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2.1 THE PLANTING

2.2 The Early Novels

Narayan’s first phase ‘planting’ as a novelist is a phase which begins with ‘Swami and Friends’ and closes with ‘The English Teacher’. The novels of this period are written before independence. The location of action projected in these novels is limited because it is related to the autobiographical experiences of his school and college days and his married life.

‘The English Teacher’ by R.K. Narayan marks a turning point in his life and career as a novelist. ‘The English Teacher’ establishes him firmly as a novelist capable of handling both the comic and tragic elements. It is one of the autobiographical novels which is dedicated to his wife Rajam. It completes the trilogy of novels consisting of ‘Swami and Friends’, and ‘The Bachelor of Arts’. These three novels constitute the odyssey of growth in the Malgudi world of education. Swami as the school boy in ‘Swami and Friends’, Chandran as the college student in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ and Krishnan the teacher of English in ‘The English Teacher’ explore the Indian educational system to bring out its drawbacks. The fictional world of the plantation deals with the first three stages of human life comprised as the child’s world of play and pathos, the world of youth of romance and conjugal life of adults in the ideal of platonic love.

Being well-known craftsman Narayan’s novels are marked by certain peculiarities in the structure of plot. It is governed and shaped by the particular milieu and background of a South Indian Community which is deeply rooted in the cultural tradition. The return to the normal that is traditional pattern of life which underlines cyclical pattern of the plot construction. Narayan uses simple and episodic plot in his novels. The plot of ‘Swami and Friends’ is simple. The wandering of Swami is presented directly. Narayan does not use complicated device in it. The plot is influenced by the myth and legends. In ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ the structure of plot is classical with beginning, middle and end. It has an episodic nature. The actions and events are divided into different stages. They are Chandran’s love at first sight and his decision to marry Malathi by avoiding traditional norms of Malgudi tradition, his
leaving for Madras and wandering as a ‘sanyasi’, Chandran’s return to his parents house in Malgudi and his marriage with a girl of his parent’s choice, Susila.

The plot of ‘The Dark Room’ is well organized and it has episodic structure. Narayan presents triangular relationship between Ramani, Savitri and Shanta Bai as it is presented in ‘Candida’. The plot of the novel is shaped and governed by myth and legends. The plot of ‘The English Teacher’ is divided into two equal parts. Narayan presents intimate relationship between Krishnan and Susila in the first part but it ends by the death of Susila at the end of the first part. In the second half of the novel Krishnan spends his time by establishing communication with the spirit of his dead wife and his involvement in The Leave Alone School.

The themes which have been presented by R. K. Narayan are human relationships, illusion versus reality, conflict between tradition and modernity, return of the native and the theme of rebellion. The theme of human relationships has originated from the Indidan tradition. The rebellion is realized as a deviation from the tradition. In the course of rebellion there runs the theme of illusion versus reality. Narayan uses the device ‘rite de passage’ to focus on his principle of acceptance. Realizing the error the deviators withdraw from the deviation and return to the place, Malgudi which indicates their growth on spiritual level.

‘Swami and Friends’ elaborates the instances of Swami’s rebellious deeds. Swami’s rebellion is considered as the novelist’s technique to present the world of Swami’s illusion. The theme, return of the native is indicated by the protagonist’s understanding of reality and moving towards normal state of the mind. Narayan presents the theme of mother-son relationship, father-son relationship within the frame-work of Malgudi tradition. ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ underlines father-son relationship in which understanding and respect for thought are given importance. While maintaining relationship Chandran’s father wants to respect rules and traditional values of Malgudi. Chandran’s love at the first sight with Malathi and his decision to marry her by violating traditional norms of Malgudi underlines his rebellion. Failing to understand illusory nature of love he leaves Malgudi for Madras. The normalcy returns when Chandran returns home and settles down with Susila in a
traditionally arranged marriage which suggests the theme of order-disorder and restoration of normalcy.

Narayan has projected the theme of husband-wife relationship in ‘The Dark-Room’ which has social structure. The arrival of Shanta Bai in Ramani’s life disturbs domestic harmony which leads to the theme of rebellion. Ramani, his wife Savitri and the other woman Shanta Bai are the agents of rebellion. The lover-beloved relationship between Ramani and Shanta Bai is against Malgudi tradition. The theme of illusion versus reality is reflected through the deeds of these characters. Savitri’s leaving house in despair for committing suicide is an act of rebellion, which is temporary. Finally, she comes back home which symbolizes the theme: return of the native. The theme of husband-wife relationship in ‘The English Teacher’ reflects Narayan’s world of values. The fine example of domestic harmony has been explained by the novelist. The theme of rebellion is focused on the character of Krishnan. Narayan presents Krishnan as spiritual rebel and his positive philosophy of life and spiritual maturity and union of two souls.

There is a truthful presentation of the middle class in the Indian society in Naryan’s novels and his characters are chosen from the same class. The characters of Narayan are the followers of the Malgudi custom. They are strongly imbied with the tradition. It is underlined that they do not side the custom or the tradition when ever any issue takes place related to family matters. In the early novels of Narayan the characters are simple, modest, loving and obedient.

The life one may witness is not complex and complicated but simple. The characters are also innocent and they are without any ambition. The relationship between the characters is not governed and shaped by complications. It has a traditional and peculiarly native cultural base. The domestic harmony in the family is governed by religious activity. There is a sense of true devotion and dedication to each other in particular in the cases of Swami and Rajam, Chandran and Susila and Krishnan and Rajam. The last pair continues their love even though death has put a barrier in their love as well as life.
Narayan’s plot, theme, character and world view have a strong sense of tradition, culture and moral values. The religious aura is an indispensable quality of the Indian culture and tradition. The episodes in the novels are controlled by the Malgudi locale, morals, spirituality and social norms. The theme of relationships is rooted in the Indian tradition. Narayan searches psychological implications of human deeds. The traditional norms of Malgudi donot allow rebellion for a long time. Their journey from innocence to experience underlines the illusory nature of their life. The characters finally withdraw from deviation and their return to the world of reality underlines Narayan’s philosophy of acceptance realized through ‘rite de passage’. It suggests spiritual growth in his characters. They are presented as the faithful followers of the sanctrosanct tradition of Malgudi locale.

