Chapter IV

A COMPARISON BETWEEN FICTIONAL WORLDS OF NARAYAN AND NAIKAR

Our discussion in the preceding two chapters focuses on the fictional worlds of R.K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar as depicted in their short stories. Seen in the historical perspectives, R.K. Narayan represents the first generation who gives through his short stories a better feel of the Indian realities in the fictional locale of Malgudi. Along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan founded a tradition which was continued in its essence by K.A. Abbas, Manohar Malgonkar, Khuswant Singh, Jayant Mahapatra, Manoj Das, Ruskin Bond, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, etc. On the other hand, Dr. Basavaraj Naikar is a contemporary short story writer, novelist and the representative of the present generation. In an attempt to analyze the Indian sensibility both R.K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar highlight the Indian society in general. It seems that Basavaraj Naikar has also continued the tradition of R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand.

R.K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar are truly Indian writers in their vision and wisdom and truly universal in their appeal with a genuine mixture of wit and compassion on one hand and an insight and the capacity to reveal on the other hand, the authors bring each character to a throbbing life and make each situation precisely natural and yet significant.

R.K. Narayan struggled hard to publish his first book Swami and Friends as there were no publishers in India at that time. But Basavaraj Naikar, who began his career as a creative writer in 1970, did not publish his first story Fulfillment because he did not receive any guidance or encouragement from any writer due to a variety of reasons. He admits that his historical stories and novels are more important than the works of contemporary themes. Narayan has not written historical stories like that of Basavaraj Naikar.

Basavaraj Naikar’s stories are based on the Indian themes, and deal with the social and family matters. It seems that the fictional world of Basavaraj Naikar is like that of much celebrated world of R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi. Naikar is also a talented artist
and writes in the main stream of Indian English writers. In this regard Bhagwat Naik’s observation is noteworthy-

But a few others like Basavaraj Naikar continue to write honestly and diligently on Indian themes in the tradition of the great Indian short story writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Khushwant Singh and Manoj Das. With an extraordinary realization and fertile imagination Naikar has expressed his primary concern on the existential problems of man and his struggles to achieve finality. Through his restless creative passion and with his zeal of a reformist he presents the characters in Indian situation and sensibility with their loss of values in life.¹

On the other hand, R.K. Narayan being a true artist has an extraordinary power of presenting the multiple facets of life. He has no philosophical or socialistic concern. He is rooted in his limited world i.e. Malgudi as M.K. Naik writes-

Narayan is primarily preoccupied with man’s feeling of the life-role entrusted to him by tradition and environment.²

It is obvious that unlike his contemporary writers, Narayan is not a critic of society; he is a keen observer of life and manners. This vision could be characterized as humane and comic. He cannot moralize, propagandize or pontificate, nor can he lash out with a satirists’ whip. According to William Walsh Narayan’s is an irony of recognition, not an irony of correction. On the other hand, Basavaraj Naikar seems to be social critic and his major concern is to project the ethical values on his fictional world. He severely criticizes shortcomings and weaknesses of characters without fear and favour.

After close reading of the stories of R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar, we can say that both happen to be brilliant short story writers. They have presented South Indian life in their short stories in particular and Indian life and culture in general. Their stories represent various aspects of human relationships in our life. Both have a wide variety of themes. Narayan is a pure artist and there is no didacticism, no moral teaching in his fictional world. There we find total acceptance of life in Narayan’s fiction. He is well aware of the fact that the human nature is a blend of virtue and vice, nobility and knavery. Irony is Narayan’s forte but it is not difficult to discern the satirical overtones which animate most of his stories. On the other hand Basavaraj Naikar’s stories “range from the elemental to the social and mythical dimensions of life”.³
In presenting the salient thoughts of human mind Naikar has projected a very commendable critical skill as a storywriter. As one goes through the stories, one is struck by the under-current of social criticism, the vividness of description, the ability to concretize and the authenticity of experience. Without consciously plunging into critical appraisal or providing didactic sermons, the author achieves his goal and leaves the reader brooding:

Naikar’s stories give us an authentic view of life as it is lived and as it should be. The author of *The Thief of Nagarahalli and Other Stories* does not propound values but his message can be identified through his treatment of the themes. Man turns a brute when his inner restraint is lost, evil never goes unpunished, the present-day society is in a lamentably indulgent, hypercritic and corrupt condition, and we are gripped by maniac materialism. Naikar’s stories have many aspects, but the most noteworthy characteristic of his art is his subtle exploration of the mundane realities.4

Both writers have written stories dealing with education, friendship, humour, marriage, superstition, theft, campus life, animal, children, historical figures, love, sex, greed, etc. In this chapter an attempt is made to highlight the similarities and differences in the short stories of R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar.

**Education**

Schools, Colleges and Universities are considered to be the seats of learning and expectation from them is very high. At the same time it is stated that the end of all good learning is the attainment of virtue. We expect that in the educational set up the learner is at the centre and the whole process should be joyous. However, the present scenario in the academic field presented by Naikar and Narayan is not happy one.

Both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj amuse the readers, undoubtedly but at the same time their attempt is to awaken readers to the reality of the sad state of our educational system which cries for urgent reformation. Narayan is much more concerned with child education whereas Basavaraj Naikar is hurt much by the corruption, hypocrisy and politics prevalent in the academic field. In fact both Narayan and Naikar are of the opinion that education should be learner oriented and child’s well-being should be given greater importance. This is where we need value system of education which will engage
with the learner in a befitting manner and ensure him well-being. Learner’s mind should be free and he/she should enjoy it to the fullest and it is only in freedom of mind education takes place. Peace and joy are the conditions under which a healthy education takes place. There must be freedom of action, freedom of dress, freedom of thought for a learner. Thus both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar’s approach towards education seems to be identical as they think that education should be free, joyous and there should not be punishment, harassment, hypocrisy, corruption in schools and colleges.

Child’s life is determined mainly by his school, his home and his friends. R. K. Narayan pictures school going children, their traumas in his stories. In his fictional world of Malgudi Narayan is a bitter critic of regimented education. His constant refrain on the subject of education gives the readers a glimpse of his concern for our educational system. R. K. Narayan was the Honorable member of Rajya Sabha and in his speech he called for a ban on school bags, home-work and uniforms and bemoaned the plight of the school-going child.

Narayan is of the opinion that in our adult preoccupation we do not concern ourselves with the plight of children. In his maiden speech in Parliament as a member of the Rajya Sabha R.K. Narayan spoke of Indian cruelty to children. The difficulties for innocent children begin at home with their parents rudely waking them up to be packed off to school.

The school-bag has become an inevitable burden for the child. I am now pleading for the abolition of the school-bag, as a national policy, by an ordinance if necessary.\textsuperscript{5}

Narayan was concerned at the weight the child was expected to cart to school…nearly 6 to 8 kilos and the impact of burden on the physical well-being of the child. He said-

Most of the children on account of this daily burden develop stoop and hang their arms forward like a chimpanzee while walking.\textsuperscript{5}

If the child does not bring this burden to school, he gets punished, usually in the form of raps on the knuckles. Narayan was also against the dress code for children. The child is not spared even after school hours because the mother and the tutor are waiting for it so that special coaching or homework can be done-
For the child the day has ended; with no time left for her to play or dream. It is a cruel, harsh life imposed on her and I present the case before this house for the Honorable members to think out and devise remedies by changing the whole educational system and outlook so that childhood has a chance to bloom rather than wilt in the process of learning.  

In his fictional world, R. K. Narayan has presented teachers as embodiment of ruthlessness. The corporal punishment they inflict on children amounts to callousness. Narayan finds only problem teachers and not problem children. For children most of their difficulties arise from school. In the story *Uncle* the child regards the premises of school as the danger zone. Children in Narayan stories are reluctant to attend the schools. They are shuddered at the very thought of school. It is well illustrated in the story *Father’s Help*:

Lying in bed, Swami realized with a shudder that it was Monday morning. It looked as though only a moment ago it had been the last period on Friday; already Monday was there. He hoped that an earthquake would reduce the school building to dust….  

The mood and psychological tension of school going children is reflected in these words. Children are scared of school and their teacher so the innocent children suffer a lot. Narayan condemns the traditional education system as it is devoid of intrinsic values. His love for Indian culture is revealed in his persistent rejection of the Macaulean education. In his famous novel *The English Teacher* Krishna says:

This education has reduced us to a nation of morons. We were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture feeling on leavings and garbages.  

Narayan has severely criticized the teachers in his stories. He thinks that the teachers inculcate in the minds of innocent children fear of school rather than love of learning. The teacher in the story *Uncle* is unshaven and looks villainous and the narrator remembers vividly the frightening gestures of his teacher. Sometimes the innocent children like Ranga from *Dodu and Other Stories* gives up learning and opines that education is a useless self-infliction. The creative talents, according to Narayan should not be crushed under the dead weight of dry academics. We find, the Pyol school master in *The Guide* who often calls his pupils donkeys and monkeys. Narayan has criticized
even the examination system. He has successfully portrayed the effect of the farcical examination system on the youth through Iswaran. We find most of his fellow-students struggle hard to come out successful from the hellfire of the examination system. Ironically enough Iswaran is killed by the delirium of his unexpected success. To fail in the examination is a disgrace and we see unsuccessful students commit suicide. Narayan portrays the pain and misery of young students who suffer mental agony through the character of Iswaran. Thus the story is a poignant reminder of the pressures that the educational system with its examinations puts on innocent young people.

While R. K. Narayan deals with child education, Basavaraj Naikar presents corruption, cynicism, indifference at the administrative level, apathy and incompetence at the academic level, fecklessness at the level of students and researchers, hypocrisy, callousness, petty politics in colleges and universities. Any kind of corruption in an educational institution is like a canker that eats away the very roots of a culture. Naikar, being a distinguished academician must have observed the relentless realities of an Indian university campus which is replete with expediency, ethical degeneracy, dirty politics, and jealousies. Education system in India seems to be rotten and that is what Naikar in his fictional world powerfully projects in his stories dealing with campus life. In The Anonymous Letter the author brings out the foppery, meanness and petty politics of highly educated intellectuals. It seems that the author is able to evoke the atmosphere of backbiting, student-baiting and string-pulling that is rampant in Indian colleges and universities. The story is a biting satire that exposes much of the reality of the present higher education system in our country. Basavaraj Naikar severely criticizes the head of department of English, the teachers and students. He draws our attention to the fact that teachers are supposed to pursue their research and should not waste their talent in putting each other down.

Again in the story A Chronic Patient Became a Doctor Naikar points out how corruption lurks even in the immaculate personalities of university academicians:

Exposing the setbacks and difficulties in the pursuit of research for the award of Ph.D. Naikar delineates the shocking affairs of guru-sisya relationship. Nandishwar the teacher-scholar has lost his sanity of mind during his fourteen years of ordeal under a tough and sadist guide for the award of a Ph. D. degree. Being frustrated with his unexpected result at the M.A. level Nandishwar has made up his mind to
excel his friends by doing Ph. D. on a rare topic of international standard. Sympathizing with the plight of the scholar at the post Graduate Centre, Naikar discloses some of the unsolved problems of Nandiswar in the hands of a third-rate, cruel, cunning, non-cooperative, selfish, lazy, egocentric and sadist guide Professor Nagaraj.

After close reading of the stories we also realize that there is the sense of uncertainly among the junior members of many PG departments. They are told to attend seminars, present papers and publish; otherwise there would be no promotion. What kinds of encouragement are given to these teachers for their intellectual pursuit? The libraries are poorly stuffed. Appointments to faculty positions are not being done with sincerity. Naikar points out-

“….nowadays, Indian universities have become the playgrounds for politicians. All the UGC norms are either thrown to wind or adopted for vested interests.”…. “If such anomalies happened in appointments and promotions in the highest institute of learning like a University, how can you expect academic excellence? How can a meritorious man work hard or cheerfully when he is suppressed or ignored by the University?”

Thus, Naikar poses a number of vital questions related to the academic world. When this field is so stinking, we should ask for some kind of academic improvement. It needs to be changed positively. This is what Basavaraj Naikar wants to convey the message through his stories.

In conclusion, we can say that both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar are not happy with the present educational set-up of our nation and are sympathetic and compassionate to learners. It is observed that both authors have criticized the present system of education but it seems that Narayan comes up with some sort of solution. In this regard, Narayan in his famous novel The English Teacher shows his decided preference for the introduction of a new type of school called ‘Leave-Alone School’ for children. In this type of school children are free to do things accordingly to their free will. Teachers here do not impose their will on children by punishing them. Krishna, the English teacher in a college, when he sees the new type of ‘Leave-Alone school’ feels disgusted with, “stuffing Shakespeare and Elizabethan metre and Romantic poetry for the hundredth time into young minds and feeding them on the dead mutton of literary
analysis and theories and histories.” Krishna, the protagonist, therefore resigns his English lectureship and accepts the head mastership of ‘Leave-Alone School’ for the sake of children.

Friendship

Friendship is also one of the important themes in the short stories of R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar. In respect of Narayan’s fictional world, he gives much more importance to friendship. The very title of his first novel Swami and Friends is self-explanatory:

Friendship is of the utmost importance for Swami…In Swami’s relationship with Somu the Pea, Rajam and the others we see Narayan’s broad human sympathies finding tender and loving expression. Similarly, Basavaraj Naikar too presents the bond between two persons skilfully.

