In the early 1990's the writer suffered some bouts of illness and chiefly for medical reasons, left Mysore for Madras where he set up home with his daughter, Hema, and her husband C.S. Chandrasekharan. Her death from Cancer in April 1994 was the second great blow in his life. This was the time when he was living with his son-in-law. He continued to write, spend time with his grand daughter and great grand children and enjoy the company of friends. He was planning to write a short novel when he was hospitalised due to severe cardiac – respiratory problems. He was not able to start his sixteenth novel. He passed away on 13th May 2001.
Narayan is regarded as India’s greatest writer in English of the twentieth century. All of Narayan’s fiction testifies to this knowledge. His writing career was exceptionally long lasting, encompassing seven decades. His literary output is rich and varied. Fifteen novels all but one set in Malgudi and a number of short stories, retellings of Indian epics and mythology, travelogues; essays and an autobiography My Days. Narayan was the first modern Indian writer to make a full-time career out of literature. He was in fact modern India’s first successful professional writer.

Narayan, India’s greatest writer in English of the 20th century, was also a literary pioneer, a man who quietly and un-selfconsciously tried new ground and unfolded new possibilities. Back in 1930’s, the decade when he began his career as a writer, fiction of the modern type hardly existed in India. There were no Indian forebears or peers to whom he could relates, no indigenous literary explorations of character, plot and story beyond the traditions of mythology and folk tale.

Narayan’s fiction deceptively simple and elusive in terms of literary theory and technique, is distinctive for its voice, its fusion of the comic with the sad, and its philosophical death. He is famed for his lightness of touch and a style that is lean, lucid, undecorated, but wonderfully expressive and full of understated surprises.
William Walsh in the *Writers and their works* series commented that Narayan's novels are "Comedies of Sadness" and he concluded that "Narayan's fastidious art, blending exact realism, poetry, melancholy, perception and gaiety, is without precedent in English literature and as far as one can see, without following. It is engaging because of the charm and authenticity of the Indian setting, moving because of the substantial universal human nature which it incarnates".

The main aspects of the works of Narayan as shown by William Walsh are certainly similar to those aspects of the works of A. P. Chekhov. While analysing the novels and short stories of RK Narayan one can find certain similarities with the short stories and plays of A P Chekhov. In the selection of themes and plots, narrative techniques, treatment of characters there are striking similarities between these writers. Narayan seems to be quite at home in short stories of restricted social setting. Like Chekhov, Narayan on a small canvas, creates characters that are familiar. The story telling impulse is uncontrollably fecund and carries the main character through various episodes big and small; but all memorable. Narayan's characters are of every day. His characters have intimacy, assurance and honesty.

Narayan's characters are illiterate characters like Doctor Raman (*The Doctor's Word*) form an exception. He presents poor artists, neglected
workers, peddlars, astrologers, beggars, rickshaw pullers, lock repairers, servants and attendants and other homeless, helpless persons in his stories, Narayan’s stories have the brevity and limitations of fables.

As from the beginning both Narayan and Chekhov wrote with a single purpose, to earn money and help the family. Earlier both Narayan and Chekhov wrote for newspapers and literary magazines. Narayan’s success lies in individualizing his characters and exposing the unnoticed, subtle possibilities of the average and the unremarkable. His strength of characterization lies in his thorough and close observation of life’s little incidents. Narayan has an eye for the minor details of life and an ear for the language of the common people.

In his short stories Narayan has depicted familiar situations and explored ways of life with which he was intimate. But the people here represent humanity at large and hence Narayan’s novels and short stories have universal appeal. He gently pushes the readers right into the midst of life that he is presenting. Humour and pathos go hand in hand in some of his stories (eg Four Rupees, The Mute Companions, Half Rupee worth, Loela’s Friend etc). Like his humour, his pathos is mild and delicate. Romantic love, politics, religion, struggle for existence are rarely treated by him in his short stories.
Like Chekhov, Narayan also got the material for short stories from his surroundings. The action of all the novels of Narayan (except The Grand Mother’s Tale 1993) and the majority of his stories takes place in Malgudi. The author describes so vividly the town on the imaginary river Sarayu, its Market Street and Lawley Street, the Albert Mission College and co-operative Bank, that even after the first book about Malgudi the reader easily gets accustomed with it and is oriented in it.

Some of Narayan’s short stories contain parallel characters i.e. characters appearing in his stories and novels and bearing the same nature if not always the same name. For instance The White Flower, Seventh House and The English Teacher have Krishna as their hero.

In Chekhov’s and Narayan’s stories we do not always find society divided into two classes- the villains and the victims or the haves and the have nots. Like Chekhov, R.K. Narayan has also written many stories which highlight the struggle of the common man to make living. Narayan has written a number of stories dealing with suffering through poverty, through exploitation etc. We do not often hear the tone of righteous anger or tender pathos in Narayan. Many of Narayan’s character accept their hard lot attributing it to an unkind fate. Like Chekhov, Narayan also mixes the serious and the comic. If we examine a typical Narayan story it may be
difficult for us to pin point where exactly the comedy ends and the serious and the tragic begin.

In the story 'A Horse and Two Goats’ we get a very detailed and authentic picture of the abject poverty in which many of India’s millions live. In this story Muni, a once flourishing shepherd and goat-herd, is now reduced to herding two scrawny goats and utterly dependent upon a shrewish but efficient wife for his wretched allowance of food. Every morning Muni would drive his flock, which consisted of only two goats, to the highway and sit on the pedestal of a clay statue of a horse while his goats grazed around:

“ He carried a crook at the end of a bamboo pole and snapped foliage from the avenue trees to feed his flock; he also gathered faggots and dry sticks, bundled them, and carried them home for fuel at sunset”

“ His wife lit the domestic fire at dawn, boiled water in a mudpot, threw into it a handful of millet flour, added salt, and gave him his first nourishment for the day. When he started out, she would put in his hand a packed lunch, once again the same millet cooked into a little ball, which he
could swallow with a raw onion at midday. She was old, but he was older and needed all the attention she could give him in order to be kept alive."

Though Muni was once prosperous he and his wife live on nothing, and they have no children. He is not unduly bitter about his lot. He accepts it with resignation as something inevitable and irremediable. He does not think that he has anything to do with his declining fortune. It is just his fate. "At seventy one, didn’t run, but surrendered to whatever came” (pg 21). He firmly believe that “God will always save us whenever we are troubled by evil things” (pg 27) It is his strong faith that sustains him.

“ A Horse and Two Goats” tells the story of a day in Muni’s life. Though the ac... Narayan gives of the life of Muni and his wife may sound incredible to non-Indian readers, it is absolutely authentic. Narayan is incomparable in his knowledge of the lives of ordinary men and women as in his power of portraying them realistically, without exaggeration or comment, and with complete detachment which is an essential quality of great art. The tragic tale of the poverty stricken Muni’s life breaks into explosive comedy when he meets the American.

The dialogue between Muni, the Tamil speaking goat herd with an English language vocabulary of “Yes, No,” and the foreigner, not knowing a
word of Tamil is cleverly conceived and developed to produce highly amusing situation comedy. Thus, even though we find old Muni in many comic situations from the beginning to the very end of the story, he is not presented as a ridiculous old fool, but a character who arouses pity in our hearts. He is more a tragic than a comic figure, and while we laugh at his simplicity, our hearts go out in pity for the suffering, starving old man.