2.3 PLOT

Chapter two, the planting, considers the early Narayan novels, the pace-setters in terms of Narayan’s use of recurrent plot, themes, characterization and worldview, and studies them in the context of the specific setting projected by the novelist in his first four novels.

R.K. Narayan presents the story which records a succession of events. The hiatus between character and plot is the setting of Malgudi and its environs. Both character and plot are inseparably knit together which can take place only in Malgudi. The qualities the novelist attributes to these characters determine the action. The action in turn progressively changes the characters who belong to the location of action, that is, Malgudi alone. Thus the story is carried forward to the end through the episodic pattern. In other words, as a good story teller, Narayan sees to it that his story has a” beginning, a middle and an end.” (Verghese, 1971: 134) His story begins in Malgudi, has its middle in Malgudi and ends in Malgudi again, though a brief departure from Malgudi may heighten the impact of the story.

The plot construction of Narayan’s novels is steered by the “particular milieu and background of a South Indian community.” (Girla, 1984: 149) The community is from Malgudi, which is the location that is firmly established in a cultural tradition. One may underline the dominance of the exterior influences from Malgudi. The spirit of
place-Malgudi forces the motivation in the construction and progression of plots in Narayan’s novels. The comic as well as catastrophic complications revolve around Malgudi in the journey of his plot-progression. The return to the normal means return to the traditional pattern of life which reaffirms his comic vision as this is an emphatic return to Malgudi. This lays stress on the cyclical pattern of Narayan’s plot construction which moves in the pattern of order-disorder and return of order and also normalcy in Malgudi, disturbance in Malgudi caused by the characters with Malgudian traits, departure and absence from Malgudi and the prodigal’s return to Malgudi. In this context Williams, H. M. rightly observes:

So we have in these Malgudi novels a rhythm of departure and return, ebb-and flow…Inspite of such disturbances and changes from outside and inside, Narayan underlines the timeless quality of Malgudi; his novels celebrate a kind of heroic Indian inertia. (Williams, 1973:55-56)

There are some departures from the right path, leaving outs, digressions, and diversions. The plot structure of Narayan pursues a cyclical and classical pattern. ‘The novels of R.K.Narayan’ are circular in the sense that they begin where they end. (Dwivedi, 1987:124) They are climatic in structure: which means that both the climax and anticlimax fold over in his novels. The foolish action of the protagonist up to the climax of final failure is established by Narayan. At the same time, the protagonist in the novel anticlimactically falls spiritually from a better situation in the beginning to a worse situation at the end. The protagonist either gets merged as a commoner into life, or collapses at the end. The Narayan novel closes with some ambiguity deliberately leaving the conclusion to the reader’s imagination.

The plot construction of Narayan’s novels is reconciliation of fact with imagination, of substance with form. The principle of episodical sequence is followed by the novelist. Narayan has only one plot-design with “humble beginning, interim rise, and then slopping down to a quiet.” (Mishra, 2002:21) The events and characters are logically designed. The plot is a compound perplexity of action and interaction, a complex web of various social and human types of being. The structure in Narayan’s novels is not the surface structure but a concrete symbolic drama of truth with moral significance.
In plot construction of novels, chance as a device plays a very significant role, which implies the unexpected nature of happening. It is ‘parapetia’ in the course of events. The feeling of frustrated will is added to unexpectedness by chance. It is termed as the consequence of episodes. The use of this device creates an impression of constructional artificiality of the writer. Chance or mischance leads to a major turn in fortune of character, which may be called catastrophic. Chance is used by Shakespeare and Hardy with effectiveness. The fate of Romeo and Juliet is a working of chance through delayed information about the sleep-inducing position. The dropping of Desdemona’s handkerchief is the purest chance. Clym’s mother’s visit in Hardy’s ‘Return of the Native’ proves problematic for reconciliation, and she is then stung by the poisonous snake. This disaster reduces characters to “puppets not in the hands of fate but of the author”. (Cecil, 1950:129)


2.3.1 Swami and Friends

‘Swami and Friends’ Narayan’s first novel is episodic in structure. It begins with the antics of a group of school children. In the middle the protagonist Swami leaves Albert Mission School. In the end, he returns home and to school. His separation from Rajam is the most touching episode of the novel. The plot of the novel is a presentation of a string of episodes and incidents. All these episodic antics are characterized by a distinct unity as all the incidents are set in pre-independence days in India, in a fictional town called Malgudi and move round Swaminathan and his chums, and their activities and mischiefs. In this novel Swaminathan and his friends are presented as the playing, giggling and mischief making children whose portraits strongly struggle to come out of his pages as living figures having flesh and blood.
The characters and incidents act and react. The plot moves with logical sequence. The plot is governed by the place of action, Malgudi. It provides a distinctive setting through the background of a south Indian community, rooted in the truly Indian cultural tradition. It is the onslaught of the external influences and forces which constitutes the motivation in plot. Swami’s teachers, his parents and in particular his Granny provide the ‘adult’ interest. Swami and his friends including Mani and Rajam add the charm of school life to the proceedings.

Narayan reflects on the tendency of the school boys in ‘Swami and Friends’ like a common schoolboy in the Indian society through Swaminathan’s reluctance for Monday which symbolises the regular school work every week. After the freedom of Saturday and Sunday they are unwilling to go to the class which stands for the mood of duty and discipline. Here Narayan presents the way of life of middle-class in Malgudi with the presentation of children whose psychology and manners with which he is mostly acquainted.