In a number of stories Narayan’s protagonists are children presented in their multi-faceted relationships in the family and in society. These stories with their vivid descriptions reveal Narayan’s intimate knowledge of child life in the families of the middle class. He probes into the working of their mind and lays bare their innocent longings. In the bitter-sweet story Leela’s Friend Narayan reveals the bond of friendship between the innocent Leela and Siddha a servant. Leela is deeply attached to Siddha who has won over her by his capacity to engage and amuse her. Leela finds a friend in him. Narayan emphasizes the fact that human relationship matters little to the grown-ups. It is a direct contrast to the child’s love for the servant. In the eyes of Leela’s parents Siddha is guilty but still innocent Leela’s pathetic entreaties to keep Siddha back in service is remarkable. The dominating factor in the child’s world according to Narayan is friends and games. The author gives a buzzing world of Dodu and friends – in their mischiefs, anxieties and fears. Cricket and Cricket talk permeate their world and cricket enables them to form a coterie. Indeed. Dodu and his friends recall the exploits of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn.

Narayan’s another story; Doctor’s Word is a charming story about friendship between a doctor, Raman and his close friend and now patient, Gopal. It is a memorable
story with human touch. For Narayan friendship is a rare commodity. People come together for a purpose; it lasts as long as some interest binds them. If people come together without any purpose (i.e. friendship) by itself, that is a great achievement. Friendship is just like a spray of water. Narayan illustrates this best in The Doctor’s Word. Dr. Raman, the eminent doctor, a stickler for truth was a conscientious and determined fighter against death but he “never believed that agreeable words ever saved lives.” The moment of trial, however, comes in Dr. Raman’s life when his dearest friend in the world waits for death-sentence from his lips. The votary of truth wavers for the first time in his life. He takes decision to tell a lie for the sake of his friend:

If my word can save his life, he shall not die…This was the first time he was going to do a piece of acting before a patient, simulate a feeling and conceals his judgment. He stooped over the patient and said with deliberate emphasis, “Don’t worry about the will now. You are going to live.

The effect of doctor’s word on his friend Gopal is magical. The hopeless patient begins to recover. However, Dr. Raman does not understand how his friend has survived this attack. Narayan has, however, given his answer—the power of faith has turned the doctor’s word into a talisman.

In some of his stories Basavaraj Naikar also deals with the theme of friendship. We have many pairs of friends in the stories like Cross Roads [Mohan and Sivaraj]. Blood For Blood [the narrator and Channappa, the narrator and Dr. Deshpande]. The Invisible Face [the narrator and Bangarasetty]. Coffin in the house [Mallikarjuna and Mr. Patil]. All For Gold [Sangappa and Balappa]. The bond of friendship between these friends is strong but some of them are brutes who betray their friends for gold and money. On the contrary Narayan’s friends value friendship and never betray each other. Then the question arises whether the friendship portrayed by Naikar is true or not. The persons like Balappa and Dr. Deshpande are the stigma on friendship and that is what Naikar realistically points out through these characters.

Bangarasetty, President’s Award Winner in The Invisible Face is secretly involved in the production of fake currency. He is a close friend of narrator who tells him everything except his connection with the big bulls. However, like a true friend, the narrator leaves no stone unturned to help Bangarasetty in his crisis. When Bangarasetty takes poison, the narrator helps him a lot by utilizing the services of his doctor-friend,
Mr. Deshpande, Bangarasetty, the patient is treated properly and gets better. Later on the
doctor who is the second god on the earth is shown poisoning Bangarasetty for the sake
of money. Thus, it is the narrator who helps his traitor friend without knowing his real
nature. Similarly, we find, the friendship between Sangappa and Balappa in the story All
For Gold. Naikar opens the story stating-

Sangappa and Balappa were very intimate friends. They were popularly known as
Sangya and Balya. Sangya was a rich man….But Balya was born poor….16

The author brings together the rich and the poor in the name of friendship. But
Balappa deceives his close friend in the devil’s way, supports his enemy Virabhadra and
murders Sangappa. The brilliance of gold outshines that of friendship. “What shocks our
finer sensibility is Balappa’s betrayal. When in the final scene Sangappa screams,

“Ayyo, Balya! Why did you betray me?”

One is reminded of Julius Caesar’s “et tu Brute!” But whereas Brutus stabs
Caesar for ideology, Balya betrays his friend for gold.”17

In the story Coffin in the House we meet Mr. Patil, a respectable man who rapes
a girl named Prema, the daughter of his friend and murders her. He confesses his crime
before his friend Mallikarjuna. Finally, Mr. Patil is arrested and put behind the bar. But
Prema’s father’s remark is noteworthy here, with disgust he says-

We thought Mr. Patil to be the best friend of our family and could never imagine
that he would do such a terrible thing. We simply cannot guess which snake lives
in which hole.18

In Naikar’s stories the unfaithful, disloyal friends are punished, however, in the
stories of R. K. Narayan dealing with friendship, we don’t find such treacherous friends.
Narayan’s doctor-friend saves the life of his intimate friend while Naikar’s doctor-friend
poisons his patient and kills him.

Humour and Irony

R. K. Narayan, unlike Raja Rao and Basavaraj Naikar, is an artist first and
writer last. Narayan has, in his writings no motive other than giving his readers the
delight and joy of creative art. He seems to believe in the principle of “Art for the sake of Art”. Narayan’s forte is pure and genial humour.

On the other hand, Basavaraj Naikar’s stories are “told with muffled humour and subtle satire on a society that is conservative and liberal, traditional and modern.  

R. K. Narayan’s vision of life is subtly ironic. His art is never or rarely guilty or betraying a fierce amelioratory purpose. The major bulk of his stories reveal R. K. Narayan to be a shrewd and amused observer of the innumerable follies and foibles, vanities and vapidities that his fellow human beings are invariably guilty of. Most importantly-

what gives Narayan depth is that he sees the comic dimension of every situation and by doing so, he gives us balance, and in his own way, underscores the seriousness of the situation itself.  

R. K. Narayan tries to give his readers the joy of purely creative artist. The comedy masked by absurdity shows the human values though ridiculed. Narayan very well exemplifies this in his fictional world.

Narayan accepts life with all its imperfections, eccentricities, and follies. He successfully transports this spirit to his readers without any didacticism. The sympathetic humour and broad humanity of R. K. Narayan has no parallel in Indian English fiction and this is the great achievement of Narayan.

Most of Narayan’s stories are intended purely as entertainment. He discovers something odd in what is ordinary, quaint and queer in what is natural and familiar, and gives a comic turn even to what might otherwise has been serious issues of life. It is primarily as a comic writer that Narayan excels. The world of Malgudi as projected in his novels and numerous short stories has provided him with his material for rich human comedy:

Malgudi Days, not nights …The sun in these Malgudi days’ beams from beneath his brow and its light is generous and steady and benign.  

The stories like Dasi, the Bridegroom, A Shadow, Ishwaran, Another Community Selvi give a wrench to the heart. But, generally, Narayan’s stories amuse and delight. They cover a variety of subjects-supernatural, animal, and human-and reveal
a keen and close observation of life. However, the basic fiber of the treatment retains its comic essence. Narayan displays a rich and varied range of art as a humourist in his stories. The central situation in the stories like Lawley Road, Like the Sun, Engine Trouble is extremely amusing. Engine Trouble is a rib-tickling account of a tight corner the Talkative Man finds himself in, after winning a road engine at a lottery. The unusual prize gives him no end of trouble, and it is only a providential earthquake that ultimately solves his vexing yet amusing problem to depose of his prize.

The focus of the author is on the humourous incident. The heroes in these humourous stories are like Charlie Chaplin. The Talkative Man (Engine Trouble), Sekhar (Like the Sun) and the Talkative Man (Lawley Road) amuse the readers like that of Charlie Chaplin. These heroes have what is called Charlie Chaplin Streak. The hero is “exposed as a man unequal to the situation. Like Charlie Chaplin he finds himself in a world which is too complicated, or to exacting for him. 22

On the contrary, in the fictional world of Dr. Basavaraj Naikar we don’t come across the heroes like The Talkative Man or Sekhar. Some of Narayan’s most amusing stories have children as the main characters, on the contrary the children making mischief is a rare phenomenon in the fictional world of Dr. Basavaraj Naikar. Narayan’s children stories like Father’s Help, Crime and Punishment and Dodu may be taken as examples. The author pokes fun as the boy’s parents who make a fuss about their child “as if he were made of thin glass.” 23

The way the boy in Crime and Punishment blackmails the teacher and makes him do all that his fancy dictates is indeed humourous. Dodu, the innocent child with his gnawing financial worries, hits upon a novel solution. He carries “a few leaves crumpled into a ball”. 24 With his own inscriptions on them, to the Director of Archaeology in the expectation of a good price for them. Dodu’s interview with the ‘mighty man’ Dr. Iyengar is highly amusing:

‘Sir’, Dodu repeated. This time, as if to compensate, his voice indecently loud. And Dodu felt awkward.

“The mighty man started at the noise and looked about for the source of that ‘Sir’, but could not locate it.
‘Are you a doctor?’ the voiced asked. The mighty man was puzzled by the disembodied voice. He searched with his eyes and found a clump of black hair in level with the top of his table.  

The real secret of Narayan’s artistic performance lies in his gentle touch of humour and masterly use of irony. *Lawley Road* is Narayan’s masterpiece. His skill as a humourist is at its best when he blends humour and satire. The humour arising out of the confusion of the public mind at the time of Indian Independence movement is well portrayed in the story.

Narayan produces spooky humour in the stories dealing with ghost. The ghost stories like *Old Bones, Old Man of the Temple* and *Accident* amuse readers rather than give creeps. The supernatural becomes comic as spirits enter living bodies and give vent to their buried wishes of complaints. The spirit in *Old Bones* possesses a young boy and complains that every pig which noses about for filth stamps over his head all day and every donkey and every passerby defiles his bones, and they heap all kinds of rubbish there. In such a situation, the ghost says “How can I rest?”

As Basavaraj Naikar has not written stories dealing with supernatural element, the readers do not see such humourous accounts in his stories.

Similarly, the element of irony that marks of the well-known stories of Narayan is absent in the fictional world of Basavaraj Naikar. *Sweets for Angels, An Astrologer’s Day, Cat Within, The Martyr’s Corner, Lawley Road and Trail of The Green Blazer* are finely conceived and cleverly executed ironical situations. The stories like *Half-A-Rupee Worth, Four Rupees, A Horse and Two Goats* and *Seventh House* are also highly effective in this regard. It is noteworthy that Narayan’s irony is often directed at human avarice and lust for money and power.

In Narayan, we find the strange mixture of humour, sadness and beauty. In his introduction to *The Financial Expert* Graham Green comments on R. K. Narayan’s “gift of comedy with its undertones of sadness, its gentle irony and absence of condemnation—a type of comedy virtually extinct in the West, where farce, satire and boisterousness are substituted for true comedy.”  

Narayan’s *Fellow Feeling*, a highly delightful piece is a fine example of verbal humour. In this story a typical scene in a crowded train-compartment is turned into a
hilarious situation. Rajam Iyer picks up a quarrel with a brawny fellow-passenger but outwits him in a casual and clever manner, playing on his bravado:

“You stand there and it will be over in a fraction of a second.”

“Fraction of a second? What will you do?”

Oh, nothing very complicated,” replied Rajam Iyer nonchalantly, “nothing very complicated. I will slap your right cheek and at the same time tug your left ear, and your mouth, which is now under your nose, will suddenly find itself under your left ear, and what is more, stay there, I assure you, you won’t feel any pain….

He drew a line on the newcomer’s face between his left ear and mouth, muttering,

“I must admit you have a tolerably good face and round figure, but imagine yourself going about the streets with your mouth under your left ear….27

An encounter of two people of different castes having a verbal fight is an entertaining piece of misunderstanding. What ensues from such verbal humour is sheer joy. It is indeed, an admirable piece of writing, quite relaxing, where the smile on the lips never fades.

We also find character humour in the stories like Flavour of Coconut and Attila. Comedy in such a case bubbles with joyous and merry laughter in which we have full sympathy and love for the object of laughter. Narayan, a born-story teller pushes everything into the furnace of his imagination and out comes a totally humourous picture. Attila, the story of a dog makes us laugh. He is named after the scourge of Europe however, he does not whimper. In Flavour of Coconut, after almost three fourths of the story, the readers come to know that the court scene has no criminal, but only a small rat. Thus, in Narayan the recognition of the wide difference between what is and what ought to be produces refreshing and invigorating humour. At the same time, the recognition between the normal situation and the incongruity creates ripples of laughter.

On the other hand, as a social critic Dr. Basavaraj Naikar’s focus is on the ethical values of human life. As a result, Naikar criticizes its short comings and weaknesses through his characters without fear or favour. Naikar’s stories have a special charm and appeal every human heart. With a touch of humour the stories like The Anonymous
Letter, A Cronic Patient Became A Doctor, When the News Came, etc. are narrated humourously.

The story The Anonymous Letter is about campus life, which appears to be based on Naikar’s empirical study of the situation in a university department. The foppery, meanness and petty politics of highly educated intellectuals have been exposed. Instead of pursuing research, the teachers and the chairman of the department are busy in each other’s fault finding. The head has his own axe to grind against his colleagues and instigates the students of MA Final to write a letter. The complaints made against teachers make us laugh:

Prof Gangadhar is like a primary school teacher. He never teaches a word more or less. He always dictates notes. Professor Balachandra’s pronunciation is not all right. We cannot follow his English at all.

Professor Nagesh does not look at girls at all. He always stares at the ceiling.