In “Crime and Punishment” we find a poor tuition master having to put up with the insolence and rowdiness of a young boy for the sake of the meagre amount he is paid. Though a child, the little boy is shrewd and cunning enough to understand the master’s weak position and to exploit it. Realizing that his tutor is desperately in need of the tuition fees he receives on the first of every month, the boy refuses to co-operate with him and blackmails him by threatening to tell his parents that he had been beaten by the teacher. According to the parents, “the boy is a little angel, all dimple and sweetness only wings lacking” (pg 217). But according to the teacher “what the little fellow needed to make him a normal citizen was not cajoling but an anna worth of care, for which he was prepared to advance the out lay” (P 217) For the sake of a paltry amount, the teacher has to put up with the bullying of a little

In the story “The Evening Gift” Narayan presents a young man with a curious job in life. Sanker, a poor villager, who has come to the city in
search of employment, finds it impossible to get a job, so he accept the job of keeping a wealthy drunkard company and preventing him from drinking after nine in the evening and taking him home. For this job, he is paid thirty rupees a month. He lives on fifteen rupees in a cheap hotel and saves the other fifteen for paying off a debt he had incurred in his village over his sister's marriage. He feels disgusted with his job and when one day in an intoxicated state his master dismisses him and gives him four months salary in place of notice, he accepts it at once, though he feels guilty about this. But the next day he is arrested on the charge that he had robbed his employer after tying him up and manhandling him. He loses not only his job, but also the four months salary he had been given. The city to which he had come with high hopes offers him only bitter experiences, and he goes back to the village, as empty handed as he had set out from it.

Narayan's story "Half a Rupee Worth" is a beautiful story with man's avarice for money as their theme. It is a good example of the heartless and criminal exploitation of the helpless public by greedy and unprincipled traders. Subbiah is a greedy, unscrupulous trader. During the second world war there is great scarcity of food grains in the country. Subbiah takes advantage of the sufferings of the people to make money. He hoards rice secretly in his godown and sells it at an exorbitant price to the starving people. In order to escape the penalties of the law for dealing in the black
market he bribes the officials liberally. He also breaks a coconut every
friday in the temple to propitiate the gods and to secure the continuance of
their favour. But one night nemesis catches up with him in the form of
heavy rice bags which fall on him and crush him to death as he takes out
half—a-rupee worth of rice for one of his customers.

The story gives a pathetic picture of the sufferings of the poor,
starving people and their helplessness before heartless shopkeepers like
Subbiah. Here we also get a very vivid picture of the familiar figure of the
unscrupulous trader who holds the community to ransom by hoarding grain
and creating artificial scarcity so that he can sell grain at an exorbitant price,
pretending at the same time to be doing a favour to the people he robs.

Through the stories “Forty Five a Month”, “All Avoidable Talk” etc
R.K. Narayan shows a large segment of the population who drag out their
lives at forty or fifty rupees a month in government or business employment.
The monotony, boredom, self denial, frustration of such lives are brought out
with ease, humour and irony. It is in his portrayal of such common life, men
and manners that Narayan gets closer to Chekhov. “Forty five—a—
Month” is a good example of the ruthless exploitation of the white collar
workers in business establishments where they are bled white by heartless
employers. Venkat Rao, a low-paid clerk is so over worked that he never
gets any time to spend with his family or to take his only daughter Shanta to
cinema. "Every day they kept him at the office till seven to eight in the
evening and when he came home, the child was asleep. Even on Sundays
they wanted him at the office" (Pg. 143-44) One day he promises to take his
daughter to a cinema, because he felt that she was growing up without any
comforts of life which other children enjoy.

"While children of her age in other houses had all
the dolls, dresses and outings that they wanted, this
child was growing up all alone and like a barbarian
more or less. He felt furious with his office. For
forty rupees a month they seemed to have
purchased him out right (Pg 143)."

So taking courage into his hands, he decides to leave the office at
5'o clock and to hand in his resignation if he is not allowed to do so. When
he is asked to stay back that day, in fury he writers a letter of resignation
and takes it to the manager. Ironically enough, before opening the letter, the
manager tells him that he has decided to give Rao an increment of five
rupees. Rao is unnerved by this quite unexpected announcement and he
takes back his letter of resignation saying that it was an application for
casual leave. It was nine o'clock when he reached home that night and the
deeply disappointed Shanta had already cried herself to sleep, dressed in all
her finery.
We see in this story how the struggle for existence and the concern to provide the family with the bare necessities of life, breaks a man’s spirit and makes him a drudge, little better, than a bond slave. There is little joy in his life and he is denied even the simple pleasure of family life.

In the story “All Avoidable Talk” also Narayan presents the central character Sastri in a similar plight. Sastri is an accountant in a jewellery shop and he is paid barely fifty rupees a month. When a customer, who is later discovered to be eccentric, complains about him, his employer bullies and insults him in the presence of the customer. Sastri is filled with righteous indignation. After nine when he goes home, the events of the day well up before his eyes and he feels that he is demeaning himself.

“I have been called names. I have been insulted by strangers and by my officer, before everyone.... I’ve served for twenty years for less than fifty rupees a month....” He wonders why he had became so degenerate as not to be able to earn this anywhere else “Tonight I will not dine without extracting an apology from my boss. Otherwise I shall throw off his work I don’t care what happens .......” He had in a flash a vision of his wife and children starving. It seemed insignificant to him now. Nothing seemed to him important now except redeeming his dignity as an ordinary human being without
prevailed in Tamilnadu during his time. Narayan accuses the educational system in India. Chekhov's concern about the contemporary educational system is reflected in many of his stories who dedicated himself for the welfare of the teachers in Russia. He has been a vehement and life long critic of Indian schools and the education they impart. He strongly attacks the inhumanities practised in the name of teaching and the examination system.

The bitter animosity that is all too evident in his fictional or direct treatment of the subject of education in India is inspired by his unpleasant personal experiences. In many of his short stories and even in a few of his novels, he has drawn heavily from these experiences.

Narayan was rather unfortunate in the schools he attended. He had special reason to feel unhappy about his school. It was in Lutheran Mission School that he studied. This school was meant mostly for boarders who were converts to christianity. The teachers were also converts, who were overzealous about their new found faith. This resulted in a few non-christian students feeling isolated, despised and hated, as both the Christian students and teacher's constantly hurled abuse at them as idolaters. Things were no better when he reached high school, where his own father was the head master. His father was a strict disciplinarian who took stern measures
against erring students, and Narayan found himself the focus of attention as
the headmaster’s son.

In Narayan’s short stories and novels there are numerous children
who dislike to go to school. The narrator of the story “Uncle” in his younger
days used to pray daily before the pictures of gods and goddesses adorning a
niche in the kitchen, under the watchful eyes of his aunt, for help in getting
through the day unmolested. “May you help me get through my school
hours without being mauled by my teachers or other boys, may I get through
this day unscathed” (pg.44). Though he had never been beaten by the
teacher, every monday is like Black monday to him. He invents all kinds of
excuses to stay back at home.