The plot in Narayan’s novels has the quality of life and its flux. There is basic spontaneity in their progress and the rhythm of life is preferred. In ‘Swami and Friends’ Narayan portrays life external and internal, episodic and psychological. School and school boys constitute the whole charm. This particular age group of school boys is known as the peer group in terms of emotional interplay and conflict. The conflict between Mani and Rajam is for supremacy. Their impending encounter and the ultimate compromise by the side of the river, Swami’s big list of demands on the event of examination, the formation and the running of the M.C.C. club, the note to dealers of bats and balls are cheerful situations that spring from the day-today flow of life and they are delightful and aesthetic in their values.

Everything is smooth inside the class. Swaminathan becomes upset knowing that his friends Sankar, Somu and Samuel are not happy with him due to his close friendship with Rajam and call him a tail. One day in a mood of anger Swaminathan beats Samuel and Sankar and there is disorder in the class. Friends quarrel and scratch one another. The headmaster’s timely arrival restores peace again, which underlines a hint of Narayan’s recurrent theme ‘order-disorder and order.’
The contributors to the action in ‘Swami and Friends’ besides Swaminathan are Mani and Rajam. The ripples in the life of Swami are caused by the “external influence” that is Rajam. Mani hates Rajam so much that he is almost on the point of killing him and throwing his body in the river, Sarayu. The sacred river is the pride of Malgudi that does not allow enmity in the children. The controlling power Sarayu brings the pupils together as the intimate friends; Rajam extends a hand of friendship. Mani accepts it and they are reconciled easily reminding of Tolstoi’s story of children being wiser than their elders.

The people of Malgudi spend their leisure time on the sand banks. Friendships are made here; old contracts are renewed and business transactions are finalized. Malgudi provides the background of all activities that take place in his novels including his first ‘Swami and Friends.’ The construction of the design in Narayan’s novels is centred on the motivation of love and money. But ‘Swami and Friends’ and ‘Waiting for the Mahatma’ are free from cash-nexus. R.K. Narayan, while describing the routine activities of the school-boys is aware of the social segregation between the rich and the middle-class. The class-consciousness comes to the mind of Swaminathan in ‘Swami and Friends’ when he is decorating his study-room to receive Rajam, the son of Police Superintendent. Swaminathan’s request to his grand mother not to call him or to enter his room so long as Rajam stays with him shows that he feels inferior. Rajam for showing his position of authority asks Mani and Swaminathan: “Are you fellows, any of you, hungry.” (Narayan, 1935: 41) It is the tone of a boss to his subordinates but not the tone of a friend to friend. Rajam orders the cook loudly and the cook in return replies sharply and asks him to eat in the kitchen if he wants food. It is a shocking rejoinder to Rajam because he is outdone by his servant before his friends.

Swaminathan’s thrilling experience of breaking the ventilator makes his exit from Albert Mission School and joining the Board School. Initially, Swami feels the separation from his friends but Rajam’s request to join the M.C.C. makes him happy. Malgudi Cricket Club, one of the ingredients of Malgudi locale seems to be a source for Swami in establishing his contact with his old friends. Very soon, it throws him in another unavoidable trouble. Remaining absent from the drill and scouting Swami involves himself in practising bowling for the match. Consequently he is caned by the
Headmaster. In a great depression Swami snatches his cane and flies away from the classroom. Finding it difficult to face his parents, he has no other option except temporary escape. While returning home in the increasing darkness, Swami loses the road in the Mempi forest. The timely appearance of a forest officer saves his life.

The game of cricket in ‘Swami and Friends’ is an interlinking event in the structure of the concluding chapters. The little crises and funny entanglements, taking place in action are connected to MCC, have a striking influence on the life of Swaminathan. The momentous contributors, who enlighten the action in addition to Swami, the “key” bowler are Rajam the captain and Mani the batsman. The cyclical pattern, occurring again and again in Narayan’s plot structure is remarkable in its embryonic form in ‘Swami and Friends’. Rajam, the ‘external influence’ causes bubbles in the life of Swami and his return to Malgudi after his deviation from Malgudi points out the return of ‘normalcy.’ Analysing the character and interaction in Narayan’s ‘Swami and Friends’, it is remarked:

Swaminathan passes through stages which are by implication results of his contact with these boys. (Taranath, Rajeev, 1968: 863)

The parting of a friend is the most poignant episode in the book. Swami is not able to play the cricket match because in a moment of desperation he has lost his way. It creates anger in Rajam and he refuses to see Swami’s face. Hearing Rajam’s father is transferred Swaminathan feels shattered. At the railway station, Swami loses his control and cries ‘Oh Rajam, Rajam you are going away. When will you come back?’ (Narayan, 1935: 178) Narayan attempts to show that children in Malgudi are innocent and they do not present symptom of revenge.

The action in ‘Swami and Friends’ is not confined merely to “the boy’s world” but it is also equally concerned with ‘domestic world’ of Swami. The action moves from the home to the school and from the school to the playground. Later the scope of novel is further widened by bringing in the Indian struggle for independence, and showing its impact on Malgudi, particularly on the “boy’s world.” The title ‘Swami and Friends’ itself indicates that the plot turns round the protagonist Swaminathan, his chums and their activities, his parents and in particular his granny and provides the ‘adult’
interest. Misadventures of the innocent school boys contribute to the unity in holding together the plot. Therefore, one has to remark that the characters and incidents act and react and the plot revolves as a logical sequence.