Prof Sekhar is very arrogant and biased. He calls girls to his room and gives them notes, books and other things. In examination he gives more marks to girls than to boys. He does not like his colleagues. Prof Nandishwar is too young to be a University teacher. We cannot understand his high-flown vocabulary. 28

Here is another complaint made by the students in their second anonymous letter which provokes laughter:

Professor Sekhar is a weirdo and helps only the girls by leaking out questions to them. He comments upon his own colleagues and fails the students who are not his own chelas. 29

In this way the story is remarkable for its wide-ranging humour. No doubt, Naikar expresses his concern for the erosion of personal professional ethics of the teachers, but at the same time he makes us laugh. Also we find descriptions of harmless humour in the story-

I winked at Professor Balachandra, who smiled and tried to divert our attention. He turned towards Professor Gangadhar and said smilingly, ‘Professor Gangadhar, you look so smart today, because of your haircut. It calls for celebration.’ We all burst into laughter. 30
Humour in the story or novel comes through characters, situations and language. When Malla in the story *The Thief of Nagarahalli* robbed off all the ornaments from a dead body by making a hole in the wall and making the dead hands clap, he made relatives flee from the place. Naikar very ingeniously sketches Malla with his exploiting the situation by creating an atmosphere of superstition among the village folk:

> The people grew terrified and guessed that the corpse’s ghost had returned to the body and clapped…They dashed against the walls and pillars; tumbled down the stairs…A couple of women touched their *saries*, which were completely wet. They discovered that they had involuntarily urinated in their fit of terror.\(^{31}\)

Here the purpose of humour is not just to provide comic relief:

> While we laugh at the villager’s folly along with Malla, we also relish the author’s dig at the feeble Indian superstitious mind that finds a devil in every dark tree.\(^{32}\)

We also find the similar scene in the story *When the News Came*. It is a story of the confusion of identities. The story is a mixture of humour and pathos.

The abusive and vulgar language used by people is the example of humour out of language. Here are a few examples—

> “Don’t call me Dharmappa, if I did not hack you and sleep with your wife.” \(^{33}\)

> “With whom are you whoring, Gangi?”

> Are you not satisfied with your husband?

> “Do you want to taste a variety of penises?” \(^{34}\)

> “Dirty man, couldn’t he go to a prostitute if he wanted it so badly.” \(^{35}\)

Abuses like scoundrels, my dear fool, bastard, whore, etc. are freely used creating humourous effect.

As compared to Narayan’s humourous stories, Basavaraj Naikar’s stories are less in number. Narayan’s humour is genial, refined and mild and it is like a magnet that attracts every reader. That is why Murli Das Melwani describes R. K. Narayan as a “humourist in the true sense.” \(^{36}\) Whereas Basavaraj Naikar may not be called a
humourist as his main focus is on ethical world. More importantly, Narayan seems to be a superb craftsman and comedian, who can present smiles and tears together in his fictional world.

**Marriage**

Both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar have written short stories dealing with marriage, dowry system and domestic life. The family is the immediate context in which the writer’s sensibility operates. Indian people have roots in family and religion that cherish a heritage of faith and values, customs and rituals, and even superstition. Thus the family personifies the Indian traditional values. The Hindu household offers a surfeit of materials for the fictional treatment to R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar.

Marriage which is very sacred institution involves various traditions and customs. It is a social phenomenon and a formal institution. They formulate the social pattern of human life. As man is a social animal, he desires a community life for satisfying his gregarious and impulsive instincts. The mental status of men and women is in want of cordiality and concurrence. The dominance and superiority of a husband in the middle class lead to piquant slipperiness. The growing unreliable relations even in institutions like marriage and family result in breaking conjugal rights. In the past some moral bindings were given to harmonize the domestic life. But some of those ethical codes appear farcical and absurd to the modern people.

The problem of marriage and morals is one of the primary themes of the stories of R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar. In the Indian context marriage occurs as per the law of destiny. People believe that marriages are settled in heaven and celebrated on the earth. In India marriage is arranged by elders. At the same time the astrologers are very often consulted with regard to marriage in Hindu families. Almost every match is subject to the approval of an astrologer. If the horoscopes of bride and bridegrooms do not match, the marriages are not settled. It is interesting to see how R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar handle the theme of marriage in their short stories.

R. K. Narayan’s treatment of the theme of marriage reflects the Indian social reality. His portrayal of marriage promises no bliss. Marriage is the destiny, woman is
generally offered in life and the anxiety of the parents to see their daughters married before they cross the age of eighteen is well depicted in *The Missing Mail*. Ramanujan the father of marriageable daughter Kamakashi is worried about her marriage. Though he has enough money for the daughter’s marriage, there are other hurdles to be crossed, like the matching of horoscopes, the problem of caste, etc. R. K. Narayan satirizes the absurdity latent in the disposing of a human being so lovingly brought up in the marriage market. Though a woman’s role is of great importance in family life she is treated both before and after marriage as an unwanted being. At last a warmhearted and lovable Thanappa helps the worried father and the marriage alliance with a Delhi boy gets materialized. This seems to be an exceptionally rare marriage in which the bridegroom’s people are magnanimous and make no fuss whatsoever. Narayan at the same time sheds light on the character of Thanappa. At grave personal risk, he withholds delivery of a letter of illness and telegram of death so that the wedding of Kamakshi a young and beautiful girl whom he has known and loved since she was a day old, may come off undisturbed.

In the story *A Willing Slave* Narayan symbolizes through the character of Ayah the myriad devoted Hindu wives, whose primary obligation is towards their home and husband. The claims of domestic duties and upbringing of children necessitates them to preside over the household. The acceptance of her husband by Ayah is symbolic of the innumerable wives’ resignation and compromise in spite of exploitation. Perhaps the strong pull of morality and the Indian woman’s traditional subservience to and worship of one’s husband as a god makes them feel drawn towards their husband.

Similarly, Basavaraj Naikar in his story *Her Husband Went to America* asserts-

> The patriarchal philosophy that woman is born only to serve faithfully, and be a custodian of moral responsibility of which, Girija is an ample illustration.\(^{37}\)

> The story is about the newly married couple, Rajsekhar and Girija. There we find tussle between the selfishness of a husband and selflessness of a wife, between sophisticated deception and traditional binding, between self-interest and self-sacrifice. The moral principles force an Indian wife to believe in destiny. Girija’s story is a story of betrayal of trust, of innocence versus craft and cunning. She decides not to remarry. She says:
I’ll not marry again; I have married him and shall remain his wife all through life. Doesn’t matter even if he has let me down so meanly, My parents-in-law are like gods to me. I’ll live as their daughter-in-law.\(^{38}\)

Girija and her situation only corroborate the fact that an Indian male marries only his wife whereas Indian woman marries the whole family. Naikar has glorified the Indian womanhood and wifehood through the character of Girija. Naikar rightly points out the importance of family bond which tie people together. Marriage is not merely an agreement between two individuals but an institution involving two families and the society at large.

In Naikar’s another story *All For Gold* the image of women seems to be negative. The relationship between Sangappa and Ganga throws light upon the question of marriage. Traditionally marriage in India is viewed as a sacred bond which has to be respected and preserved with a kind of religious fervor. But Ganga in the story betrays her husband and wants to “forget her husband but secretly even wished his absence from home to be delayed further.” \(^{39}\) Naikar offers no tangible reasons for Ganga’s infidelity. This speaks voluminously about Ganga’s disrespectful attitude towards marriage.

Marriage is viewed in similar light in yet another story titled *She Wanted a Child* anthologized in *The Thief of Nagarahalli and Other Stories*. Manjula is married to Sankara but even after two years she fails to bear a child. To sustain her status in her husband’s house she needed a child. This type of hankering after the child is quite common in Indian society. During the first two years of Manjula’s married life, she does not conceive. She then enters into adulterous relationship with her colleague. Even this strategy fails, so she steals a baby under the guise of a nurse. She confesses that the act was committed only to placate her husband, mother-in-law and society. The story highlights the preference of a married woman for sex-relation with a man other than her husband with the hope of having a child. As a result a married woman is reduced to felon.

In *Fulfillment*, Bharati, the daughter of a retired Brahmin judge elopes with Chandrasekhar an actor from a poor untouchable family and marries him without her father’s consent. She breaks all class and caste barriers; however, Bharati is back into the traditional mould of a *Bharatiya-nari* and waits for twelve years for her husband to return.
Both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar draw our attention to the fact that in Indian Hindu society marriages are settled with the consultation of astrologers. The authors vividly depict the bridal examination in their stories on the same line. Both writers present how young girls face bridal examination. Besides, Narayan and Basavaraj are against dowry system which is prevalent in India. At the same time both writers have condemned extra-marital relation in their short stories. Narayan highlights the tension and financial strain in *The Gold Belt*. In *The White Flower* we see mild satire on Hindu system of marriage. The author points out how the union of two hearts depends on the wishes of the two persons directly concerned. In *Seventh House* Krishna the protagonist marries the girl even though their horoscopes do not match. Narayan in his stories criticizes the superstitious nature of the people and also points out the discrepancy in the reading of horoscopes by two astrologers in the story *The White Flower*.

In short, we can say that both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar depict Hindu wives whose primary obligation is towards their home and husband. In Naikar’s stories, we find the temperamental incompatibility and divergence of interests which ultimately lead to the disastrous collapse of wedlock. Both authors have shown the individual potential of the Indian woman. However, we also come across the modern women in the stories of Narayan and Naikar who rebel against tradition. It is also observed that R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar have laid more emphasis on the sanctity of marriage.

**Avarice**

Greed for money or gold is at the root of all evils. The desire to grow and prosper is quite natural to human beings. If a man works hard and prospers, it is no doubt good for the society but, if such growth is motivated by the malevolent selfishness, it is dangerous and disrupts the moral order. So any creative writer claims that vices in human characters are to be checked as they pose immediate threat to life and society. Both Narayan and Naikar express their concern over the loss of values and morals. However, it seems that Narayan is not a critic of society; he is certainly a keen observer of life and manners. He looks at life with a degree of detachment. On the other hand, as a social
critic Basavaraj Naikar criticizes the shortcomings and weaknesses through his characters.

R. K. Narayan exposes Subbiah’s greed for money, his selfishness, hypocrisy, gross materialism through the story Half-A-Rupee Worth. Four Rupees and Half-A-Rupee Worth are Narayan’s beautiful short stories with man’s avarice for money as their theme. Narayan enables readers to get a glimpse into the mind of a greedy man through Subbiah, Ranga and the Talkative Man, as they are embodiment of greed. They are mad and accumulate wealth as much as they can. For them, money alone is important in this world. Even in his novel The Financial Expert Narayan says:

If money was absent, men came near being beasts…People did anything for money. Money was men’s greatest need, like air or food.\(^{40}\)

Subbiah in Half-A-Rupee Worth accumulates wealth selling rice at an exorbitant price. When there is a scarcity of rice, Subbiah, selfish merchant makes the capital use of the situation. He is well aware that “the stock he held was worth its weight in gold.”\(^{41}\)

The desire of Subbiah is not ‘natural’; this desire for possession over-reaches and kills him, thus displaying powerfully the fruitlessness. He is the clearest picture of madness that leads him to self-destruction:

Rice was in his blood…the little man had no eyes for anything in life except rice and no head for anything except the price of grain, and he dreamt of rice and thought of rice and spoke of rice.\(^{42}\)

Narayan conveys the message that lust for excessive wealth leads to man’s ruin, passion for wealth is always a synonym of evil. The very godown where Subbiah had piled rice bags from floor to ceiling became his death trap.

The Blind Dog is Narayan’s another tale that deals with a blind beggar’s despicable selfishness. A great desire to earn more money seizes the beggar and he even feels that resting is a waste of time. Blinded by avarice he takes the dog’s services for granted and by juxtaposing the blind man’s materialism with the dog’s love and gratitude, R. K. Narayan shows that the animal ranks higher in the scale of moral values.

Narayan in the story A Career presents the treachery of Ramu who loots the Talkative Man’s money. Ramu is not only jilted by his lady love, but turned blind due to
small pox. A career that could have proved prosperous ends in utter ruin due to avarice for money. Greed in the story **Neighbor’s Help** overpowers the Talkative Man and is crushed under a vehicle. Narayan’s point of view is clear that the catastrophe arises out of the hubris of the protagonists. We should note the evil doer is ultimately punished in Narayan’s fictional world.

Avarice for gold happens to be one of the important themes in Basavaraj Naikar’s stories. Greed seems to be the basic instinct which serves as a motive for many of our crimes. Like Narayan, Basavaraj Naikar also presents a picture of human greed in his story **All For Gold**. The story emphasizes the fact that gold is a great power, which makes one forget those great values of life. For the love of gold Paramma deceives Ganga, a married woman. She persuades Ganga to accept the sweet company of Sangappa, a rich landlord. In return, Paramma gets a golden necklace of five *tolas*. We find another character Balya, Sangappa’s friend who yields to the love of gold. It is again gold of Virabhadra that ensnares Balappa to betray his loyal friend Sangappa. Gold plays a lot of other roles in the total scheme of Sangappa but finally all his wealth fails to protect him. In the story **The Invisible Face** the greed for gold takes everything away from Bagarasetty:

Hunt for gold happens to be the main occupation in the title piece, for the central character, Malla, the notorious thief of Nagarahalli. And hoarding the booty happens to be the favourite pastime of his patron and landlord, Marigouda.  