In the story “Hungry child” Raman thinks of sending his new found
protégé to Lovedale Boarding school at Ooty. But the boy says he will not
go to school because he will be beaten by teachers at school. Raman
resolves to persuade him gently “by easy stages... I ‘ll persuade him. I
remember how I hated school myself” (p.85)

In India examinations are taken very seriously, as they are important
for successful careers and for social acceptance and prestige. So it is
common to find students taking examinations over and over again until they
pass. A few of the many unlucky ones, who fail to get through, even take
their lives in despair. Narayan himself had difficulties in crossing the
hurdles called examinations, and managed to pass his B.A only when he was twenty four while all his brothers graduated easily. Therefore, his repeated failure must have been a bitter and terrible experience for Narayan. A student who is unsuccessful at examinations not only disgraces the family, but is generally regarded as a good - for - nothing person who would be a failure in life.

In his short story "Iswaran" Narayan analyses with great understanding and sympathy the state of mind of a college student on the day the results of the examination were to be announced. It is a remarkable story with a poignantly sad ending. Iswaran has failed in the intermediate examination nine times, and it is for the tenth time that he has sat for the same examination. Though outwardly he appears non-chalant and happy, inwardly he is writhing in a agony and misgivings. Though he think that he might pass, his previous bitter experiences discourage him from going to the senate hall for finding out his results. Instead, he pretends the utmost indifference to the examination results and goes to see a cinema which is actually a play to escape from the ridicule of others and to keep his mind diverted. He knows that if he ventured out he would be the centre of attention and takes special pains to dress well.

He combed his hair with deliberate care, the more so because he knew everybody looked on him as a sort of an
out cast for failing so often. He knew that behind him the whole family and the town were laughing. He felt that they remarked among themselves that washing, combing his hair, and putting on a well-ironed coat, were luxuries too far above his state. He was a failure and had no right to such luxuries. He was treated as a sort of thick-skinned idiot (pg. 83-84)\textsuperscript{11}

Though he pretends not to notice the barbs of ridicule aimed at him, at heart he was "a creature hopelessly scared by failures, desperately longing and praying for success" (pg. 84). Even in the theatre, he is unable to blot out the thought of examinations completely from his mind. When he sees the happy and excited faces of the boys who have come to the theatre to celebrate their success in the examination, Iswaran feels utterly dejected and miserable. So he decides to put an end to his misery by drawing himself in the Sarayu river. But before killing himself, he gathers enough courage and decides to go up to the University buildings and check the result sheet on the notice board. He cannot believe his eyes when he finds that he has not only passed but got a second class too. This is beyond his wildest hopes and dreams and the sudden joy and excitement deranges his mind. In that state he attempts to swim across the swollen Sarayu and is drowned.
Iswaran is a psychological study of the behaviour of a diffident boy who is mocked by others. "Iswaran" is a very subtle but very powerful indictment of the false importance and value attached to examinations in India.

Like Chekhov, Narayan also was attracted by the life of innocent children. A large number of short stories of Narayan are concerned with children. Children in his stories are playful, innocent, intelligent, resourceful and mischievous. They are against conventional discipline and hence often illtreated by superior parental or educational authority. Their innocence, childish pranks, the games they play, their fears and desires, their simple understanding of the world around them- all these factors are reflected in stories like "Children", "Crow and Catapults", "Everest Reactions", The Election Games", "Causerie", "Glimpses of Thumbi" and "Thumbi's Shoaling" etc.

In "Father's Help" we see little children's aversion to school and also how their conscience pricks them when they have to tell lies. Swami to evade his classes feigns headache and complains of ill-treatment from a cruel teacher, but all his tactics to avoid going to school prove futile, and he is forced by his father to attend school. In his attempt to stay at home at all costs Swami paints a lurid picture of his teacher Samuel who, he says, is a cruel tyrant who delights in tormenting little boys. "When he started
caning he would not stop till he saw blood on the boy's hand, which he made the boy press to his forehead like a vermillion marking. Shocked and angered by Swami's narration of the teacher's cruelty to the little boys, his father worded letter of complaint to the Head master. Swami is now in a fix because Mr. Samuel is really a mild and friendly teacher. Swami, forced to go to class, provokes Mr. Samuel into punishing him. The surprising twist to the story comes when Swami runs to the Principal's room to deliver the letter only to find Mr. Samuel officiating as the Principal for the day.

Like Chekhov, Narayan also has a special knack of understanding and portraying child-psychology. Narayan seems to re-create the world of childhood with rare artistry. Children's guiles and wiles, their endearing ways, artless talk, the innocent subterfuges they employ to hoodwink the elders etc, figure prominently in Narayan's stories. In "Dodu" a child's make-believe world is presented in contrast to the world of adults who have no concern for children's feelings and bring disillusionment to them. Here Narayan midly satirizes the attitude of the elderly people towards the child. In "Dodu" we have a young eight year old mischievous boy called Dodu who devises ingenious tricks to make money. He invests the one rupee his uncle gives him and starts a mini post office on the verandah of his house, his customers were elders of the house, but he gets no encouragement from them. Instead of gaining any profit, he loses his capital. Then when he
hears from his brother that the Director of Archaeology Dr Iyengar pays a handsome amount for a historical document written on Palmyra leaf, he jots down something on a palm leaf and takes it to Dr Iyengar who is highly amused by Dodu’s attempt to humbug him and gives him four annas. Perhaps the only person who understands the feelings of Dodu and encourage him is Dr. Iyengar.

While in “Dodu”, the young hero’s fertile brain perpetually devises ways and means of making money, in “The performing child”, kutti, a small girl of ten, longs to live in a world of pleasant dreams far away from the charmless world of adults. She becomes sad when her mother wakes her up from her dream: “Oh, mother, why did you disturb me now? It was such a beautiful engine. Just let me sleep again. The dolls wants to go home.” She refuses to co-operate with her parents in earning a handsome amount by dancing in films. She is a wonderful dancer and the poor parents build castles in the air about the fortune they would get by making her a movie star. However their plans are wrecked by kutti who refuses to dance before the film makers and hides from them. She hates everything connected with the cinema; perhaps she has an instinctive dislike for commercialization of her art. Though she is only a little girl of ten, she is a representative of tradition and conformity and resists all attempts to turn her into a
sophisticated and modern young girl by refusing to let her hair loose and wear a frock to please the movie makers.

Leela, in the short story "Leela's Friend" shows us the world of children, happy, innocent, mischievous and sad with its little problems. Leela is innocent of all the intricacies of the world of adults. Her parents are perplexed at the loss of her gold chain. Where as they suspect Sidda, their servant and Leela's playmate, Leela is calm and longs for Sidda's company. Later on when the gold chain is recovered from the tamarind pot, Leela admits that she had put it there. Now even though Sidda has been proved innocent, Leela's parent refuse to believe that he is innocent.

Thus like Chekhov, Narayan too wrote about children with astonishing originality. The observer in both the writers open before us the beautiful charming world of children. Along with children the readers too involve in their activities. Only a writer, familiar with the world of children could write so passionately about them.