The myth forms the inner structure of the novel or acts. Granny who has faith in the truths of life learns about Rajam’s bravery from Swaminathan and relates the story of Harishchandra who lost throne, wife and child for truth. Swaminathan is fascinated by the story of the coach man that he can easily turn twelve paise into six rupees. When Swaminathan fails to receive money he puts a couple of pebbles in a cardboard and keeps the box in the puja room. Closing his eyes Swaminathan remembers that Rama had slain the ten heads of Ravana. Therefore, it should not be difficult for Rama to grant Swami two three-pie coins. Narayan makes use of mythical reference to explain an immediate situation.

Narayan’s characters move within the municipal limits of Malgudi, neither a village, nor a city but a town of modest size. Malgudi in ‘Swami and Friends’ is Malgudi of the thirties, with the known landmarks, Nallappa Grove, the Lawley Extension, Kabir Road, the Albert Mission School’, the spreading tamarind trees, the Sarayu River and Mempi Hills. All these landmarks instead of remaining static flourish in importance in this and the other succeeding novels.

One cannot ignore influence of the political disturbances on Malgudi, which disturbed the peace of the place of the thirties. The “Broken Panes” is symbolic of a strike in the school. The intention of Swaminathan and his friends attending a public meeting is to protest against arrest of Gauri Sankar, a prominent political worker of Bombay. Hearing the ‘plight of Indian peasant’s ‘boycott of English goods’, Swaminathan makes an earnest request to wear home spun ‘Khaddar’. He also shouting ‘Gandhiji ki Jai’ and ‘Bharat Mata Ki Jai’ with the rest of the people.

The youngsters who collected in street corners and echoed the high-sounding words of their elders, most of whom could not have been any more effective than the school boys who employed nationalistic postures to no purpose. It is these that brought forth Narayan’s comic gestures in fiction. (Narashimhaiah, 1968:138)
The hero, Swaminathan in ‘Swami and Friends’ and Raju in ‘The Guide’, are seen making their ways in the English ruled atmosphere of Malgudi. Teachers in the Albert Mission School are all the time busy in insulting Hindu Gods:

The scripture classes were mostly devoted to attacking and lampooning Hindu Gods, and violent abuses were heaped on idol Worshipper as a prelude to glorifying Jesus. (Narayan, 1986:12)

Narayan demonstrates his emotional involment with the Indian struggle for Independence and his attitude towards it. (Garg, 1993:10) A lively spirit encourages people to rise against the British rulers, who were trying to remain in India and the great leader begins Khilafat Movement, (1920) Civil Disobedience Movement (1921) and (1930) Quit India Movement (1942) to push them out of the country. Swaminathan and his friends took participation in the main stream of the movement, who walked out of their classes, broke window panes, took out processions, raised slogans and burnt their clothes made up in the foreign factories.

2.3.2 The Bachelor of Arts
The structure of ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ is an episodic one because its actions and events are put together in three stages. They are Chandran’s encounter with Malathi on the bank of the river Sarayu and his decision to marry her, his wandering as a Sanyasi, and Chandran’s returning to to the parental house and his marriage with Susila. The plot of the novel has the beginning, the middle and the end and actions and events are interlinked with each other. With a very little digression, Narayan narrates the story of Chandran, a young man going out of Malgudi, for a short time because of heart break, who finally returns to Malgudi and begins his normal life with Susila after their arranged marriage. The complex structure of social and religious customs and traditions governs and controls the course of structural engineering of the plot of the novel.

The plot in Narayan’s novels has the quality of life and spontaneity in its progress. The characters in the novel are figured on the river of life itself and instead of making them solid Narayan make their life interesting in its flow from day to day experience.
The incidents are recognized as thematic repetitions. The love at first sight and internal monologues are the set pattern of ‘The Bachelor of Arts’, ‘Waiting for the Mahatma’ and ‘The Painter of Signs’. Chandran’s conservative and horoscope minded parents, Kailas, the drinker but sentimentally attached to his mother, Natesan, the union secretary who bribes his way to office with coffee and tiffin, Gajapathi, the Professor of English who corrects Fowler and Bradley, the holy-thief stealing flowers for worship and Mohan, and a poet who is inspired by anything—all these contribute to the progress of narration.

A detailed description and vivid picturization of Chandran’s college life is the basic source of the narrative. ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ is the story of a young Indian in his last year at college and first year of freedom” says Graham Greene and rightly admires Narayan’s objectivity of vision and art. This complete objectivity, this complete freedom from comment, is the boldest gamble a novelist can take.’ (Badal, R.K. 25) The Indian middle-class life is not free from corruption. Chandran bribes the peon to get to see the college principal. The novelist criticizes socio-political reality by stating that the elections in India are losing their democratic values. Natesan, the student’s union secretary wins the election by purchasing every vote with coffee and tiffin.

Narayan takes the risk and turns out well that even E.M. Forster finds the novel “charming, unusual and amusing.” (Sharan, 1993:11) A simple story of ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ moves around the placid life of a Hindu household in South India. Narayan’s novels are known for peculiarity of economy. The novelist presents single character in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ and in ‘The English Teacher’ that shapes important part of the novel. A single character, Chandran is presented by the novelist around whom the the story of the novel moves.