Thus stories dealing with the theme of avarice for wealth are studies in human behaviour. Both Narayan and Naikar do not attempt to make a moral fable out of them. These deliberate efforts on the part of the writers account for the intimacy that is immediately established between the readers and characters. Both writers expose human weakness i.e. greed for money but never do they show a reformist zeal. Both writers advocate the need for money to fulfill one’s basic needs, but bring out the danger of its unlimited craze.

**Erotic Scenes**

Modern psychology regards sex as one of the most important aspects of life, and hence it is sex-relationship and sex conflicts which predominate in the fictional world. Every writer has his own way of creating some erotic scenes in their works which may be
physical, spiritual and ethical. When we study the short stories of Naikar and Narayan, we realize that R. K. Narayan differs from Basavaraj Naikar in dealing with sex, physical love. Narayan’s Malgudi has its own set sexual ethics according to which sex-aberration or perversion with any motive is bound to end in frustration and misery. Man and woman living together as husband and wife without getting married are regarded as sinners. Hence it is sacrilegious to violate the sanctity of sex.

Sexual passion, in fact, is not a theme which Narayan anywhere develops very convincingly in his fictional world. To him sex is as something too private and holy to be allowed to appear publicly in art. It is said that sex cannot be avoided especially where it serves an artistic purpose. In The Writerly life: Selected Non-Fiction Narayan makes it clear with regard to sex:

The professor then focuses attention on the individual in Narayan’s work. Does he do justice to this aspect, he asks? There are areas you have neglected. For example, do you deal with man-woman relationship with any seriousness? Aren’t you prudish when it comes to sex? Narayan says that he is not prudish, only delicate and tactful about such matters…He is being suggestive, not prurient …Narayan defends himself suitably by saying that a writer cannot record every bodily function and mental activity. He has to be selective. 44

Thus it is obvious that R. K. Narayan does not encourage unhealthy sexual curiosity in his fictional world. It seems that his moral outlook on life disapproves of any laxity in sexual behaviour. He does not discuss sex openly besides he projects indignation and intolerance towards licentious behaviour. This is well-illustrated in the short story The Seventh House in which Krishna’s deep love for his wife, his loyalty and his practice of monogamy are highlighted. Similarly, Narayan in his novels also condemns illicit affair and does not advocate licentiousness. Both pre-marital and extra-marital relationships in Narayan’s fictional world have been censured.

Narayan’s “attitude towards sex has been targeted deprecatingly terming it ‘Conventional’, ‘Victorian’, and the conspicuous absence of the physicality of man-woman relationship has been commented upon as a ‘serious limitation’ and ‘a handicap.” 45
Narayan may have his own reservations due to his conservative upbringing. He has poured into his fictional world what is ingrained him. The literature of our age is an essentially complex phenomenon. The rise of scientific spirit and rationalism has led to a questioning of accepted social beliefs, conventions and traditions. Sexual renunciation has ceased to be a theme of literature, interest in sexual perversion has grown and there is a free and frank discussion of sex. Taboos on sex thus, are no longer operative. There is a breakup of the old authoritarian pattern in family relationship; the assessment of the relative roles of the sexes has changed. Nonetheless, there has been a long and controversial debate in literature as to how much sex should be put into it.

Basavaraj Naikar differs from R. K. Narayan in terms of the treatment of sex. Barring a few stories almost all the stories of Naikar have intricate descriptions of intimate scenes between woman and paramour. Amorous gestures and postures, pornographic pictures, picturesque descriptions and suspense are the superficial ingredients of the short stories of Naikar to make the reader lost in the pages. Physicality in Naikar’s fictional world plays an important role but is not all in these relations while sexual descriptions about where lust is the only compelling force behind the union of man and woman. To highlight their lustfulness, Basavaraj Naikar describes copulation outside marriage. Ganga in All For Gold though married sleeps with Sangappa. Once she crosses all boundaries and continues to invite her paramour every night in the absence of her husband. Basavaraj Naikar unravels their physical attachment in the following lines which is replete with sensuousness:

Sangappa moved nearer his hard-won darling and enclasped her slowly and tightly. Ganga slipped into his arms silently and remained there. Then he smothered her with passionate kisses on her cheeks and lips...“I never knew there is so much pleasure in loving you, o my king,” whispered Ganga. Sangappa’s eager fingers were exploring the nooks and corners and rotundities of Ganga’s physical abundant wealth continuously. Both of them kissed each other passionately until they could wait no longer. They removed their sartorial hindrances and interlocked themselves in each other’s limbs and set about the slow rhythm of penetration and reception...As the rhythm of strokes gathered momentum they seemed to enter an ethereal world as it were and forgot all about the mundane world. When they reached the peak of organism, they felt as though their souls were floating in the high sky without the gravitational pull of the earth.
They forgot the I - Thou relationship between themselves as they were welded into each other in paradisal union.\textsuperscript{46}

Such graphic descriptions of copulation do not appear in R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi. Here is another instance of Naikar’s erotic scene which occurs in the mythical story Mother’s Husband, Chandrasani or Kamalata has sex with her own son Adivesha:

He pressed her nipples delicately and squeezed her breasts in a steady rhythm… As he took his manhood into her full palm and caressed it gently, it straightened into an iron rod as it were… She also trembled as he ran his fingers into the triangular turf and on the rubbery button and along the silken crevice. Chandrasani could not wait any longer. She guided his hard rod into her velvety passage… Their interlocked rhythm started slowly, grew faster and faster until the solid tension in them melted and flooded each other… Their souls were disconnected from their bodies as it were and soared in the sky like two balloons.\textsuperscript{47}

We should note that such details help drive home the point that lust is an important motivational force behind human mistakes. But Naikar does not glorify such illicit relations. He does not moralize them. Like a true artist he simply presents what life is like carefully abstaining from positing his point of view or assuming a didactic approach.

However, Pushupati Jha and Ravichandran do not find any philosophy with regard to sex in Naikar’s stories:

D.H. Lawrence has portrayed sexual passion with a particular philosophy of life in his mind. One fails to find any such philosophy in the present collection. Even Arundhati Roy has her own share of sexual interludes in her most famous novel. Yet everything is amalgamated in the fine alchemy of her art, one solely misses this artistry in Naikar. But then, when Henry Miller was accused of putting so much of physical passion in his novels, he simply replied,” Maybe you have to wade through rivers of shit to find a germ of reality.”\textsuperscript{48}

It is equally true for Naikar’s collection of short stories. Perhaps Basavaraj has not been able to raise it to the level where sex stands for integration with cosmic forces. The
important point is that Naikar has not certainly glorified licentiousness in his stories and that matters much.

Thus, Basavaraj Naikar and R.K. Narayan differ from each other in respect of the treatment to sex and licentiousness. Naikar openly discusses sex whereas Narayan is suggestive and does not record every bodily function.

Superstition

Superstition is a purely subjective and ambiguous term. Entomologically, the word ‘superstition’ has ‘super’ as prefix which means ‘excess’. In this sense superstition may mean excessive or exaggerated belief in reasonable ideas, theories, practices and beliefs in the field of religion, cultural and supernatural powers. In fact, superstitions are those irrational beliefs which don’t provide any logical and reasonable explanation however; they are carried on from generation to generation with its significance without being questioned. Superstitions vary from person to person and place to place but none is free from them. They are the products of darkness and ignorance and fear and sense of insecurity are responsible for the origin of certain superstitions. Indian people are also superstitions and both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar make the best use of this aspect of Southern Indian life in particular and Indian life in general. Both writers are keen observer of Indian life, culture and know very well the strong hold of superstitions on the minds of people.

It is to be taken into our account that R. K. Narayan has written more number of stories dealing with superstition than Basavaraj Naikar.

Since, the ancient times the belief in astrology is deep rooted in people. The astrologers are consulted on auspicious occasions like marriage negotiations, interviews or meeting with important people, etc. People believe in planets, stars, the sun and the moon which influence the life of man. Marriage is solemnized only when the horoscopes match each other perfectly well. It is believed that Seventh House in a horoscope is of matrimonial alliance and if it is occupied by Mars, it indicates that the person concerned will be a widower or polygamist. R. K. Narayan in his story Seventh House brings us back to the familiar Indian world of horoscopes, planetary influences, astrologers and
priests. Krishna the central character marries a young girl even though their horoscopes do not match. The relatives along with priest arrange a flower test. As they are ardent lovers, Krishna gets married despite all opposition. After some years Krishna’s wife suffers from typhoid and ‘Mars in the Seventh House is remembered. Krishna is compelled to perform various rituals. The irony of the situation lies in the husband’s futile attempt, on astrological advice, to save his wife’s life by being unfaithful to her as this alone could neutralize the rigor of a malignant Mars in the Seventh House of his horoscope. Similarly, in The White Flower the horoscopes of the bridegroom and bride are consulted and relatives come to know that the horoscopes do not match because-

A few days later a girl’s father came and said that there was a serious flaw in Krishna’s horoscope. There was Mars in the Seventh House, and it indicated a short life for the wife. He could cite any number of cases where such a flaw had been overlooked and the wife had died immediately after the marriage, and he did not propose to risk his daughter’s life now. 49

Here in this story also the flower test in the temple of Hanuman is arranged but the test is not decided in favour. The story pictures the strong belief the people have in the influence of stars on the lives of the mortals. The author suggests the helplessness of the people before astrologers and god. But at the same time we should note that whether Narayan believes in this superstition or not for his greater faith in love is crystal clear.

Narayan has presented two types of astrologers-fake and genuine astrologers-and criticizes the blind belief of people in astrology. It seems that the society presented in the fictional world of Malgudi is traditional and superstitions. Even educated people like Gopal in The Antidote, believe in planets, stars and astrology and out of fear performs rituals. He has been strictly warned by the astrologer not to do anything unpleasant on his birthday and there is a danger of his not seeing his forty-ninth birthday. Narayan draws our attention to the fact that superstitions people spend a lot of money on rituals:

Some criminal lawyer who gets 10,000 rupees a month does some homa and other follows him. 50

Narayan in An Astrologer’s Day through the character of an astrologer has criticized fake astrologers. Shastri in All Avoidable Talk blindly follows his friend who gives free prophecies and people believe him. The credulous Malgudi people are put
under perpetual dread of some impending doom all through their lives. The superstitious belief that the *Punnaga Vareli* raga should not be played at night is voiced by Narayan through the story *The Snake Song* anthologized in *Malgudi Days*.

R. K. Narayan points out that the values and morals practiced is what makes an ascetic rather than the preaching which one tries to uphold through the story *House Opposite* anthologized in *Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories*. The author projects the scale of moral analysis that physical appearance has nothing to do with one’s inner strength. The reader’s attention is drawn towards the fact that life’s values could be traced in a physically demoralized person when a fake *Sadhu* could be mentally corrupt. In this connection Macabre Brian observes-

Narayan’s powers of observation makes it utterly convincing and the perception at the heart of the story-that virtue [and vice] can be found in the most unexpected places are perfectly embodied in it.51

It may be noted here that R. K. Narayan does not explicitly announce his distrust is superstitions. In his stories dealing with superstition Narayan makes fun of the credulous Malgudi people. The world of fantasies and the world of facts collide and it seems that the author assumes a dubious stance.

Basavaraj Naikar also takes into his consideration the superstitions belief of South Indian people in his fictional world. Unlike R. K. Narayan, Basavaraj Naikar does not take dubious stance; he just refers to the blind belief of the people prevalent in Dharwad and its surrounding area. In his fictional world marriages are also arranged by the elders with consultation of astrologers and priests. The narrator in *Blood For Blood* anthologized in *The Rebellious Rani of Belavadi and Other Stories* the father of Girija is eager to have blood relationship with Viranagouda’s family who happens to be a dynamic leader and social reformer. At the time of bride examination, the priest is invited and Basavaraj Naikar highlights the role of the priest in marriage negotiation-

Panchagayya, the priest suggested that the bride may be shown…The priest Panchayya asked her to be seated on the wooden seat with her face to the east. She touched the floor with her palms and symbolically saluted all those seated there and sat on the wooden seat in a lotus posture. Then Panchayya went and sat facing the bride, took her left palm and examined the line on it meticulously like a scientist
examining the bacteria through a microscope. While doing this priestly job he nodded his head by way of approval. Then he asked her to stand up. She lifted up her sari six inches from her feet so that everybody could see the symmetry of her toes and ankles. Panchayya took out a Siva-string of silk and measured her ten fingers and two palms and compared it with her height i.e. from feet to the vermilion dot on her forehead.\(^5\)

In the story *Her Husband Went to America* the family priest is consulted who tells the members of Rajshekar’s family that “there was no auspicious *muhurtama* for *sobhana* programme for three months. Rajshekar’s father, who had great faith in astrology, could not ignore the priest’s words”\(^5\)

In *The Invisible face* the priest is called in to officiate for the funeral rites. When Basavanti the central character in the story “Basavanti” was ill, Chennappa-Gouda heaved a long sigh and said in a consolatory tone,

“All right then, let everything be as per God’s wish.”\(^5\)

In this way, Naikar points out the strong belief of Indian people in god and religion in his stories. Again in *Cross-Road* Sivaraj, the protagonist is suggested not to go ahead because he has seen a snake on his way back to his village. “Now, you cannot go ahead. The entire day’s work will be cancelled if you come across a snake on the road.”\(^5\)

It is clear that in Indian families the marriages or negotiation takes place with consultation of priests and astrologers. This is what both R. K. Narayan and Dr. Basavaraj Naikar bring to the notice of the readers. Besides, very realistically Basavaraj Naikar probes into psychology of the Indian parents who examine and judge the pros and cons of each other’s family antecedents before the finalization of matrimonial proposals.