In R.K. Narayan's world of Malgudi; caste and its concomitant evils do not loom large as important issues. This is not because Narayan is a Brahmin, and as such a beneficiary and not a victim of the caste system but because his focus is rather on the individual, especially the idiosyncrasies of character, than on society and social evils. Narayan deals with the segment
of society he knows best, namely, the middle class Brahmins. But the caste of his characters is rarely emphasized.

R.K. Narayan is a self confessed believer in the world of the occult and the supernatural. He genuinely believes in life after death, which is an extension of the belief in spirits. Perhaps it is Narayan’s own experience with the world of spirits that make him see the ghosts as not any different from human beings. After the shattering agony and trauma of his beloved wife’s death after a short period of five years of marital bliss, Narayan had tried to establish contact with her. And as he reveals in My Days and also in the autobiographical novel The English Teacher, he had succeeded in contacting her and communicating directly with her. His wife’s spirit tells him through the medium Raghunatha Rao that the spirits “exist in a more refined state, in a different medium … I wish I could explain all that I see, think and feel.”

It is no wonder therefore that quite a few of Narayan’s stories are built around supernatural characters and happenings. Narayan’s handling of the supernatural creates the proper atmosphere. His ghost stories deserve admiration for their appropriate atmosphere, telling phrases and vivid descriptions. Instead of becoming horror-tales, they remain amusing and humorous stories with a supernatural basis. They are ghost stories with a difference. Some stories are based on the belief widely prevalent in many
countries and from very early time, that the spirits of those who die violent
deaths do not attain “moksha” but wander on earth restlessly and sometimes
even possess people. Narayan has humanised the ghosts and so they listen to
reason, argue and cause no harm.

In “Old Bones” we find Narayan using this popular belief. In this
story the Talkative man and his nephew, a twelve year old boy called Raju,
stay in a deserted “dak” bungalow which is hunted by the ghost of a man
who was murdered there by the watchman of the “dak” house. The spirit
takes possession of the nephew’s body and throws out the Talkative Man,
threatening not to leave the young boy, unless the Talkative Man digs up his
bones from under the tamarind tree, where it is defiled by dogs and pigs, and
throws them into a nearby well. After the Talkative Man had carried out the
commands, the spirit departs. True to the tradition of ghosts, here also the
ghosts of the murdered man reveals the identity of his murderer. Thus the
crime is brought to light.

Narayan’s story “An Accident” is also set in the pattern of the
conventional ghost story. Here the ghost of the driver Arul Doss, appears in
person to the narrator, helps him to repair his car and as a recompense asks
him to reveal the truth about the fatal accident that he had, on that very spot.
The owner of the car that was wrecked had blamed him for his careless and
drunken driving. This is unbearable to him as it was not true and he wants
the narrator to tell the owner that the accident occurred because that was a evil spot. He does not realize that this place has acquired a bad name because of his haunting the spot of the accident.

Through the stories like "The Martyr's Corner" and "Lawley Road" Narayan deals with the hypocrisy of politicians, the volatile temperament of the Indian crowds that causes a riot in no time disrupting the serene flow of life, and the follies, excesses and eccentricities of the people of Malgudi. In "The Martyr's Corner" Rama a street vendor of food stuffs does very well in business because he has got hold of a location in a very prominent place where the Jutka drivers, shoe-shiners and the theatre goers congregate. But the good life comes to a sudden end for him when one day a riot breaks out in his street. The police resort to firing to quell the riot and many people are killed. When peace is restored in the street Rama finds that the corner which had helped his business to flourish is now marked off for erecting a statue to a political leader who had fallen in skirmish between the rioters and the police. He is forced to move his shop farther up the road, where it is unnoticed by people. Soon he winds up his business and is forced to find employment as a waiter in a hotel. Thus the man who had only a little while ago a thriving business of his own, is reduced to the position of a hired servant due to no fault of his. The question which Narayan poses here is, who is the real martyr, the leader who died in the police firing or the
innocent vendor who lost his livelihood and was reduced to poverty?

Narayan's title for the story is charged with irony because of the ambiguity.

Political agitations and demonstrations and firing by the police on unruly agitators have become a daily feature of life in India and frequently disrupt public life. In "Lawley Road" Narayan pokes fun at the wide discrepancy between the official reports of casualties and the exaggerated rumours spread by the public. In this story, Narayan also ridicules the tendency of Indians to deface public parks and streets by putting up statues of national heroes and leaders. In "Lawley Road" Narayan analyses the motives of the man who take the lead in honouring national figures by naming roads and parks after them. In this story the Talkative man who is the narrator describes the enthusiasm with which the independence of India is celebrated by the Municipality of Malgudi. Streets are swept, drains are cleared and flags are hoisted all over the place. Even after doing all these, the Municipal chairman of the town feels that enough has not been done to commensurate with the importance of the occasion. At last the municipal councillors hit upon the idea of renaming all streets and parks of the town after the great national leaders. This led to utter confusion and chaos. Coronation Park is renamed as Hamara Hindustan Park.

"Mahatma Gandhi Road" was the most sought after name. Eight different ward councillors were after it. There were six others who wanted
to call the roads in front of their houses “Nehru Road” or “Netaji Subash Bose Road”... The town became unrecognisable with new names. Gone were the “Market Road”, North Road”, “Chitra Road”, “Vinayak Mudali street”, and so on. In their place appeared the names, repeated in four different places, of all the ministers, deputy ministers, and the members of the congress working committee. Of course, it created a lot of hardship. Letters went where they were not wanted, people were not able to say where they lived or direct others there. The town became a wilderness with all its land marks gone.”

But the chairman was happy and was looking for fresh ways of demonstrating his patriotism. His eyes fell on the enormous statue of Sir Frederick Lawley mounted on a tall pedestal at the corner of Lawley Extension which has already been renamed Gandhi Nagar. The chairman whose knowledge of history left much to be desired, thinks that Sir Frederick, one of the hated British who had been driven out of the country, has no business to take up such a commanding position in the town. Tenders are called for the removal of the statue. When it is found the lowest is for fifty thousand a sum which the Municipality cannot afford, it is decided to offer the statue free to any one who will rid the town of it. The narrator speculating that he could make a huge profit from the sale of the large quantity of lead that had gone into the pedestal and statue, accepts the offer
and finds himself in endless trouble and expense in removing the statue to his house. When a report of the removal of Sir Frederick’s statue appeared in the press, there were protests from all over the country because Sir Frederick, though an Englishman, had been a true friend of India and was virtually the founder of the town of Malgudi. The chairman and his fellow councillors now find themselves in a spot. They turn against the narrator, whom they had officially thanked as a public benefactor of the town, for removing the statue. But the clever narrator suggests that the Municipal chairman buy his house and the statue and make a present of them to the town. It would be a good investment as he would have to spend more if he were to fight an election. The chairman saw the point and a deal was struck. He was happy to see a few days later this news item in the papers:

The Chairman of Malgudi Municipality has been able to buy back as a present for the nation the Statue of Sir Frederick Lawley. He proposes to install it in a newly acquired property which is shortly to be converted into a park. The Municipal Council have resolved that Kabir Lane shall be changed to Lawley Road (P.13)

In the figure of the chairman, Narayan draws the portrait of the corrupt, self seeking, ill educated politician without integrity or principle
whose patriotism is only a cover for promoting self interest of his antecedents the narrator tells us that “He was a man who had done himself well as a supplier of blankets to the army during the war, later spending a great deal of his gains in securing the chairman ship” (Pg.7). In order to gain popularity and retain his seat as Chairman, he is prepared to layout a considerable sum on a public park in memory of Sir Frederick Lawley,

Communalism has a much longer history in India than nationalism and it is one of the chief obstacles to national integration. In his short story “Another Community” Narayan touches upon the theme of communal strife. At the very out set, the author tells us.