The hero, Chandran, the son of Venkatachala Iyer, steals a glance of Malathi and falls in love with her on the bank of the river Sarayu. Ignoring the traditional norms of the Malgudian society he wishes to set an example by marrying this girl without considering caste or religion. Chandran’s parents could not tolerate for a long time the sight of unhappy Chandran and they have agreed to consider the proposal if it comes from the bride’s side. They refuse to take initiative because it is against the norms of
the society in Malgudi. According to the age-long tradition it is the bride’s people who propose first. They do not want to behave against the norms of the society and become an object of ridicule in the community. Chandran’s father Venkatachala Iyer is the Hindu father and his mother is like all Hindu mothers intends on marrying her son to the most desirable young girl with the best dowry. Unfortunately the horoscope does not allow their marriage describing him “as a manglik, a condition in which a manglik can only marry another manglik and if not, the non manglik will die.” (Panda, 2010:87) Narayan focuses on Indian society’s orthodox belief in astrology. It also shows that free choice of emotional relationship is decided and shaped by faith and astrology. Chandran is not allowed to marry a girl of his choice by denying social codes. He can only marry the girl he is destined to marry. The romantic escapist, Chandran who has little experience of life, refuses to compromise with sociological and environmental compulsions of life. Malathi’s marriage to her cousin makes Chandran to say indignantly:

A marriage would not be tolerated even among sub-castes of the same castes. If India was to attain salvation these water tight divisions must go community, caste, sects, sub-sects, and still further divisions. (Narayan, 1937: 55 - 56)

Hurling himself into the slough of despair Chandran moves into different parts of South India to seek escape from the stirring memory of Malathi. The motivational aspects of love and money are seen in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’. Singing a song of Mammon the poet Mohan tells Chandran importance of money in the life. According to him the parents bother more about the money than any other things. “If you give them money, they will leave you alone”. (Narayan, 1937: 13) The flower-thief episode and the Kailas episode are independent of the main plot and they have their own share in the development of the plot.

Chandran’s disillusionment has pushed him in another situation i.e. ascetic sanyas in Madras. The person Kailas with whom Chandran confronts is amusing. Kailas who spends most of the life time for wine and prostitution thinks that the mother is sacred and her memory makes him an angel of piety which reflects his professing pious devotion to mother. He is addicted to prostitution like Vasu, a taxidermist of ‘The
Man-Eater of Malgudi.’ The unsettling encounter with the lecherous Kailas is renunciation through mortification and it gives a new twist to Chandran’s course of life. Chandran with Kailas visits a brothel. As soon as the flash of understanding comes to his mind he escapes the evil situation.

The flower thief episode looks furtively into the domestic life of Chandran which consists of the characters Chandran’s parents, Chandran and younger brother Seenu. The complete ‘suspense’ of this episode ends in anti-climax when it is understood that the thief has been taking away the flowers not for personal use but performing puja. The thief is honoured and he goes out. The novelist shows attitude of Indian people towards the gods and goddesses. The act of the thief stealing flowers demands punishment but the intention of the thief behind it is spiritual. Consequently he is released from conviction.

The main motivational drive in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ is love at first sight. The magnificent grey spire of Kapaleeswarar temple attracts him and he turns into a Sanyasi in search of peace. Chandran cannot be called true Sanyasi because he never goes beyond the orbit of social norms. The notion of Sanyasi pleases him to mortify his flesh Chandran’s renunciation is a revenge on society and fate. The disapproval of Chandran’s marriage proposal under pressure of social conventions caused frustration in his life and he becomes Sanyasi. A world of adolescence of love in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ is experimenting with ‘Sanyas’ (ascetism) and finally Chandran settles down by accepting matrimonial compromise as the fact of life.

The home-coming of Chandran and his acceptance forms the concluding part of the novel. Finding no alternative he decides to make a compromise in life. The aimless wandering of Sanyasi (ascetic) ends as suddenly as it had begun. It suggests Narayan’s skill of circular structure. Realizing his mistake Chandran returns to Malgudi and settles down in routine life with his wife Susila. Chandran’s return to Malgudi and his rehabilitation as a lover of life mark the victory over the pathetic in real life. He gets the agency of a newspaper ‘The Daily Messenger of Madras’ with the help of his resourceful uncle. He has to confront traditionalism of his parents. This cyclic pattern of the story telling evolves into Narayan’s recurrent mode of
construction and narration through the cycle of order-disorder, and return to the order. This spring winter spring pattern is peculiar to the classics of Indian literature.

2.3.3 The Dark Room
The plot of ‘The Dark Room’ underlines a remarkable development of technical skill in Narayan. Using a compact and tightened structure the novelist displays an architectonic quality in the present novel. The plot of ‘The Dark Room’ has a well-structured plot construction with a clearly defined framework. The story of the novel underlines the theme which is realistic. The novel shows Narayan’s portrayal of middle-class life in Malgudi.

The plot progresses from a typical middle class family situation- an obedient and humble wife and a conservative and faithless husband. Savitri a housewife, replica of stoicism and Ramani, unfeeling and adulterous husband make up the two poles of the ill matched conjugal family. The domestic disharmony is caused by the intrusion of enticing Shanta Bai. The present situation is not uncommon in the domestic life in India. The various incidents in ‘The Dark Room’ are organised to help the treatment to the central theme. There are a number of incidents which one feels insignificant but their role in domestic life is very important.

It creates the sense of tragedy and invites sympathy of the readers which has similarity with Rama Mehta’s ‘Inside the Haveli’, a novel of an Indian household in which a house wife Geeta struggles against the orthodoxy and tradition but finally she adjusts herself with the ways and the norms of the family. R.K.Narayan introduces fictional record of devotional wife, Savitri in ‘The Dark Room’. The relationship between Ramani, Savitri and Shanta Bai is dramatized by the novelist. Savitri symbolically stands for traditional wife and Shanta Bai, a modern woman who urges for financial freedom. One of the elements of artistic work, ‘poetic justice’ is invisible in the novel ‘The Dark Room’ which helps in getting perfection.

Through a series of events Narayan develops the theme of domestic disharmony. The episode of Navaratri festival effectively vivifies the progress of the plot and emphasizes the main theme of the novel. Ramani, a dominating husband governs his house according to his own wish whose irritative nature destroys peace and harmony.
of the house. The vulgarity of his nature is witnessed in his stupid and hard hearted manner at home and his beast-like attitude is comprehended by the novelist on the occasion of the Navaratri festival. His son Babu’s plan of throwing light on the doll-display results in electric failure and it results on the heartless beating by father, Ramani. The episode presents a typical Indian father who behaves irrationally with his children. Without giving intimation in advance he brings guests and expects them to be fed. It indicates his careless nature about domestic activities. The novelist invites reader’s attention on the feelings and emotions of both husband and wife in the society of Malgudi.