R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar are keen observers and know very well that people have deep rooted belief in ghosts, devil and evil spirits. In some of their stories both writers create a sense of eerie to be felt very naturally. Many Indian writers have expressed their displeasure with blind belief as it has caused a severe set-back in the progress of nation. Especially, R. K. Narayan has used this aspect of Indian life because it forms an ideal basis for his imaginative fictional construction and partly because he is well aware of the strong hold these superstitions have on the minds of Indian people.
It is obvious that both writers criticize astrologers, priests and laugh at the gullibility of the masses and suggests that as long as people remain credulous such deceivers will also continue to cheat people. Both of them seek to faithfully mirror the South Indian society in particular and Indian society in general, rooted in a ritualistic way of life.

**Ghost**

R. K. Narayan’s ghost stories are narrated humourously. Perry D. WestBrook remarks that “These are skilfully told stories of pure entertainment.” In some of his stories like *Old Man of the Temple, Old Bones, Level Crossing* and *An Accident* Narayan shows his penchant for sensation and surprise. In *Old Man of the Temple* the ghost enters the body of a driver named Doss and he calls himself Krishna Battar. The ghost tells the narrator that he was once robbed of his money and ornaments and the robbers stabbed him. However, he thinks that he somehow managed to return to the temple and since then he has been living there. The real and the unbelievable, the empirical and the hypothetical seem to merge with each other and the author adroitly evokes a perceivable phantasmagoria with his eerie pen. The readers may find it absurd when the narrator guides the ghost to the land of the dead. Even in the story *Old Bones* the ghost takes the possession of the body and mind of the Talkative Man’s nephew. Then the ghost demands the Talkative Man to dig up the bones that lie buried under a rubbish heap and throw into a well. The ghost is infuriated for its bones are being defiled by people. The ghost in *Neighbor’s Help* compels the Talkative Man to mend his ways and not trouble his children. In setting accounts properly the ghost acts the role of a guardian angel to the family members. Narayan’s ghosts therefore are not tormentors but remain contented with teasing the human beings a little, to make them realize the importance of fantasy in human experience. Here it is to be noted that the supernatural is a part of the popular consciousness and their surroundings. Even in modern time some places are believed to be inherently inauspicious and therefore accidents occur there frequently. This is well-illustrated in Narayan’s short story entitled *The Level Crossing*. There in this story the intangible and the tangible worlds collide and a weird situation is created. Narayan’s narrator after listening the story turns back and sees none, and then he runs for his life as if a ghost were pursuing him.
Basavaraj Naikar also points out how people in his fictional world are scared of ghosts and at the same time make fun of them. His When the News Came is a humourous account of the confusion arising out of mistaken identity. We come across superstitious people who believe in ghost. It is a superstitious society where people fail to believe what they see. It is because of the carelessness of the police department the problem is created. Chennappa of Kavalur is a truck driver who dies in a road accident but the constable mistakenly enters into the register the name of Chennappa of Navilpur, another truck driver who is alive. As the body is mangled, the wife of Chennappa (Navilpur) cannot recognize it and the grief-stricken wife returns her village after the burial at the police station. However, Chennappa returns at dusk and the villagers and his wife mistaking him for a ghost and fled from their homes. On his way back Chennappa of Navilpur meets a villager named Siddanna who runs back into the village crying-

“The ghost of Chennappa has entered our village. Save me, O save me!”…. Soon the news circulated in the village with great speed….

“Everybody is vacating his house and running away from the village.”…within half an hour three fourths of the villagers had left the village. Only a few daredevils kept dilly-dallying.57

Chennappa’s wife and son also leave the village to escape the supernatural visitation of Chennappa’s spirit. Ultimately the truth is detected and the situation is restored. Even in the story The Thief of Nagarahalli, Malla makes a hole in the wall just behind the dead body of old lady is laid and then inserts his hands inside and collects the dead hands together and makes them clap. The relatives of the dead woman grow terrified and guessed that the corpse’s ghost had returned to the body and clapped. As a result, “Everybody grew nervous and began to grope in the dark. They went on searching for the main door to escape from there. Since their imagination was very fertile, they went on seeing terrifying apparitions before them dashing against one another. They dashed against the walls pillars tumbled down the stairs and against the thresholds. Their foreheads, knees and noses were badly bruised. A couple of women touched their sarties, which were completely wet. They discovered that they had involuntarily urinated in their fit of terror. 58

Naikar satirizes the villagers running away from their homes and exposes the backwardness and unscientific behaviour of the village people like that of R. K. Narayan.
It is observed that both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar do not glorify the superstitious beliefs. R. K. Narayan assumes a dubious staunch whereas Basavaraj Naikar makes fun of the superstitious people. So far ghost stories are considered Narayan “has humanized ghosts so they listen to reason, argue and cause no harm.” ⁵⁹

**Poverty**

The theme of poverty is also an important aspect of Narayan and Naikar. “Poverty may be used to denote the inability or failure of a family to obtain the necessary income for the minimum customary level of living at a given time and place.” ⁶⁰ People moan about poverty as a great evil that is inherent in our Indian social pattern invariably find a place in the Narayan and Naikar’s stories. However, it is observed that R. K. Narayan does not fight shy of portraying the reality of our country. As poverty is inseparable from the Indian social matrix, Narayan has dealt quite forcibly with the theme of poverty, hunger and human degradation.

As compared to Narayan’s pathetic characters who are miserably poor, it seems that Naikar has paid little attention to the poor.

In Narayan’s popular story entitled *A Horse and Two Goats*, we meet Muni who is the perfect picture of poverty. Here Narayan makes hero of the poor. Muni once flourishing shepherd is now reduced to herding two goats and utterly dependent upon a shrewish but efficient wife for his wretched allowance of food. Muni finds it very difficult to satisfy his basic needs. Narayan describes Muni’s pathetic condition in these words-

His wife lit the domestic fire at dawn, boiled water in a mud pot, 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. ⁶¹
Muni’s full meal is not more than ‘a handful of millet floor’. Narayan clearly states how Muni leads a life full of agony. The readers come to know the plight of the sub-human living which many poor people must be leading in our country.

Also R. K. Narayan portrays the poor with “Unfalling dignity and moral richness in his stories”. 62 He seems to be unique in his social imagination. The portrayal of poor people in Narayan is intensely individual. His intimate knowledge of the poor gives his work a touch of authenticity; the suppression of the poor by the callous rich is well-illustrated in The Martyr’s Corner. Though Rama is poor, he has a fatherly soft corner for the beggars, and half starving hollow looking boot-polish boys. Narayan in Broken Pot points out that even harmony of human relationship is acutely disturbed due to poverty.

India abounds in poor men who set out in the morning, venturing the world, still being unaware whether they will find their food or not. Ranga in Four Rupees reluctantly goes down in a sixty feet well to recover a treasured brass pot for a meager four rupees. Half-A-Rupee Worth is a moving tale that throws light on the miseries of the poor people caused by black marketers. The poor people cannot afford to pay for rice owing to the mounting prices. Thus, some of the stories of R. K. Narayan, undoubtedly, deal with economic problems of the poor sections of Indian society. Though Narayan is not a writer of problem novels and short stories he is content with depicting the contours of Malgudi and portraying the sorrows, joy and irony in the life of poor people. In An End of Troubles Kuppan the protagonist wallows in dire poverty and want. His pathetic condition compels him to run behind every customer and mostly in vain. The whole existence becomes meaningless to Kuppan because his position has steadily deteriorated from prosperity to half-starvation and then to starvation. Thus, Kuppan represents thousands of such brethren in our country. He feels terribly cut off from humanity. While pondering over his miserable condition, he sees his patron getting down the bus, rushes towards him and gets crushed to death. We should note that these poor people believe that everything is pre-ordained. These poor people do not revolt but resign themselves to their endless poverty. Is there any remedy to root out poverty from our society? The title of the story An End of All Trouble is apt in this regard. It suggests that death and death alone can save the poor from their miserable condition. This is the sorry state of affair. By picturing the untold suffering of the poor Narayan awakens the indifferent people to an urgent awareness of human depravity.
Though Narayan’s sense of commitment in the stories dealing with poverty is deep and abiding, he has been criticized. The critics are of the opinion that the dregs of poverty and the crushing loads of misery are totally absent from Narayan’s gaze. Narayan has been criticized by V. S. Naipaul in these words. “Narayan’s novels did not prepare me for the distress of India.” It may be true so far novel is concerned, however, Narayan’s short stories are ideal to illumine lives of the poor. His projection of poverty in short stories carries in it his protest against this social evil. When a person is out of business he faces a number of domestic difficulties and starves. Narayan in Out of Business indicates that money is an indispensable condition for primary human happiness.

It is observed that poverty is seen but not abhorred by R. K. Narayan. At the same time, we see the poor occupying the centre of Narayan’s imagination, whereas it is not so in the stories of Basavaraj Naikar. Basavaraj Naikar’s chief purpose is not to portray the plight of the poor people. The poor occupy only a margin of imagination in his fictional world. Naikar’s main concern is to project ethical values. In spite of the fact, Naikar has also presented the miserable condition of poor people in his stories. In All For Gold we come across a very poor Balappa-

Balya was born poor and had no kith or kin apart from his wife and children. Nor did he have any landed property. The only thing that endeared him to the rich landlord Sangappa…Fate had prevented him from having even two square meals per day. He wore a soiled dhoti and a ragged shirt and walked on bare feet. Perennial poverty had given him a stoop. His cheeks were sunk and the cheekbones appeared very prominent. His eyes were surrounded by dark rings. His greenish blue veins were easily visible on his fore arms and legs. His face was full of wrinkles.

R. K. Narayan’s Muni in A Horse and Two Goats and Basavaraj Naikar’s Balappa are drawn on the same line in terms of their appearance and poor miserable life. Both wear dhoti, and they find it very difficult to fulfill even their basic needs. However, so far their role in the stories is concerned they differ from each other. Muni in A Horse and Two Goats is straightforward, innocent, honest and never cheats anybody in his life. Whereas for the sake of gold Balappa in Naikar’s short story is a traitor who deceives his close friend Sangappa for gold.
Corruption

“Corruption is a general term for the misuse of a public position of trust for private gains”.

Gluttony is a sin. It leads to corruption. Sin leads to sin. There is only an entry into the world of sin but no exit. Though ours is a democratic country, the corruption is rampant everywhere. It is the tempestuous force that disturbs serene sea of morality. Narayan indirectly deals with social evil in his Malgudi stories whereas Basavaraj seems to be a committed writer who vehemently criticizes the corrupt politicians, academicians. Narayan is mild whereas Basavaraj Naikar seems to be harsh critic. Naikar spares no opportunity in holding up a mirror to reflect the interior of the corrupt characters.

Narayan in the story Half-A-Rupee Worth; narrates the story of a corrupt black-marketeer named Subbiah. He is an embodiment of vice and can do anything for wealth. Love of rice is in his blood. When the government exercises control on food supply to help the poor, Subbiah resorts to stealthy ways. He knows very well how to handle the officers. By greasing the palm of the auditors he manages to keep rice out of sight and out of paper. Narayan writes:

He had to give away a lot of money to people who were entitled to examine his stock and accounts. If he passed a ten-rupee currency note on such an occasion, it meant he had screened from prying eyes a thousand rupees worth of grain…He reflected philosophically: “God arranges everything for the best.” He distributed a few Anna’s for charity twice a week, and broke a coconut at the temple on Fridays in appreciation of God’s interest in his affairs.

Narayan exposes the shallow religiosity and self-centredness of corrupt Subbiah. He offers a bribe not only to the government officers but also to god to whom he thinks his patron of his black marketing. As in most of Narayan’s stories poetic justice is meted out to Subbiah also. Narayan shows the culmination of greed in tragedy. The rice bags accidently fall on him and Subbiah is crushed to death.

The story Guru sheds light on the corrupt nature of Gurumurthi, a government officer. The bureaucrat is a heartless creature. He spreads around him an unpleasant odour of selfishness and corruption. When his selfish nature is not satisfied, first weapon
he hurls is the person before him is delay-inordinate delay in attending to the file. Guru’s
duty is to sanction loans of poor villagers. These villagers very often visit the office of
tahsildar to seek various relief measures offered by the government. Though the
government is offering all the favours free of cost, Guru makes it a rule that every
peasant should pay a certain amount of money for his seal on any paper. The applicant’s
paper becomes animated only when the isolated amount is propelled into the left side
drawer of Guru’s desk. However, Guru is caught by the collector and is compelled to
resign his post.