“I am not going to mention caste or community in this story. The news papers of recent months have given us a tip which is handy – namely the designation “One Community” and “Another Community” In keeping with this practice I am giving the hero of this story no name. (Lawley Road pg. 150).17

His hero has no name, no caste or community. He is just an ordinary man who works in an office, has a family of four children and leads a quiet, contented life. But his life is violently disturbed and he finds himself on the
edge of a volcano. Things change in his little world dramatically and suddenly tempers flare up and friends turn into enemies.

It was on the whole a peaceful, happy life.... till the October of 1947, when he found that the people around had begun to speak and act like savages. Someone or a body of men killed a body of men a thousand miles a way and the result was that they repeated the evil here and wreaked their vengeance on those around. It was an absurd state of affairs. But there it was: a good action in a far off place did not find a corresponding echo, but an evil one did possess that power. (pg. 150)\textsuperscript{18}

Rumours are rife about brutal killings of women and children and each community vows to avenge their slaughtered brethren. The atmosphere becomes charged with suspicion and hatred.

"Day by day life seemed to become intolerable. All straightforwardness seemed to have gone out of life suddenly. People seemed to him sneaky and secretive. Everyone seemed to him a potential assassin. People looked at each other as cannibals would at their prey (pg.152).\textsuperscript{19}
Being a very peaceful and timid person he is filled with fear and
anxiety, imagining rioters breaking into his house and killing his wife and
children. Even the slightest noise at night wakes him up and he would rush
to the window to peep out and see if the town is in flames. Finally on the
fateful day when both the communities are fully geared for action and wait
for some provocation from the other side to start annihilating their enemy
community, the excuse is provided by our non descript hero. In order to take
his mind off the gathering tension in the city, he plunges into work with such
zeal that he loses all count of time and leaves the office only after 7.30 P.M..
Now he feels anxious about the fate of his family and decides to hurry home
through a short cut which normally he would avoid on account of it.
Narrowness, gutters and stray dogs. As ill luck would have it, he collides
with a cyclist coming in the opposite direction and a quarrel ensues. A
crowd collects, hot words are exchanged and the poor man is attacked by the
crowd. His last thought as he dies is “But I will never tell my uncle what has
happened. I won’t be responsible for starting all the trouble. This city must
be saved...”20 (pg. 155). But his dying wishes for saving the town are of no
avail. News of the incident spreads like wild fire, and a full scale communal
riot follows. Our hero’s body is found in a ditch the next day and identified
by the kerosene ration coupon in his breast pocket.
Narayan's narrative manner is uncharacteristically grim here; the customary gentle satire and sly humour and tolerance of human follies, yield place to a sombre colouring sardonic humour.

Narayan's sympathy is extended even towards the dumb animals, birds and insects. The relationship between animals and human beings and man's cruel exploitation of the animals is explored by Narayan in many stories. His stories dealing with animals reveal his close study of animal behaviour. They are humorous in general but have their moments of emotion and pathos. It is remarkable how Narayan understands animals and makes them almost living characters. The explanation for this is not far to seek. As he tells us in his memoir My Days, the earliest recollection he has of his childhood is playing in a corner of the garden, with a peacock and a monkey for company. The monkey was named Rama. The monkey ran away and peacock was killed by someone. A little mynah was his next pet, but it was devoured by a cat before his eyes. The fate of the green parrot was the same as that of the mynah. Then a kitten and later a puppy was added to the menageries, but both died. Deciding that they were not lucky with pets, Narayan's uncle resolved never to have a pet in the house again. It was this early association with animals that gave him such an intimate understanding of their ways and taught him that they are affectionate, loyal and sincere.
In the short story “Chippy” we get to know something of the psychology of animals. Chippy, a loyal dog, has the feelings and instincts of human beings. When his master brings home a small, stray dog, chippy is fiercely jealous and as he cannot bear to share his master’s love and his own possessions with the new comer. He hates the new comer and leaves home in great anger and sorrow, but returns as he cannot bear the separation from his master.

“The Blind Dog” and “The Mute Companions” by Narayan are stories about a dog and a monkey who are exploited by cruel and greedy owners. In “The Blind Dog”, a dog attaches itself to a blind man named Sami. It is a god send for him. He ties him up with a thread and uses him as his eyes. But he ill-treats the dog very badly, he does not feed the dog well and gives it plenty of kicks and blows. Yet it is loyal to his tyrannical master and does not leave him even when the opportunity presents itself. It behaves as though it is its destiny to serve as the eyes of the blind man. The dog is the better of the two.

Sami, the dumb beggar in the story “The Mute Companions” bears a close resemblance to Sami, the blind beggar. He procures a monkey, teaches him tricks and earns his livelihood by making the monkey perform tricks. But unlike the dog in the “Blind Dog” the monkey escapes from his bondage never to return to his master. These stories emphasize the
inhumanity and cruelty of human beings. The blind and the dumb beggars to whom fate has been unkind, instead of being compassionate to the wretched, are more tyrannical than others. In this story the monkey is more impressive character than Sami, the beggar.

In the short story "Naga" by Narayan we have a snake charmer who has a cobra named Naga. His son has a monkey called Rama. Both of them make a living by making the cobra and the monkey perform before people. Unlike the blind and the dumb beggars, they are kind to the creatures. The snake charmer being a devout Hindu considers the snake to be a sacred creature possessing supernatural powers. When the snake-charmer takes out the snake from his basket, he gives a discourse on its importance to the public and traces the brilliant ancestry of the snake.

"As you all know, Shiva is the lord of the cobras, which he ties his braid with, and its hood canopies his head; the great God Vishnu rests in the coils of Adi-Shesha, the mighty serpent, who also bears on his thousand heads this universe. Think of the armlets on goddess Parvati! Again, elegant little snakes. How can we think that we are wiser than our gods? Snake is a part of a god’s ornament, and not an ordinary
creature... After all, what is a serpent? A great soul in a state of penance waiting to go back to its heavenly world. That is all sirs” (pg. 184–85 old and new)

Narayan’s “At the Portal” a short story about squirrels has no human character, except for the narrator who is merely an observer and not an active participant in the action. It depicts an interesting scene, where a mother squirrel teaches her young one to climb. But the young squirrel is unable to imitate his mother who shows him several times how to perform this feat – Finally the mother squirrel leaves the young one to its fate. The narrator is so captivated by the attempts of the mother to teach the recalcitrant young one that he forgets all about the meeting he is supposed to attend and spends more than an hour watching this spectacle.