Life is moving on smoothly, pleasant and happy with occasional commotion and anger. But arrival of Shanta Bai disturbs the peace in the house of Ramani and Savitri. Shanta Bai, the office probationer provides the extramarital triangle. In fifteen years of married life Savitri has received her husband’s anger and nothing else. Due to Ramani’s infatuation with Shanta Bai the clouds of disharmony float over the roof of Savitri who patiently waits for the arrival of her husband late at night. She dresses herself beautifully and waits for her husband’s arrival with dreams of romantic wedlocked life in the mind. Being tired of ceaseless waiting Savitri rests her head soothingly on the pillow thinking that they may be in tact. Narayan underlines Savitri’s dream:

That her husband came home held her in his arms and swore that he had been carrying about only a coloured parasol and silly people said that he had been going about with a woman. (Narayan, 1938:94)

The plot moves at a quickened speed after her entry and the climatic point is reached with the attempted suicide of Savitri. Unable to find any solution for bringing change in Ramani’s arrogant behaviour and egoistic attitude, Savitri leaves the house to commit suicide. One realizes that Savitri leaves her house, husband and children to understand the bitter truth that a traditional Hindu wife of her class is completely helpless. The novelist underlines melancholic tone and depression in the theme through comic creation. The tragi-comic element of fiction is brought into relief by artistic skill of the novelist.
The plot accommodates Mari-Ponni-Savitri episode which relieves the tension by providing cheerful moments. It also strengthens sharpness of Savitri’s situation by contrasting it with the situation of the loving couple of Mari and Ponni. Mari, the burglar appears at a point where the intensity of Savitri’s agony is moving to her suicide by drowning. The spirit of humanism is projected in his attempt of rehabilitating Savitri. Though poor, tough Mari the burglar and his wife belong to the low strata of the Indian society, the couple of Mari and Ponni possess what the couple - Savitri and Ramani - lack due to the high-handedness of the husband.

Giving stress on social situation, Narayan tries to show that caste distinction, an evil of the society is coming to an end. Mari’s wife, Ponni promises Savitri about her safety during her stay in her house because Savitri belongs to the Brahmin community. She also assures that she will clean the house and prevent herself from entering there. Ponni has decided to buy a new pot and rice so that Savitri can cook her own food. Ponni says “I will never cook anything in our house which may be repulsive to you. Please come with me.” (Narayan, 1938:120) R.K.Narayan intends to give a realistic touch to the novel by giving such a type of description.

Ponni’s obligation enables Savitri to follow her to their village where Savitri tries to establish her own identity of an independent living by working in a temple. Her intolerable anxiety for her children makes her uneasy and Savitri returns home. The unavoidable tragic situation of Savitri ends in her return to her home. Savitri makes an unsuccessful attempt to run away and live a life of her own but for a while and her going back establishes full circle where the novel had begun. The total pattern of a novel by Narayan is order-disorder-order. This can be easily discerned in ‘The Dark Room’. A comment of the pattern of plot-construction of the novel is:

There is little understanding between husband and wife, but life goes on. The wife makes an unsuccessful attempt to run away and live a life of her own, but ultimately she comes back full circle to where the novel had begun. (Mukherjee, 1971: 155)

The novel, ‘The Dark Room’ is written in the Shakespearean double plot technique – main plot consisting of Ramani and Savitri, and another sub-plot consisting Mari and
Ponni. The rustic couple, Mari and Ponni constitutes sub-plot of the novel. Narayan witnesses frank picture of marriage in which wife wields the power the pant in the house. Ponni’s philosophy of husband management is that the girls take the charge of their husbands the moment they are married. Mari who loves his wife Ponni behaves badly by throwing things at her when he is drunk. By portraying the minor characters Mari and Ponni Narayan presents their loving and friendly attitude towards each other. Narayan contrasts the attitude of low-born and socially discarded Mari-Ponni with the heartless upper middle class. It is neither an Indian ‘Doll’s House’ nor a copy of ‘Patient Crissil’ but it is a study of an Indian attitude to family life nor the traditional glory attached to this happy concept of living.

2.3.4 The English Teacher

R.K. Narayan observes economy of substance in ‘The English Teacher’, the last novel of the first phase of his career. The stem of the novel is the personal experience of the novelist, R.K. Narayan himself. It is underlined that the novel is a story of a single character because the moorings and psychic experiences of a lonely person constitute the centre of the plot. The mode, Narayan uses in the present novel is narrational but the narrator is the central character Krishnan the English teacher and not the novelist. This sentimental technique is unusual in its strangeness of presentation in the fictional universe. The autobiographical method stretches the reader’s receptivity to the extreme as it deals with the para psychological incidents, involving Rajam his dead wife like calling the spirit on the planchet. The central character, Krishnan gives harmony, consistency and intensity to the whole information.

The plot of ‘The English Teacher’ is divided into three parts-the life led by Krishnan before his wife joins him-the life led by him in the company of his wife Susila and child Leela and Krishnan’s life after his wife’s death. Krishnan’s effort for establishing his contact with the soul of his dead wife proves to be interest of para-psychology.

Using linear plot structure Narayan divides the plot into two parts. The first half has distinctive smoothness of structure which focuses on the domestic harmony in the Hindu Household of Malgudi village. One witnesses a picture of a loving husband and careful father in the character of Krishnan. The initial chapters describe Krishnan’s
life as a college lecturer and a young affectionate husband living happily with his wife, Susila and his daughter, Leela. The mechanical routine life of Krishnan introduced in Malgudi is like any college teacher anywhere in India. After lecturing on Milton and Shakespeare in the Albert Mission College he returns to hostel room, chats with his colleagues, and indulges in discussion with other lecturers on points of common interest. All this indicates Krishnan’s independent life in the hostel. It is an amusing and realistic picture of the academic life of Krishnan in a college.