In Basavaraj Naikar’s fictional world also we come across corrupt characters. The
department of police is supposed to be the guardians of law and order in the society.
However, people are afraid of them and have no courage to lodge complaint against
thieves or wrong-doers. When the theft takes place in the house of Siddhalinga in
Change of Heart, one of the neighbours suggests him to lodge a police complaint.
Siddhalinga thereupon says:

Perhaps, you do not know these fellows. They not only do not hunt for the thieves,
but also on the contrary, extract money from us. I am not the sort of person who
would visit the police station. As far as possible, I would like to be away from the
police fellows, lawyers and even doctors.\textsuperscript{67}

Basavaraj Naikar has severely criticized the police department in his stories.
Viranagouda in Blood For Blood bribes the police inspector to murder his rival,
Kalappa. Viranagouda takes the police inspector in his confidence:

“I need your cooperation for this task.” Please, don’t think that I am asking for
any favour gratis. I shall give you Rs. 2000/- if you oblige me… The very idea of
a big sum made the Inspector salivate… “All right, Goudre, I shall do your work,
provided you give the money in advance,” said the inspector.\textsuperscript{68}

Thus, Naikar brings out the callousness of the police department in these words.
The story The Invisible Face highlights the corruption prevalent in our society. Here in
this story, we find a minister, a legislator, two merchants and a landlord get involved in
political corruption, bribery and underworld and Naikar exposes the ugly faces of the
criminals. Dr. Deshpande, the civil surgeon initially saves the life of Bangarasetty, but
soon after, he himself kills the patient by giving him poison-injection as he has been
heavily bribed. Thus, the doctor who should have saved the life of his patient is actually responsible for his death. Mr. Desai, the narrator’s friend narrates the account in these words:

Among the ones involved in this case were a minister, a legislator, two merchants and a landlord. All of them were terrified about their own safety and prestige. They, therefore, rushed to the civil Surgeon, and took him into confidence. They bribed him Rs. 50,000 and asked him to give poison-injection to Bangarasetty. You know Rs. 50,000 is not a small amount. The surgeon was easily tempted by the offer. He received the hard cash instantly and promised to oblige them. He gave the poison-injection to Bangarasetty about midnight.69

The story shows the devilish nature of man who turns a brute when his inner restraint is lost but we should note that the evil in Naikar never goes unpunished like that of R. K. Narayan. Being a well-known academician Naikar exposes the corrupt people in the academic world. The researcher is compelled to please his sadist guide Professor Nagaraj by offering him a holi tirtha. Naikar regrets this shocking situation in higher studies and research in India.

In conclusion, we can say that both Narayan and Naikar bring before us the present corrupt system which pose immediate threats to life and society. At the same time, their concern over the loss of values and morals is noteworthy.

Theft

Both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar have written stories dealing with thieving. It is observed that the writers do not vehemently attack the ways of the thieves. They refer to their deft dealings and move on with a gentle smile. Basavaraj Naikar’s excellent story The Thief of Nagarahalli centres on a thief whose skill is such that he may, paradoxically, be considered “an artist in dishonesty.”70

Malla, the protagonist is glorified for his notoriousness in the village Nagarahalli and Dharwad Taluka. Very ingeniously the character of Malla is sketched, with his exploiting the situation by creating an atmosphere of superstition among the village folk. He has the winning admiration of many for his superb talent in stealing.
He inspired a heroic spirit in the hearts of young men. He kindled amorous sentiments in the minds of young girls. Thus, ‘success’ had become another name for Malla. He had taken an oath that he would stop his thieving profession the day he met with failure in his ventures.\(^7\)

At the outset itself the reader comes to know Malla as a man who loves adventures and despise commonplace existence. He goes about his job in as skilful and intelligent a manner as any other professional world in his respective field. The clever manner that he devices in order to rob ornaments from a dead body in Morab village wins him applause not also of the veterans in his profession but also of the readers. At the end of the story Malla fails to get back the bowl from Monappa and he feels humiliated and accepts his defeat. Thus, Malla disappears from Nagarahalli putting an end to his glorious criminal career for worldly peace. In fact in our society thieving in any case is not glorified but Naikar’s depiction of the character is in such a way that any reader would surely take much more interest in him:

Almost a Robin Hood Figure Malla amuses the reader and despite his anti-social activities one is simply unable to hate him.\(^2\)

Malla’s character is skilfully depicted and that one wishes Malla to succeed always in the way one wishes John Milton’s Satan [Paradise Lost], evil though he may be, to triumph over the rival angels. He has not chosen evil for the sake of evil but that he finds the path of good to be less challenging and very uninspiring.

Naikar’s Malla may be compared with R. K. Narayan’s famous character Raju in the novel \textit{The Guide}. It is so because Raju’s act of forgery and the labored repentance, moving from the mundane to the sacred. At the end, Raju becomes Swamiji at Mangala. Similarly, we see Naikar’s Malla’s wish to become Swamiji. In the words of Basavaraj Naikar-

Once he even tried his best to become a Swami at Ranebennur, but found that it did not suit his bent of mind.\(^7\)

At the end of the story we see a decisive change in Malla’s attitude and understanding.
It seems that both Basavaraj Naikar and R. K. Narayan have sympathetic attitude towards thieves, pick-pockets. Also we should note that the criminals, at the end are punished. These thieves have their ethics. Malla declares that once defeated, he will stop thieving and accordingly he disappears and “nobody knew where he had gone and what had happened to him.”

In another story entitled **Change of Heart** Basavaraj Naikar as an optimist expects that kind words, forgiveness, sacrifice, etc., can bring about a better change even in the lives of burglars. The house of Sivalila and Siddalinga, pious couple is attacked by the burglars and they hand over the thieves all including *mangalya Sutra*. But Sivalila advises the burglars with confidence and firm voice. Her sympathetic words, though had a catalytic effect on the burglars, Naikar presents them through his magic realism. The words in affectionate tone of a sister leave an indelible impression on the mind of the burglar. As a result, we find the burglars returning the ornaments of Sivalila after fifteen days. Further, the thief decides to stop thieving and start leading a respectable life. We should note that the transformation of a burglar brought about by a good-natured Sivalila seems to be rare but not incredible. Naikar conveys the message that sooner or later human values will earn a lot for life in this world and goodness in man by making truth stranger than fiction.

Both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar make it clear that there are social values which must not be easily disturbed. The evil in their fictional world is punished but at the same time the authors go deep into the matter and assert that criminals are not born but they are made, sometimes circumstance compels them to do so.

R. K. Narayan’s stories dealing with theft provide a very pleasurable and individual aesthetic experience for the reader. Like the Great Russian masters, Narayan takes situations and characters from common life and turns them into pictures and vignettes which linger long in our memory. His comic vision gives him the necessary detachment and compassion to make the portrayal truthful and aesthetically satisfying. The element of irony marks many of the well-known stories of Narayan which seems to be absent in Basavaraj Naikar.

In Narayan’s well-known story **Trail of the Green Blazer**, he does not frown at the pick-pocket but on the other hand points out his charitable disposition towards the beggars in contrast to the green blazer’s niggardliness. It is a wonderful story of a pick-
pocket named Raju who steals the purse of a green blazer. When Raju is about to throw the empty purse into the well he sees the balloon meant for the motherless child and feels pity for him. Here are R. K. Narayan’s words –

Raju almost sobbed at the thought of the disappointed child – the motherless boy. There was no one to comfort him. Perhaps this ruffian would bit him if he cried too long…Raju was filled with pity at the thought of the young child…That motherless boy must have his balloon at any cost, Raju decided. But how? 75

Thus, a rogue like Raju finds sudden transporting nobility at the thought of a sobbing child. Ultimately, he tries to put the purse back in the Green Blazer’s pocket, but he gets caught in the process. Raju is badly beaten by the people and handed over to the police. Even before the Magistrate in the court Raju kept saying-

I was only trying to put back the purse. And everybody laughed. It became a stock joke in the police world.76

Raju is punished and imprisoned for eighteen months. It is indeed a sharp irony of fate that Raju, a pickpocket escapes when he steals purse but gets caught when he attempts the slightly good deed of returning purse. Narayan also draws our attention to the fact that the rigorous law with its indiscriminate punishments does not teach Raju to give up this ignominious profession but teaches him never to allow sentiments to intervene in his way of living. He believes that god has gifted the likes of him with only one way deftness and his fingers are not meant to put anything back.

In The Birthday Gift, we also come across a pickpocket who steals Seenu’s pen. However, in Fruition at Forty Narayan narrates the story of Rama Rao whose purse is stolen by a clever pickpocket and thwarts all his plans for the birthday celebration. Here in this story Narayan shows sympathy towards the man whose purse is stolen and as a result he feels depressed for all his plans of celebration of his birthday are destroyed by the pickpocket. In Wife’s Holiday we find, Kanan, an idle gambler tries to steal the money stored by his own son when his wife and son are away. But he is taken aback at their unexpected return and he becomes ashamed of himself when his son hands over him a couple of coins to be put into the box. Thus, Narayan sometimes has sympathetic attitude towards thieves and other times he criticizes the ways of these rogues.
The close reading of the stories of Narayan and Naikar reveals the fact that in Naikar’s stories the thieves are not punished by the law, whereas in Narayan they are caught red handed and put behind the bars. Moreover, Narayan draws the attention of the readers that sometimes the innocent people are falsely charged and punished. This is well illustrated in Narayan’s beautiful short story Leela’s Friend. Sidda, a new servant helps the efficient management of the household and at the same time brings joy and happiness to the innocent girl Leela. He is suspected of stealing a golden chain. Sidda is arrested and the parents accuse him vociferously of disloyalty and ingratitude. To their surprise the parents discover the golden chain in a tamarind pot. The innocent Sidda suffers a lot due to relentless and unforgiving nature of the parents. The ending of the story is eloquent and significant in its suggestion. The father who is so quick to inform the police of Sidda’s supposed theft and to see him arrested, coolly says:

I will tell the Inspector tomorrow…In any case, we couldn’t have kept a criminal like him in the house….

In the course of the story we have hardly any reference to Sidda’s misbehaviour or misconduct. Even his tremendous love for the child has not convinced parents of his essential innocence. Narayan emphases that these parents even do not feel guilty for holding Sidda responsible for the temporary loss of the chain.

Political Scenario

As far as politics and politicians are concerned both writers under our discussion do not hold them in high esteem. It is important to note here that R. K. Narayan’s indirect approach and unconcern to the political problems of the day has been criticized. He remained aloof from the current issues of the time. When people were fighting for independence, R. K. Narayan was engrossed with the various problem of the individual. Gandhi’s influence on Indian writers was immense. Even R. K. Narayan has great regard for Gandhi. The word ‘Mahatma’ means ‘a great soul’ and it is R. K. Narayan’s projection of Mahatma Gandhi not as a ‘man’ but as a Mahatma in the novel Waiting for the Mahatma.

In Narayan’s fictional world, politics “figure very little in his work.” In his opinion politics is the least interesting aspect of life. As a literary material he does not attach too much importance to it because most politically inspired novels and stories die
in good time. Instead, he gives more importance to the human elements which last. While the people were fighting for freedom, Narayan dedicated himself to his art and was acclaimed as a writer immersed in his material.

However, Narayan cannot erase from his memory the glory of independence which was sadly mixed with the tragedy of partition. Narayan’s story that deals with the political conditions of the times is captioned as Another Community. It refers to the partition of 1947, the savage and shameless carnage that India witnessed at the time of the transfer of power from the British hands. The protagonist is a good intentioned insurance clerk who hates communalism from the core of his heart. At the end of the story, unfortunately he falls a pray to the fury and violence of the communal riots. The author expresses his concern over the developing intolerance and hatred leading to the obliteration of human love and brotherhood. Though the protagonist has been fatally stabbed and wounded, he cries-

…I will never, never tell my uncle what has happened. I won’t be responsible for starting the trouble. The city must be saved…There is no such thing as your community or mine. We are all of this country. I and my wife and children: you and your wife and children. Let us not cut each other’s throats. It doesn’t matter who cuts whose. It’s all the same to me. But we must not, we must not. We must not.79

In this story Narayan seems to be very cautious as he does not wish ‘to mention caste or community’. 80 The author purposely conceals the name of the person and the place of action to avoid clues and leaves it all to the hypothetical reasoning of the readers. This story shows Narayan’s explicit criticism and strong sense of commitment. He highlights the blind fanaticism and indiscriminate brutality that crass communalism breeds in men. The last words the protagonist mumbles sound very much like Narayan’s own plea to humanity at large. It is clear that communal tensions are rooted in religious intolerance and hatred. It should be noted that though religions preach love, a few fanatic demagogues i.e. political agitators appealing emotion misuse it, spread hatred. In the name of religion, ultimately it is the common people who suffer. People who have vested interests exploit religion for political gains. However, Narayan has faith in the religion which has been commanding respect and following for ages in our country.

In Lawley Road Narayan exhibits hypocrisy and corruption of the political leaders through the character of the Municipal Chairman.
In Narayan’s other story entitled *Gandhi’s Appeal*, we notice his direct reference to the irresistible influence of Gandhi’s personality on a lawyer and his wife Padma. They are irresistibly led to contribute handsomely, though the couple had taken every care to avoid doing so in the beginning. The chief interest of the story remains human rather than political.

Gandhi in Narayan’s novel *The Vendor of Sweets* remains in the background but his influence is felt. In *Waiting For Mahatma* Gandhi appears as a character and not a mere symbol.

Basavaraj Naikar has also dealt with some political issues in some of his short stories. As Basavaraj Naikar is the representative of modern age; he has satirized today’s politicians in the stories like *The Spider’s Web*, *The Invisible Face*, *Felicitation* and *A Chronic Patient Became A Doctor*. India is a democratic country and it is expected that the elected leaders should work in the interests of common people. In the welfare state it is the common man who is to be at the centre but unfortunately the reverse is taking place. There we find erosion of ethical values in the politicians, bureaucrats, and ministers. Naikar is shocked to see the corruption prevalent in our country and existential suffering of man. His moving story *The Spider’s Web* throws light on the corrupt and hypocrite minister. With the zeal to reform the bureaucracy and check corruption in it, the cabinet minister visits various offices of his department and in his public meeting, he orders the Deputy Commissioner of police to suspend Durgadas on duty there after receiving a complaint against him. As a result, Duragadas collapses and dies. It is ironical that it is Durgadas who had arranged the grand dinner of fried fish for the minister. Since today’s politics is a process of dehumanization, the politicians show no real concern for any one. Naikar without fear and favour shades light on the present political scenario, how these brainless leaders get elected is narrated in the following words. The minister says:

> I HAD spent a lot of money on my election and succeeded in getting elected as an MLA. Later I was lucky enough to become a minister on the strength of my caste and popular support.  