R.K. Narayan believed in astrology. He has written quite a few stories on this theme probably because of the heavy price, as he believes he had to pay for ignoring the power and influence wielded by the stars on human lives and happiness. He married Rajam whose horoscope did not match his. The stars were proved to be right after all, when their idyllic marriage ended with Rajam’s death by typhoid. In stories like “The White Flower” and “The Seventh House” Narayan deals with the same theme. In “The White Flower” Krishna is not able to marry the girl he loves because the
horoscopes do not match. In “The Seventh House” also the same pattern is repeated, but in this story despite the protests of astrologers Krishna gets married to the girl he loves and pays the penalty for it. Soon after marriage his wife dies of typhoid. In both the stories, there is an attempt to circumvent the planetary predictions by means of a direct appeal to God. Both these stories is autobiographical.

To a comic writer, endowed with a fine comic vision of life, the blind belief in astrology and in horoscopes may be expected to provide numerous situations to exploit its comic possibilities. But in this field Narayan had not used satire and irony “An Astrologer’s Day” is an exception to this. “An Astrologer’s Day” describes a typical day in the life of a way side astrologer who takes up the profession just to make a living. He knew nothing about astrology. He was a farmer who in a fight with a neighbour had stabbed him and pushed him into a well. He fled from the village, believing he had kilted him. He had come to the city to hide himself from the police and had taken up fortune telling in order to make a living. He was a shrewd man. He never opened his mouth until the client had spoken to him at least for ten minutes and which provided him with enough ideas to tackle questions. Part of his success depended on the choice of his location and his impressive professional make-up which instilled confidence in his clients.
His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion and his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam. The power of his eyes was considerably enhanced by their position placed as they were between the painted forehead and the dark whiskers which streamed down his checks. To crown the effect he wound a saffron coloured turban around his head.

This colour scheme never failed. People were attracted to him as bees are attracted to cosmos or dahlia stalks.

By coincidences Guru Nayak, the man he believes he has murdered and, who has been on his trail ever since to have his revenge on him sits before him and wants to know whether he, Guru Nayak, will ever meet his murderer whom he has been searching far and wide. Guru Nayak does not recognize the astrologer but the astrologer recognizes his enemy and the impending danger. Without giving himself away he coolly calls of his past and of his present mission. He advises him to stop his search as his murderer has died in an accident. To make sure that Guru Nayak will not trouble him again, he warns him not to leave his home or travel southwards.

"Astrologer's Day" is one of the best of Naryan's stories. As usual he refuses to pass sentence on his characters even when they are criminals and imposters. He is compassionate and tolerant towards them.
In India there is a superstition that a perfect work of art invites the wrath of the gods. Perfection is an attribute of the gods and it is presumptuous of man to aspire to it. In Narayan’s stories this fear of the danger of perfection is a recurrent theme. The short story “Such Perfection” under scores the popular belief that gods will not tolerate man’s aspirations to equal or surpass them in any field. The sculptor Soma is commissioned to make a statue of Nataraja. He makes an extraordinarily magnificent idol which was so graceful, natural and life-like that everyone who saw it felt that at any moment it might start dancing. It was feared that a great calamity might befall the village if the statue was allowed to remain perfect and flawless as the sculptor had made it. So the villagers pressed the artist to make a little flaw in his work, but he refuses to mar his own proud handiwork. He declares that if his statue is refused a place in the temple, he will make a temple for it himself, and install it there at the full moon. Hearing this news, people from neighbouring villages flock to Soma’s house. At the appointed time, in the light of the full moon, the idol is consecrated and installed.

A great flame of Camphor was waved in front of the image, and bronze bells rang. A silence fell upon the crowd. Every eye was fixed upon the image. In the flame of the circling Camphor Nataraja’s eyes lit up. His limbs moved, his
anklets jingled. The crowd was awe-stricken. The God pressed one foot on Earth and raised the other in dance. He destroyed the Universe under his heel, and smeared the ashes over his body, and the same God rattled the drum in his hand and by its rhythm set life in motion again ... Creation, Dissolution, and God, attained a meaning now, this image brought it out, the bells rang louder every second.

The crowd stood stunned by this vision vouch safed to them...

But true to the belief, suddenly a violent thunder storm arises, people run helter-skelter in panic, rivers are flooded and water flows along the streets; many men and cattle perish. Finally the storm abates only when the statue is damaged. Slightly by a tree falling on the roof. Though Soma lived to the ripe old age of ninety five he does not touch his mallet and chisel again after creating the incomparable statue of Nataraj.

In "The Snake Song" similar theme is used. In this story the Talkative Man is visited by the Naga Raja in the guise of a Sadhu. While he is practicing various ragas. Not realizing who his visitor is, the Talkative Man sends him away with scant respect. A little later, he is punished by the Naga Raja, who appears in the form of a big black cobra which stretches its full length across the room, facing him, with its hood uplifted, when he is
playing the snake song "punnaga varali". The Talkative Man is frightened out of his wits and, afraid that the fearsome cobra would strike the moment he stopped playing, he goes on playing the same song till he faints with exhaustion. After this terrifying experience, he does not touch his flute again. His punishment is inevitable as he does not love music for its own sake, but is commercial minded and sees it as a means to wealth and fame, and the bamboo flute as the magic wand that will open for him the door to success, fame and riches.

Narayan had no personal intimacy with Gandhi. The one short story in which Narayan directly introduces Gandhi is given the title “Gandhi’s Appeal”. Through this story Narayan describes the psychology of people who make grand public gestures and repent of them in private.

Gandhi is in town and a lawyer and his wife Padma, plan to attend Gandhi’s meeting. They have heard that at the meeting the Mahatma would make ardent appeal for funds. This appeal will be irresistible and all the people assembled will scramble to the dais and compete with one another to handover whatever they have on at the time in the form of gold, silver or currency. They have also heard that many eager and not willing to part with their ornaments or money, leave these at home and go to Gandhi’s meetings empty handed. So that there would be no risk or loss even if they were spell bound by Gandhi’s words. Padma decides to imitate these clever people.
While her husband decides to stay away from the meeting, Padma, however, feels ashamed to go out without any ornaments at all. She decides to wear just a pair of very thin gold bangles and resolves to cover them from view with the end of her saree. But at the meeting where the appeal for funds comes from Gandhi, she is unable to resist the call, follow the others to the dais and donates her bangles. She decides to keep this a secret from her husband fearing a scolding but finds that her husband too had been attracted to the meeting and had in a similar fashion parted with fifty rupees which he happened to have in his pocket at the time. They both find that inspite of all the fore warnings and all the precautions they had taken they have done just what they had taken so much pains to avoid. Through this story Narayan has created a very amusing situation.