The arrival of his wife and child to Malgudi brings an agreeable change in the life of Krishnan. The event of warm welcome given to Susila by her mother-in-law when she comes home from the Railway station underlines a typical way of receiving an Indian bride in southern India. Susila and Leela’s waiting for Krishnan at evening, their enjoying the flavour of coffee and discussion of college affairs and their neighbours are the parts of routine life. Susila and Krishnan lead happy and balanced life for several months as other Malgudians enjoy freely.

The fate in which Indian people have strong faith is unkind to this happy couple. In search of a suitable house Susila contacts typhoid in an infected lavatory and dies of illness caused by typhoid. Krishnan’s mother-in-law is superstitious by nature who believes that an evil eye has fallen on her daughter. According to her the new house must have a virulent spirit. The universal tendency of human beings everywhere either in the rural part or urban region is that if a family member dies in a year of accommodation of a new house it is labeled as haunted house by the evil spirit.

Narayan uses myth as a part of the structural pattern. When Susila feels well, they leave the Extension area for their residence and while passing into the main road Susila wishes to see the god in a new temple of Srinivasa. She views that if one visits the Srinivasa temple one does not need to visit Thirupathy Hills. Susila makes offerings to the god because she knows that all efforts are blessed by him. The first climatic point is reached with Susila’s sickness caused by her strong revulsion for a little fly in a stinking latrine. However, normalcy is disturbed when Susila dies leaving her husband distracted and heart broken. The scene is dominated extremely by the autobiographical elements and it is poignant emotionally.
‘The English Teacher’ undertakes a quick and unexpected turn after the death of Susila. The introduction of mystery strikes a remarkable but rather an unbelievable note. For its truth Narayan says “The concluding chapters of the book were concerned with the psychic experiments, and the English critics lashed out at them. “Of Course”, Narayan said, “the reviewers did not realize that the whole story was autobiographical- that I myself had been a witness to the experiments”. The shaping of the two parts is based on the personal experiences in the novelist’s life after the death of his wife, Rajam.

The first part is a love story while the second half functions as a mode of resolution of protagonist’s tragic dilemma. The second half of ‘The English Teacher’ is different in its unity of action from the compact integrity of the first half which it is related to the personal happy life but just as a brief interlude. The plot of ‘The English Teacher’ shows a kind of short-cut to resolution. A profound spiritual odyssey is presented through personal experiences of the protagonist personifying the novelist himself.

A strange episode takes place in Krishnan’s life that he comes in contact with a man who is able to establish contact with soul of the dead person. He is successful in psychic communication with Susila. Attempts of psychic contact with the soul of the dead person through the planchet are common things in India which are also matter of belief. With the help of a stranger Krishnan is able to establish communication with the spirit of his dead wife. After attending his send-off party in the college Krishnan returns home with garland. His mind is full of sad feelings because there is no Susila to receive jasmine garland. Going to his room, Krishnan cries loudly “My wife…my wife, my wife….” (Narayan, 1946: 212) Krishnan’s wife appears by his side who has worn jasmine. Krishnan is able to bring his wife from the heaven on the earth on the basis of platonic love. Susila is reborn, spiritually resurrected, to be with him for ever. Normalcy is restored with Krishnan psychologically rejuvenated and in a position to lead normal life which recalls Lord Rama, “ideal king in Hindu mythology who remains attached to Sita even after her exile.” (Tyagi, 2011:219-220)

Narayan’s readers do feel very difficult to believe in the psychic communication of Krishnan with the spirit of his wife, Susila. The novelist in his autobiography ‘My Days’ Narayan makes it clear that the event is true. Krishnan is a character in the
fiction ‘The English Teacher’. Narayan says, “He goes through the same experience I had gone through and he calls his wife Susila and the child is Leela instead of Hema.”(Narayan, 1975:135)

Narayan has used a structural device chance ‘entrance in ‘The English Teacher’ The life of stable peace is destroyed by chance ‘entrance’ of Susila into dirty latrine infected with flies. The wife Susila dies and Krishnan begins his mystic experiment with the spirit for a reunion. Thus the chance ‘entrance into the latrine and her death becomes different dimension of being so as to bring this world and it its different dimension such as the physical, the metaphysical the material and the spiritual to intersect at a point.

The two episodes in ‘The English Teacher’, structured around minor characters- the schoolmaster and the planchet writer are dexterously integrated with the main plot. The preceding episode is especially effective as it seems to be an extension of the main theme- a search for purpose and happiness in life.R.K.Narayan has contrasted Krishnan’s family of domestic harmony with headmaster’s house of disharmony. Even after his wife’s death Krishnan in order to establish direct contact with his wife gives resignation from his college service and decides to join headmaster’s Leave Alone School. The headmaster is compelled to lead a miserable life because of quarrelsome disposition of his wife. In a fit of sadness he leaves his family and house and begins to work for the cause of children’s education. Leela’s Headmaster, who plays a tragic-comic role in ‘The English Teacher’, is a man with unconventional and original views on education. He is not successful in regard to his own children’s education. He tells that his school is open for all the students in the world and not for his own children because of his nagging and cantankerous wife. The strange story of this strange man comes to a strange end and all the tensions dissolves in a smooth anti climax. The story of the Headmaster forms a sub-plot in the second half of the novel and acquaints the reader to an unusual world. The tragi-comic texture of the story has an undertone of irony. Krishnan tries to seek the peace of mind and happiness in the life by continuing spiritual union with the soul of Susila. The headmaster feels insulted and tired in the company of his wife. The event of death prophecy given by a wandering sadhu underlines headmaster’s superstitious attitude towards life. A vagrant sadhu has detailed the event of headmaster’s life including his death. When he
escapes from the death the headmaster leaves the house for the cause of children’s education and his wife changes her behaviour department to suit the new situation. The headmaster, one underlines is not interested in the life after death as Krishnan is.