This is the sorry state of affair which Basavaraj Naikar presents before the readers. In another story *Felicitation* Naikar brings our notice that how people show more importance and respect to the political leaders than the artists. The poet, the critic and the
protagonists are totally ignored and humiliated by a group of petty politicians. The bitter truth that Naikar states is that today it is the politician who enjoys the highest respect by the public in our country.

In the academic world, the vice-chancellors and academicians are being heavily pressurized by the politicians. This is well illustrated in the excellent short story entitled **A Chronic Patient Became A Doctor**. Here Dr. Kudari’s remark is noteworthy–

Dear Dr. Nandiswar, nowadays Indian Universities have become the playground for politicians.  

The protagonist Mr. Nandiswar was qualified for the post of a reader but he was not selected because one of the candidates was the daughter of a central minister. She wielded much political pressure and thereby got appointed.

Thus both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar have satirized the politicians in their short stories.

**Narrative Technique**

The fictional world of R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar is fantastic and appeal every reader. Their stories have special charm. Both Narayan and Naikar follow the tradition of story-telling as it existed in ancient India. However, we should note that they have adopted their style from the west and one may find fine blending of western technique and eastern material in their short stories. Narayan is acclaimed as ‘a born story teller’ and ‘a first-rate story-teller’. Perhaps the most startling discovery in reading a Narayan story is that language poses such a small problem and it is the same with Dr. Basavaraj Naikar. Simplicity and clarity are the keynotes of their style. Though the style of Basavaraj Naikar is simple, direct and graphic, he differs from R. K. Narayan with regard to approach. Dr. Basavaraj Naikar presents Southern Indian life as it is carefully abstaining from positing his point of view or assuming a didactic approach.

In some of stories R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar make use of first person narratives effectively. This method could well be traced to the days of Jataka tales.
emanating from the teachings of the Buddha. However, in the past even great barons could not read, speech was the primary mode of communication. It is noteworthy here that the written short story developed from orally told stories. Narayan is greatly influenced by O’ Henry, Chekov, and Somerset Maugham while Naikar is inspired by Tolstoy, Emine Zola, Maupassant, Joseph Conrad, and D. H. Lawrence. We should note here that these great masters are their favourite but Narayan and Naikar do not follow them blindly.

Narayan is acclaimed for his technique all over the world as he avoids authorial comments and employs irony as a vision.

It is remarkable that Naikar achieves credibility using first person narration but we do not see the unique narrator like The Talkative Man in his stories. Narayan’s Talkative Man is the narrator of a good number of his stories. He is a comic character par excellence with a profound understanding of the reader’s mind. In short, Narayan wins authenticity to the experience he delineates. As far as the third-person device of narration is concerned, Naikar’s use is superb, whereas, R. K. Narayan relies mostly on first person narration. This technique creates a certain distance between the reader and the narrated events making the events objective.

Another important device used by Narayan is epistolary method in his story Uncle’s Letters which is absent in Naikar.

The flashback technique enables both Narayan and Naikar to relate the past and the present skilfully. Narayan makes good use of this technique in stories like The Gateman’s Gift and Talkative Man stories while Basavaraj Naikar makes his narrative fresh and vigorous using the flashback technique in his story Cross Roads.

Narayan relies chiefly on irony to expose foibles and follies of his characters. No one will deny the fact that the chief distinguishing factor of Narayan’s stories is irony which is central to his works. R. K. Narayan makes use of thematic irony, irony of fate, situational irony, tragic irony and comic irony in his fictional world. At the same time, the blend of tragedy, humour and irony reaches almost uncanny perfection in Narayan’s stories for which he is critically acclaimed all over the world. One fails to find Narayan’s skilful combination of irony, compassion and humour in Dr. Basavaraj Naikar.
Undoubtedly, Basavaraj Naikar makes the best use of symbols in some of his stories. The snake symbolism in Coffin in the House is effectively used, for serpent is associated with sinful lust both in the eastern and western mythology. Cross Roads deals with the sentimental and melancholic separation of two lovers.

The separated lovers are symbolized by the scattered King and Queen of a chessboard and their pent-up powerful emotion by the emergence of a powerfully writhing snake, ultimately led, like their emotions now forcibly suppressed.  

Again in the story Spider’s Web the dying insect is a symbol of richly sweet and attractive corruption. In the titles of the stories Naikar’s use of apt symbols intensifies the effect of the narrative which is laudable. “These technical devices in particular reinforce, as we have seen, the author’s [Naikar] portrayal of the life, customs and manners of a particular region of India, a microcosm of the country, like R. K. Narayan’s Malgudi and multifaceted interaction of the individuals residing there.”

The Locale

In writing a short story, setting or locale plays an important role. The birth place of every writer leaves with him an indelible memoir that haunts the person all the life. The goading passion of belongingness, funny days of the childhood, time spent with friends and relatives, the events and incidents of infant days, running with the moon in the moonlit nights, lonely hours in the lap of nature, enjoying the songs of birds, spending summer under the trees, school and college days, functions, festivals, fairs and many more get recorded in the writings of all the writers as the scenic locales of his works. As R.K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar belong to Southern India i.e. Karnataka and Tamilnadu, it is but natural that both depict Southern Indian life in their short stories. The way of life presented both by Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar may appear regional but the people who represent it are in no way confined to the regional or real geographical areas because their creators make them to represent the universal values and emotions. After all both the writers present characters in a particular situation as it was done by Charles Dickens.
The local chosen for the stories by R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar is recognizably Indian. Local colour is demonstrably the life of R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar’s stories which transcend the purely regional. Both writers have portrayed with great fidelity the South Indian scene in its manifold variety. With photographic accuracy both writers record the local, topography, manners, customs, rituals, superstition and character types. Their local colour stories present a type of realism, if realism can be defined as a graphic delineation of actual life.

R. K. Narayan’s stories have a specific fictional locale—Malgudi, an imaginary town in South India. Like Hardy’s Wessex, Malgudi has life of its own. Narayan describes both the old and the new existing side by side. Like Basavaraj Naikar Narayan’s stories belong to native Indian soil and are redolent of its culture. They mainly depict the South Indian life and clearly express his views of the world and those who live in. By bringing in the pests-man climbing up a coconut tree and plucking out the sap found at its top, Narayan creates a typical South Indian atmosphere. It is true that Narayan’s novels are set in Malgudi but Malgudi is not the locale of all his short stories. Besides Malgudi, sometimes the action takes place in Mysore, sometimes in Bangalore, Madras, Kritam and other places.

Similarly Basavaraj Naikar creates a typical South Indian atmosphere in his short stories.

Unlike R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao he has presented the South Indian ethos in particular, and situations quite Indian in general. 85

Almost all the stories of Basavaraj Naikar are set in the vicinity of Dharwad city. The title story The Thief of Nagarahalli presents the rural life in Nagarahalli, a small village in Dharwad Taluka. Basavaraj Naikar describes the places in such a way that come alive in all its minute details before the readers. The village atmosphere of Dharwad district is created by introducing the readers to the taste of fresh brinjal curry, curds, and temples.

R. K. Narayan’s Malgudi is not only a frame of reference but the picture of Malgudi has been slowly and dramatically built up. Malgudi’s hold on the reader’s psyche is as strong as it is of any of Narayan’s characters. It is alive like a character. In this connection H. M. William’s remark is noteworthy “Malgudi is perhaps Narayan’s
greatest character.” K. R. Shrinivas Iyengar is also of the same opinion when he says that Malgudi is the real ‘hero’ of the eleven novels and many short stories.

On the other hand, Basavaraj Naikar has not created a fictitious town like R. K. Narayan in his short stories. Malgudi is Narayan’s unique creation and what happens in Malgudi happens everywhere. Narayan in his introduction to *Malgudi Days* speaks about the universality of Malgudi. Narayan’s Malgudi has made a deep impression on the readers. It lingers in the mind even after one closes the last page of the book. Thus the backdrop of Narayan’s stories is excellently evoked. It is hard to think of another small town which has become so real to the readers of Indian fiction in English. Even Basavaraj Naikar’s stories have, no doubt universal appeal, but Dharwad is real place in Karnataka state while Malgudi is fictional town. Though Malgudi is an imaginative place presented in the stories of R. K. Narayan, it can be found anywhere and here lies the difference between Basavaraj Naikar and R. K. Narayan.

Like R. K. Narayan, Basavaraj has also depicted the credulous and superstitious village folks and has travelled along the river banks, brooks in his stories. The village temples, village cemetery, the village pond and river against scenery of poverty and hunger, tradition and superstition, joys and sorrows, morning and evening, day and night, etc. are found alive on the canvas of the stories of R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar.

The pre and post-independent India is found to be the locale of Narayan and Naikar’s stories depicting the changes in the sphere of social life and cultural and communal activities.

Narayan’s Malgudi is *Casterbridge* but the inhabitants of Malgudi are essentially human. They have kinship with all humanity. No Indian English writer has portrayed such a wonderful, varied, and colorful of his setting as R. K. Narayan has done. The milieu of Malgudi is typically Indian. It is also true that Malgudi in spite of local touches is universal. It is notable that as a great artist Narayan transcends the limitation of a regional writer. Though Naikar’s Dharwad is not an imaginary place like that of Narayan’s Malgudi, his stories have universal appeal. Like Narayan, Basavaraj Naikar also appeals to every man.

It is noteworthy that both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar create the real picture of a typical village, and town in their short stories. R. K. Narayan’s one of the
best known stories *An Astrologer’s Day* accurately mirrors Indian life. It is notable for its Indianess in theme, characterization and setting. The characters of the roadside astrologer, an ubiquitous Indian figure and of Guru Naik are well-conceived and realistically delineated. The typical Indian town scene is picturesquely drawn with admirable economy:

Punctually at Midday he opened his bag and spread out his professional equipment, which consisted of a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a notebook and a bundle of palmyra writing. His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion, and his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers…He sat under the boughs of a spreading tamarind tree which flanked a path running through the Town Hall Park. It was a remarkable place in many ways: a surging crowd was always moving up and down this narrow road morning till night. A variety of trades and occupations was represented all along its way: medicine-sellers, sellers of stolen hardware and junk, magicians and, above all, an auctioneer of cheap cloth, who created enough din all day to attract the whole town. Next to him in vociferousness came a vendor of fried groundnuts, who gave his ware a fancy name each day, calling it Bombay Ice-Cream….

Similarly, Basavaraj Naikar narrates the elements of the village-hills, brooks, river, temple, etc. The author has an eye for details and it becomes obvious in the opening paragraph itself wherein he takes the readers to the village named Nagarahalli. The geographical details take the reader on a journey whereby he is transported to Nagarahalli. Basavaraj Naikar writes:

There lived a famous thief called Malla in a village called Nagarahalli situated thirty-five miles away from Dharwad. If you go there you can easily see the leonine figure of the hill of Naragund to the north, the Kappata hill of Gadag to the south, the short and circular hill of Navalagund to the west. Nagarahalli is skirted by two brooks: one, Bennihalla [literally meaning the brook of butter], the other, Kurubanahalla (literally meaning the brook of the shepherd). Whereas the Bennihalla flows from south to north and is situated to the west of the village, the Kurubanahalla, situated to the south of the village, flows from east to west and joins the Bennihalla. A common feature of these two brooks is that none of them
has water in it throughout the year. Even in the rainy season, the two brooks create a lot of trouble to villagers. Whereas the water of Kurubanahalla is sweet but muddy, that of Bennihalla is very salty and, therefore, cannot be used for drinking. It is famous for its torrential flow of water however short may be the time and for the toll of a few human beings and animals every year…Malla was known as a great thief in the neighboring villages. The image of Malla clad in dhoti up to his knees and a half-shirt, a turban around his head, was well-known to everyone in the villages.\(^89\)

Thus, we find the concentrated sense of place in Naikar’s stories. This suggests that if we are to seek interconnection in Naikar’s story collection, it should be through the sense of place. As a result, what binds his stories is in some sense an essential Indianness. Anybody who reads Basavaraj Naikar’s story will be struck by the details with which he establishes the geographical identity of Nagarahalli catching there by its distinct personality. Malgudi provides an ideal setting to the human drama which Narayan has developed and unfolded through his novels and short stories. It is also important to note that Narayan is not interested in places for their own sake; his abiding interest lies in peopled places. His characters give meaning to places and make them alive, real and warm.

In conclusion we can say that Basavaraj Naikar’s stories will certainly take a place on our shelves beside the stories of R. K. Narayan. Naikar’s Dharwad seems to be far from R. K. Narayan’s Malgudi, but there is the same quality in his stories and for that Basavaraj Naikar should be appreciated.

**Characterization**

“Characters” says M. H. Abrams “are the persons presented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as being endowed with moral, dispositional and emotional qualities that are expressed in what they say—the dialogue—and what they do—the action.” \(^90\) The characters in fiction portrayed most skilfully by the author absorb and dominate our imagination. We start loving them instinctively. They evoke our real emotional responses. Both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar have
created memorable characters in their fictional world. It is noteworthy here any successful short story writer cannot afford to create a three dimensional image of his character due to the limited space. Hence, these authors have tackled one or two salient and memorable features in their stories. It is thus their memorable characters that lend beauty to the rainbow colours of stories.