Narayan has made little use of the immense possibilities afforded by the subject of East-West encounter so fashionable at the time when he began his career as a writer. The reason may be that he had not lived abroad and had no direct exposure to the west till he was well established as writer. It is also known that Narayan always writes about matters within his field of intimate experience. But in two of his stories he had made use of the theme of East-West encounter. They are "God and the Cobbler" and "A Horse and two Goats".
In the story “God and the Cobblers” there are two characters. One is a hippie, he is an American bomber pilot from Berkeley who in the Vietnam war had set fire to villages. Awakening to the spiritual poverty and emptiness of an affluent society which indulges in such senseless killings, he embarks on a search for a Guru who may guide him to attain personal salvation. “In his wanderings he had seen in Banares, Yogis sitting on nails in deep meditation. He had seen at Gaya a penitent who had a long needle thrust through his cheeks ... only it interfered with his tongue, which he didn’t mind, since he was under a vow of silence. The hippie had watched at Allahabad during Kumbamela millions praying and dipping at the confluence of the rivers Jumna and Ganges. In their midst was a Sadhu who had a full-grown tiger for company claiming it to be his long-lost brother in a previous birth; men handled deadly cobras as if they were ropes. There were fire-caters, swallowers of swords and chewers of glass and cactus or the yogis who sat in cremation grounds in a cataleptic state, night and day, without food or movement, unmindful of the corpses burning on the pyres around them”.24
Impressed by these awesome sights and practices he wanted to learn their secret. But he realizes that there was nothing superhuman or miraculous about these Sadhus. He was quite disillusioned with the Sadhus and god-men, but he ‘noticed on the highway, in villages and rice fields, men and women going about their business with complete absorption – faces drawn and serious but never agitated. He felt that they might have a philosophy worth investigating\textsuperscript{25}. While engaged in this mission, he meets a poor cobbler plying his trade on the pavement with his back to the outer wall of a South Indian temple under the shade of a margosa tree which kept raining flowers on him. He was struck by the serenity and acceptance of life of the cobbler and feels that he might have at last found, the Guru he had been looking for. On the pretext of getting his shoes mended, the hippie engages the cobbler in conversation. The cobbler, on his part thinks that his customer must be a God or an agent of God sent to test him. So he is very careful in answering questions about God and his part and his hopes for a future life.

Finally they come to know that neither of them is what the other takes him for. The cobbler is full of worries as he has to earn at least five rupees a day to feed his wife and grand child. His constant prayer is to be freed from his burden of existence and he does not want rebirth in any form.
The story ends on a note of light comedy. When the hippie and the cobbler part company, the hippie gives him a silver figurine of Goddess Durga. It has been given to him by a person in Nepal. The cobbler does not accept it, but asks the hippie to keep it saying that it will protect him. He has a secret suspicion that the hippie might have stolen it.

Thus the Hippie’s quest for a spiritual anchor, his belief that he will find it in India and his eager hope that at last he has found it in the Cobbler end in disillusionment. So does the cobbler’s belief at first seeing the hippie that he might be a God or a messenger of God.

With their own way of writing both Narayan and Chekhov gave form and shape to extraordinary stories that sprang up from ordinary and common experiences. The incidents are presented as if they were happening before us. The way of writing is free from any intentional colouring or complex presentations. In both the writers, characters became mouth pieces to express their opinion. At the same time there is a visible detachment and unaffected attitude towards the incidents and characters they depict.

Another peculiar and important feature of the stories of Narayan and Chekhov is their brevity. When one aim at the maximum result from the minimum materials, the methods used will have the maximum strength. This speciality gives the stories of Narayan and Chekhov and unusual colour
and beauty of their own that reflected in the depiction of characters and incidents, their talks and deeds.

Through their stories Narayan and Chekhov have proved that their genius is with the genre of short story. Their experiment with novel and its failure gives emphasis to this point. There is no difficulty to believe that there is an artistic law in which they believed and which they followed in the selection of characters, their characteristics, situations and language. With four or five sentence they could convey an idea or present a lively picture to the reader. These stories give both Narayan and Chekhov an eternal place in the field of English and Russian short story respectively. The stories they wrote reflected the social problems of that period. The sufferings caused to human minds and feelings due to the strict social laws, the yearnings of the new generation for social justice, and overall change in the life of people – all these factors reflected in these stories and increased their inner beauty. With these specialities and peculiarities Narayan’s and Chekhov’s are confined within the frame work of ‘short story’ in a similar way.

Chekhov’s stories about children have a special effect with their direct speeches, caring language and dialogues that talk about the dispositions and behaviour of children only a writer with keen observation and knowledge about this enchanting beautiful world of children could write
so effectively about them. The children in ‘Children’, ‘Boys’, ‘Vanka’, etc reveal their innocence and attract us towards them. In a similar way Narayan's ‘Hungry Child, ‘Father’s Help ‘Dodu’, ‘The performing child’ etc have memorable places in the minds of the readers and the literature of the country.

Humour and pathos go hand in hand in the stories of Narayan and Chekhov. Humour used in the stories have enough strength to bring tears in our eyes. Humour is mingled with pathos. The themes and characters—peasants, workers, teachers, men, children etc — selected place them in a similar line and give these writers a unique place in the respective literatures of their country. The realistic pictures of life depicted by both the writers, evokes a feeling of oneness between the reader and the incidents presented. It gives a feeling that the incidents happen before us and we too are a part of it. The brevity which they used gives each word and sentence a responsibility to convey the exact idea. The simple language and the style aptly suited to the situations and life style of their characters. In their stories, both Narayan and Chekhov gave importance to characters than the incidents.

In the selection of his characters Narayan and Chekhov have followed no criterion. They include petty officials, merchants, workers, teachers, peasants, women, men, clerks and to say, people who represented different spheres of life. In their stories the characters do not have a colourful life.
All of them are destined to lead a hard life, it may be financial or mental disturbance. Through the importance given to their characters they are revealing the social problems of the period. The characters reflected their thoughts and feelings. From the raw materials in their minds came out astonishingly polished stories Narayan’s stories like ‘Uncle’, Hungry child’, The White Flower’ etc and Chekhov’s ‘Anna na sheep’ ‘Vanka’, etc are brilliant examples for their ability in the creation of situation and characters.

In some of his stories Chekhov seriously ponder over the fate of Russian women. These stories reflect his enlightened views. The women characters he chose were representatives from the different strata of society. ‘Women’, ‘Volodya Junior and Senior’, ‘In the Native land’, ‘A Women’s Kingdom’, ‘Anna Round the Neck’, ‘The Bride’ etc present women who differ in character and living conditions. Among those are women who passively suffer or change themselves in tune with their surroundings, or a positive character who talks about freedom and dreams about a bright future as is seen in Nadya, the heroine of ‘The Bride’. But the women whom Narayan wrote about had an appearance different from what we see in Chekhov. His female characters are passive and unimpressive. Rare exceptions like Bamini Bai in ‘Da’s’, the Bridegroom’ only prove the rule. Narayan hardly cares to mention them by their names. He does not assign to them any important role. They do not have independent existence At times
they do resist but it is only a weak resistance that they offer. Lowerclass women often dominate their husbands though they too light the fire, fetch water and cook foods as Muni’s wife in ‘A Horse and Two Goats’.

R.K. Narayan has admitted that he has deliberately eschewed the subject of love as he wanted “to see if other subjects than love ... could be written about. I wished to attack the tyranny of love and see if life could offer other values than the inevitable man woman relationship to a writer”36. So we find that in his stories especially short stories, love does not figure as an important theme. Though Chekhov too has not given much importance to love in his stories, this human feeling is profound and deeper in Chekhov than in Narayan. He has dealt with the theme in a few stories and had a fascination towards the subject. The stories ‘Lady with a Dog’, ‘My Life’, ‘About Love’, ‘The Darling’, etc. should be paid attention.

Unlike Chekhov, in many of his short stories Narayan uses a narrator, “Talkative Man”, The Talkative Man appears in nine stores included in the two collections, Lawley Road and An Astrologer’s Day.