The characters of R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar are typically Indian in their sense of values and concerns. They possess a sense of wonder and enjoy the fringes of life. Their characters are full of life and vitality.

R. K. Narayan’s concern is with the middle-class people of a little town he has created. His approach is realistic rather than reformative. His art of characterization is a mixed fare. His chief concern as a pure artist is with the character. “My focus is all on character. If his personality comes alive, the rest is easy for me.” says R. K. Narayan.

Narayan does not lack sympathy for his characters. Each one of his Malgudi characters wicked or virtuous is drawn with extraordinary delicacy and tenderness. In his sympathetic hands they turn into interesting and amusing figures as they make the earth very colorful by their presence and by their actions. Commenting on R. K. Narayan’s instinctive sympathy for his characters, New Statesman says-

It is impossible to compare him to any contemporary English writer since he has to the full what has become the rarest quality in our fiction, sympathy towards his characters, an appreciation of the diversity of human life that is neither mawkish, nor patronizing. 

Since Narayan gives more importance to character rather than plot, the commonplace characters come alive under the focus of a comic and compassionate vision. The essential comic irony of his vision bestows upon his art of characterization a spirit of detachment and good-humoured acceptance of life. Narayan’s stories are stories of characters.

Dr. Basavaraj Naikar portrays his characters like that of R. K. Narayan. As a short story writer Basavaraj Naikar is comparable to R. K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Khushwant Singh. Naikar’s characters are typically Indian in their sense of values and concerns, and cannot be separated from the mainstream of Indian life. It seems that Naikar continues to write honestly and diligently on Indian themes in the tradition of
Indian English short story writers like R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao. His portrayal of characters is akin to R. K. Narayan, whether he is as successful as R. K. Narayan does not matter. In this regard, Aroonima Sinha rightly observes-

The characters in the stories [Basavaraj Naikar] are rural or small-town people. In his choice of characters one is reminded of R. K. Narayan’s unforgettable Malgudi characters, which within their limited range of functioning, exhibited the entire range of human emotions. But Naikar’s characters, unfortunately, are not so finely chiseled as those of Narayan’s are. This is because of his obsession with sex, various forms of seduction, guilt consciousness and repentance.93

Basavaraj Naikar’s Malla in the title story The Thief of Nagarahalli is unforgettable character. The author focuses on a single character. Malla is a thief who attains a heroic stature at the hands of Basavaraj Naikar. He felt utterly disappointed at ploughing, carpentry and masonry because these jobs did not thrill him:

Once he tried his best to become a Swami at Ranebennur, but found that it did not suit his bent of mind.94

Malla’s character is like R. K. Narayan’s Raju in the novel The Guide. On account of Raju’s act of forgery and the laboured repentance, moving from the mundane to the sacred, we see Naikar’s Malla shirking off from the sacred to the mundane. Malla’s character may be compared with R. K. Narayan’s Raju in the story Trail of the Green Blazer. Both are expert in the art of thieving. It is amazing to read how Naikar’s Malla steals the gold ornaments from the dead body of an old woman. Malla’s greatest pleasure seems to lie in thieving without being caught. On the other hand Narayan’s Raju also steals purse from the pocket of the green blazer. Both Narayan and Naikar have sympathetic attitude towards thieves.

Reading R. K. Narayan’s collection of short stories is like a travel through which one encounters several characters of rural India, such as a Sadhu, a harlot, a pickpocket, a beggar, an actor, a watchman, and a postman everyone randomly picked. It is a kaleidoscopic work of ‘slice of life’ fiction. Basavaraj Naikar’s depiction of historical characters is noteworthy. His Rani Mallamma [The Rebellious Rani of Belavadi] and Kanakadas [The Golden Servant] are historical characters. One witnesses the picturesque description of Rani Mallamma’s personality as a good administrator, an able
organizer and also a ferocious leader. The character of Kanakadas in *The Golden Servant* may be regarded as the pioneer of spiritual heroism among the downtrodden section of society. Narayan has not written historical stories.

Basavaraj Naikar’s stories have historical figures, thieves, lecturers, political leaders, truck drivers, students, lovers, murderers, prostitutes, students whereas we have children, animals, rickshaw pullers, *sadhus*, harlots, snake charmers, traders, doctors, servants, beggars, astrologers, etc., in Narayan’s fictional world. Most of Narayan’s characters belong to middle class while Naikar’s characters are from all strata of life. Narayan’s male characters present a panorama of middle and lower middle class people and understanding of all these characters is ever perfect. While majority of Naikar’s male characters are generally deceitful, cunning, greedy, selfish and lecherous.

The women characters in Narayan and Naikar are traditional. Naikar’s women are given names whereas Narayan’s women characters are portrayed without names. They are usually types. On the whole, the women characters in the stories of Narayan and Naikar do not revolt against the tradition. Woman is presented as a typical traditional archetype of Indian womanhood. It is observed that Narayan’s short stories have no heroines only heroes, whereas Naikar in some of his stories presents the question of a woman’s identity in society. In Narayan’s stories inter-caste marriage do not take place while Bharati in Naikar’s story *Fulfillment* elopes with a poor untouchable actor and marries him. Most of Naikar’s women are weak, lustful and deceitful; on the other hand Narayan’s women are pious, dutiful and gentle and are not involved in the illicit relationship.

Both Narayan and Naikar concentrate on a limited number of characters and reveal them in their crucial moments. A character survives in their stories only to either strengthen the plot or to impel it forward. At the same time we should note that Narayan’s fictional world is comic whereas Naikar’s is moral.

Narayan has skilfully drawn the innocent children, animals in his stories, however, on the other hand such characters do not find place in the stories of Naikar. In his supernatural stories Narayan has humanized ghosts whereas ghosts play a minor role in Naikar.
R. K. Narayan depicts the foibles and eccentricities, joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments of the common man. He prefers to write about the private joys and sorrows of ordinary people rather than the intellectually or emotionally adventurous people. William Walsh observes—

His [R. K. Narayan] pre-occupation is with the middle class, a relatively small part of an agricultural civilization and the most conscious and anxious part of the population.⁹⁵

It is observed that Naikar’s characters are chosen from Pan-Indian situations and sensibilities. They are presented with a strong touch of realism. He has chosen his characters from different walks of life to fit them within the confines of a multifaceted fictional society.

In this context, what Paolo Piciucco professor of English from University of Torino, Italy says about the characters of Basavaraj Naikar is worth quoting:

….the various characters are clearly instrumental to the general effect and are introduced only when they take part in the plot… In the same wavelength of the old Indian legends, the protagonists are not ordinary characters but they are delineated as somewhat outstanding figures with the rare chance to step in and out of the social norms and conventions.⁹⁶

Language

The two short story writers under our study are R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar. Both are Indian and write about Indian subjects and Indian people. The language of their short stories is, no doubt, English, but the atmosphere, the problems of the people talked about are all Indian. Hence Narayan and Naikar are more akin to Indian writers who write in Marathi, Hindi, Kannada, Tamil and other Indian languages than to the British short story writers like Somerset Maugham and others who painted the conditions and the problems of the British society of their times.

The use of English in the national context is thought by some to be non-patriotic. It is argued that Indians write in English to seek the Western market and readership, and they do so for earning a huge sum of royalty in sterling and dollars. But the truth remains that the choice of English or any other language is a prerogative of the writer, and that he
should be allowed to employ the language he is at home. The writer’s first obligation is to satisfy him and as per his or her requirements and needs, he can remake or mould it suit his own design and purpose. Mulk Raj Anand pleads strongly for the adoption of an Indian style of writing English. He has used many translations of the words and expressions in the Panjabi vernacular. C. V. Varghese opines—

An Indian novelist in English should employ his skill in contriving a dialogue that is at once natural and lively, supple and functional. He may even catch the speech rhythm and the turns of phrases, used by all kinds of people in the village and translate some of the abuses, curses, imprecations and proverbs to advantage.  

Both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar have been successful in communicating their vision in a language other than their own. They have tried their best to use the English language in a way that will be distinctively Indian and still remains English.

Basavaraj Naikar in his preface to his first collection of stories clearly states:

He has been inspired by the giants of Indian English Literatures like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Chamam Nahal among others. Like many Commonwealth writers, I believe in the view that we Indians must write in our native brand of English, and should not ape the British ‘Masters’. 

It is obvious that Basavaraj Naikar pleads for the adoption of Indian style of writing English. His prose is simple, straightforward and lucid.

Similarly, Narayan’s stories are also marked by simplicity of language. Both Narayan and Naikar believe in the Indianization of English.

Narayan’s mother tongue is Tamil and he was living in Mysore where Kannada was spoken and he feels at home writing in English. He says—

You see one person can write only in one language. In my mother tongue, I can write to my mother only! I cannot reach out to a vast audience. I have been writing in English and now I only know this language well. This is all. Not any other reason for my sticking to English.
On the other hand, Basavaraj Naikar is a bilingual writer. His mother tongue is Kannada. He wants to be an Indian writer in his sensibility and articulation. In his interview to Dr. Jaydeep Sarangi, Naikar says-

… I believe that Indians should write an Indian brand of English and should not try to imitate the British or American or Australian writers. Although they may write in English their sensibility should be deeply steeped in Indian philosophy, religion, language and culture… No British or American writer should be able to write like him.  

We can say that both R. K. Narayan and Naikar are of the opinion that Indians should write about the life around them and advocate Indianization of English. Both believe that Indians should write in an Indian brand of English. Narayan’s ‘Bharat Brand of English’ suggests that we should revitalize the English language like that of Americans and make it our own. Here we should note that though Narayan believes in Indianization of English, he does not wish to bend English syntax for his purposes.

Both Narayan and Naikar use the English language as much as we used to wear dhoties manufactured in Lancashire but their thoughts and feelings reflected in their short stories are recognizably autochthonous. It seems that English language has served the purpose of these two writers admirably. Both make use of pure and limpid English. Their language is easy and natural in its run and tone and there is nothing sort of distortion of the rules of English grammar. They make use of many Indian words to create Indian atmosphere in their short stories. After careful reading of the stories of R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar the readers come across the loan words from Indian languages. Both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar have used a number of words from Indian languages in their fictional world. They have used the following loan words to make the atmosphere lively and real:

- dhoti, beedi, rottis, bonda pan, Chappati, bhajan, Dipavali, darshan salaam, dosa, Namaste, idli, khadi, jilebi, jutka, lathi, dhall, bhaji Sanyasi, brinjal, Aiyo, saheb, muhurtama, etc.

It is obvious that R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar advocate the use of Indian variety of English. Their themes, characters and dialogues carry the feelings and sounds
of the South Indian villages and towns. Both writers have made laudable efforts to harness the rich resources of English and mix up with native colours.

Many Indian-English idioms commonly appear in the short stores of R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar. Narayan makes use of Tamil proverb, for instance-

“If you throw a stone into a gutter it would only spurt filth in your face” 101

“You may close the mouth of an oven, but how can you close the mouth of a town’, she said, quoting a Tamil proverb.” 102

“And what would one do with many mansion?” asked Jagan and quoted a Tamil verse which said that even if eighty million ideas float across your mind, you cannot wear more than four Cubits of cloth or eat more than a little measure of rice at a time”. 103

Similarly, Basavaraj Naikar also makes good use of Kannada proverbs, idioms in his stories such as –

“We simply cannot guess which snake lives in which hole.” 104

“Gone is the evil worm” 105

“You have dug your own grave” 106

“Our fate is not in our hands”. 107

“Does the sourness of tamarind ever decrease with the years”. 108

R. K. Narayan does not let his readers know that conversation takes place in another language. He seldom tells us which language his character uses. But it is clear from the conversation that these are in Tamil. It is also the same with Basavaraj Naikar.

Both Narayan and Naikar are successful artists of language. They present realistic details of day-to-day life with an air of authenticity. Both authors convey their thoughts unambiguously. One of the important features of Narayan and Naikar’s use of English language is that their language poses no problem. Simplicity and clarity are the key-notes of their style. It is true that R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar have achieved a certain eminence and won recognition from both western and Indian readers. Their focus is on
the pattern of life in South India. Their problem, in so far as it concerns language, is essentially the same, namely how to give us the ‘feel’ of that life in an alien medium.

Narayan is acclaimed as a born story-teller and a first-rate story teller by the critics. His success is singularly remarkable as it has been achieved in an extraordinarily simple and unpretentious manner with no straining after effect. What makes it even more striking is the fact that Narayan could do it with the minimum of effort in a language which is not native to him. Similarly, Basavaraj Naikar should be commended for his simplicity and clarity which are keynotes to his style. The reason for it lies in his easy acceptance of the English language as a medium of expression.

In a nutshell, we can say that both R. K. Narayan and Basavaraj Naikar have achieved complete success in solving this most vexing of the problems of the Indian creative writer in English. They have somehow or other overcome the problems posed by dialogue, for their characters would, of course, be speaking in Tamil, Kannada or Hindi. Their conversation never reads like a translation, while it is at the same time free from English colloquialisms which in the circumstances would ring false. Both authors manage to make their people speak, in fact, as they would speak if English were their language. Their mastery over the language is suggested by the fact that they are able to bring forth both the sensibility of the milieu and the personality of character.
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