At first glance it might seem that the Talkative man is conceived as the traditional story teller who entertained gatherings of simple villagers with marvellous tales. But this is not true. He assign a keyrole for himself in all the stories he tells. Further unlike the traditional fables or folk tales,
the stories told by the Talkative Man contain no moral lesson, except perhaps the story 'The Career'.

The ancient story tellers were held in high esteem by their audience whereas The Talkative man is regarded as something of a pest in the stories of Narayan. In the story "The Snake Song" this is what they say of him: "We tried to snub him by receiving his remarks in cold silence and talking among ourselves. But he followed us all the way chatting, and we had to listen to him" (pg. 134 An Astrologer’s Day) He himself tells that he is "like Sage Narada of our epics, who for all his brilliance and accomplishments carried a curse on his back that unless he spread a gossip a day, his skull would burst" (R.K. Narayan, Talkative Man (Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1986), P.I

Of the nine stories in which he appears, two are ghost stories ("The Old man of the Temple", and "Old Bones"), two (Lawley Road’ and ‘Engine Trouble) are incredibly fantastic yarns; another story “The Night of the Cyclone” of which also he is the central character, is an illustration of the proverb that misfortune never comes singly, and narrates how in the course of one night he passed through a series of harrowing experiences and sufferings.

The most interesting thing about the Talkative Man as narrator is that he is not the same person in all the stories, though he has the same name. He
is a protean figure who puts on different masks in different stories. In ‘The Snake Song’ he is a student of music; in ‘The Roman Image’ he is an Archaeologist’s assistant, more knowledgeable in matters of archaeology and cultural history than the expert who employs him; in ‘Lawley Road’ he is a reporter to a newspaper, in ‘Night of the Cyclone” he is a building contractor, in ‘The Tiger’s Claw”, he is a salesman of fertilizers, he is a trader in ‘The Career’.

In his short novel ‘Talkative Man (1986), the Talkative man appears as amateur journalist who has taken journalism more as a hobby than as a means of making a living, as he has a comfortable income from inherited property and is a very eligible bachelor. In the short stories he had known vicissitudes of fortune and was a married man. This is the account he gives to himself: “They call me Talkative Man. Some affectionately shorten it to TM: I have earned this title, I suppose, because I cannot contain myself. My impulse to share an experience with others is irresistible, even if they sneer at my back” (R.K. Narayan, Talkative Man, pg.1). By invoking the name of Narada the divine tale bearer with whom he claims kinship he puts himself in respectable company.

Chekhov had written his stories in his native language but R.K. Narayan had written not in his native language Tamil, but in English. For Narayan the choice of English for creative writing was indeed a brave choice
because Narayan during his school and college courses had been weak in English and had barely managed to graduate besides that he had no exposure to an English speaking community till his late forties. Once when he was asked whether he had ever considered writing in an Indian language, Narayan replied: "You can write in only one language and you can love only one. It's different if you are a linguist, but if you have to create than perfecting one language is the job of a life time."^{27}

A strong dissimilarity that we find between Chekhov and Narayan relates to the depiction of nature by the two writers. In Narayan, nature is completely absent In Chekhov a link exists between man and nature. Nature is used to create an atmosphere that suit to the mood of the characters. Nature is not a mere background, it always merges with human life and feelings. The description of cemetery in "Yonich"

"— a world unlike any other world, a world in which the moonlight was so soft and sweet as if this place were its cradle, where there was no life, none at all, but where, in every darkling poplar, in every grave, could be felt the presence of mystery, fraught with the promise of eternal life— still and exquisite. The tomb stones, the fading flower, and the autumnal smell of rotten
leaves seemed to breathe forgiveness, sorrow and
peace.\textsuperscript{28}

In many stories nature stands not only as a helping factor to the
development of plot, but also plays a significant role in unfolding the main
idea of the story. The special mood of the character which he intends to
convey is strengthened by the changes in nature. In this evocation of a mood
Chekhov adheres to inner lyricism which in due course gives way for
philosophical reasoning. We cannot leave 'Lady with a Dog' without paying
any attention to the lyrical digression and philosophy which he narrates the
visits made by Gurov and Anna Sergeynna to Oreanda.

"White clouds lay motionless on the mountain
tops. Not a leaf stirred on the trees, the cicadas
chirped, and the monotonous, hollow roar of the
sea, coming up from below, spoke of rest, of
eternal sleep awaiting us all. The sea had roared
like that down below when there was no Yalta or
Oreanda, it was roaring now, and would go on
roaring as indifferently and hollowly when we
were here no more. And in this constancy, in
this complete indifference to the life and death of
each one of us, there is perhaps hidden the
guarantee of our eternal salvation, the never
ceasing movement of life on earth, the never
ceasing movement towards perfection.²⁹

In Chekhov's stories nature serves as catalyst for the development of
the plot. Moreover it has a significant part in revealing the main idea of the
story.

Another special feature which is seen in Narayan and not in Chekhov
is that all novels and some stories are enacted entirely against a background
Malgudi, a fictional world. Madras provides the back drop for five stories-
“All Avoidable Talk”, “Fruition At Forty”, “A Willing Slave”, “Sweet for
Angels”, and “Man hunt”. In “Chippy”, ‘The Regal’, ‘Dodu’ and ‘Mother
and Son’ the setting is Mysore, while the action in ‘A Night of Cyclone’
takes place against the background of Vizagapatam.

Narayan hardly travelled out of India until his daughter got married in
1956. It was only later, after his burden of responsibility was mitigated, that
he thought of going abroad. But in the case of Chekhov, it was different. He
had travelled a lot.

In Narayan’s fiction there is a close correspondence between real life
objects, places and persons and those of Malgudi. It is Narayan’s triumph as
an artist that he draws us into the world of Malgudi as participants and
cocreators Malgudi penetrate the fictional world so pervasively that any
evaluation becomes impossible without alluding to them as the starting point. The complex pattern of the lives of the characters revolves around the milieu as its centre. There exists a strange communion between the characters and the background. The people of Malgudi grow out of it, live in it, and belong to it.

Though Narayan and Chekhov lived at different periods in different places their works reveal the similar thoughts which connect these writers. Thus by the study of their stories we can reach the final conclusion that there is similarity in the thought process of these writers. But regional, linguistic, cultural and age differences had their own influence and contributions on each writer. These account for the dissimilarities between them. Nevertheless, there is a common, cardinal thread that links both the writers. This unique common characteristic crosses the arbitrary bounds of space and time and thus the short stories of Narayan and Chekhov become eternal models of international integration.
Reference


2. Ibid, pg. 150.


7. Ibid, pg 143-144.

8. Ibid, pg 208-209.


12. Ibid, pg. 126

13. Ibid, pg. 75


15. R.K. Narayan, *Lawley Road*, pg. 8,9


17. Ibid, pg. 150.
18. Ibid, pg. 150.
20. Ibid, pg. 155
23. Ibid, pg. 112.
25 Ibid, pg.118.
27. R.K. Narayan, Only the Story Matters, *India Today*, pg. 61)
28. Anton Chekhov, *Collected works, Volume four Stories 1898-1903* pg.210