The structure of the novel is autobiographical because similarity between the character of Krishnan and the novelist, R.K. Narayan. The description of events Krishnan’s married life, the first few years of happiness, the suffering during Susila’s illness, the journey to the cremation ground, resembles Narayan’s individual life. Krishnan’s misery and anxiety to be both father and mother of Leela and his psychic communication with Susila also has resemblance to Narayan’s life as a widower. All these events are shaped and governed by the spirit of the place which is Malgudi, the setting of the novel ‘The English Teacher’.

2.4 THEMES

A brief look at the panorama of R.K. Narayan’s fiction through its decades of growth gives a range of vision of certain conspicuous and recurrent themes. The Indian social scene has always an exhaustible abundance of themes to offer. Everyday happenings of the society are reflected in literature. According to Narayan society is at the root of human behaviour. Hence the genius of Narayan is remarkable for his presentation of social sense in human relationships. Human thoughts and actions are controlled by society.

R. K. Narayan’s society in Malgudi is free from undue favour and is prominent to offer philosophy or thought. Human relationships in Narayan both in family and outside family are studied on sociological, political and economic levels. Every individual being is influenced by social, economic and political norms and traditions and their effects on people are seen by the readers. Chandran in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ is ruled by middle-class family norms. Srinivas is haunted by earning bread and butter, Mr. Sampath’s mind throughout life moves around the thought of making money. R. K. Narayan presents human relationships within the municipal limits of Malgudi which is considered as the real force behind it. Narayan’s characters live together to form a unique society and they may be called typically Indian despite their strangeness.
Narayan focuses attention on the formative role of the mother in relation to her children which indicates the theme of mother-son relationship. Mothers, particularly in India stand for selflessness and are ready to sacrifice their lives for the betterment of their children. Materialism and commercialism, the elemental sources of development do not affect mother-son relationship. Even money and power do not exercise their dehumanizing effect on this type of relationship. The spiritual act of mother worship has been continued in India even though material culture and commercial one arrived in India. The superiotity of mother is highlighted by worship of Kali, Durga Sarswati and Lakshmi. The mother-son relationship is presented by R. K. Narayan in the novels ‘Swami and Friends’, ‘The Dark Room’, ‘Waiting for the Mahatma’, ‘The Financial Expert’ and ‘The Guide’. The family as the basic unit of the social structure comes in for a multidimensional literary handling R.K. Narayan’s novels. The joint family system and its disintegration on account of social changes is a prominent theme in his fiction.

Because of male dominance in the Indian society the father’s role in shaping children’s life is as important as the mother. Narayan portrays father-son relationship in ‘Swami and Friends’ and ‘The Bachelor of Arts’, ‘The Financial Expert’ and ‘The Vendor of Sweets’. The talk offers an opportunity to the fathers to establish communication with their children which helps children to develop positive attitude towards life. Narayan presents boys who obey certain conventions.

The relationship between husband and wife in Indian tradition and culture is presented in a noble way. The relationship between Rama and Sita, Krishna and Rukmini, Harishchandra and Taraamati, Satyavan and Savitri presented in Indian myths and legends is influenced by religion. Economic independence is not given importance in husband-wife relationship in India. Narayan presents husband-wife relationship in ‘The Dark Room’, ‘The English Teacher’ and ‘The Guide’. There are many instances of lover-beloved relationship in Indian myths and legends. The instances are: Dushayanta and Shankuntala, Yusuf and Habbakhatun, Heer and Ranjha, Sohini and Mahiwal. In Indian society lover-beloved relationship is found in a large number. The orthodox and traditional society does not give moral, ethical and social support to it. Religious and moral outlook thinks that it is illicit relationship. Being a social critic

The theme which has mostly projected his world of values is one of juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. It develops into the central comic theme of deviation from the normal in his novels. Narayan’s world of value is what Meenakshi Mukherjee calls “East-West Encounter.” The conflicts and intersections between the two cultures and ways of life-oriental and occidental have never ceased to interest the Indian mind.

R.K. Narayan dwells on the theme in most of his novels.

The national struggle for freedom has been a theme with a great appeal from the very beginning. ‘Waiting for the Mahatma’ which appeared in 1955 has a distinctive setting and theme. It is generally considered as a Gandhian novel in the genre of Raja Rao’s ‘Kantapura’ and Mulk Raj Aanand’s ‘Untouchable’ but it appeared almost twenty years later than these two. It is Gandhian novel. Technically, Sriram is the hero of the novel and the plot revolves round him; the most dominant figure, even though he is seldom on the stage of this novel the Mahatma.

One may underline reflection of Indian life in novels which deal with the theme of faith and spirituality with its cult of Guruworship. Its most excellent and through artistic use is to be found in the novels of R.K. Narayan’s ‘The Guide’, G.V. Desani’s ‘All about Mr. Hatter’ and Bhabani Bhattacharya’s ‘He Who Rides a Tiger.’ They tend to show the power of faith as well as its fraud.

A study of protagonists in the Malgudi novels of Narayan reveals that rebellion is realized more as a deviation from the traditional codes than as defiance. Illusion versus reality constitutes a major theme in Narayan’s technique to repeat his philosophy of acceptance and quietism presented through the device of ‘rite de
passage’. It is noted that the myths play a major role in making the rebels withdraw from the deviation and accept sane normalcy in life. (Dnyate, 1996:11) It is possible to underline spiritual growth thorough the reiterative theme of almost all the Malgudi novels: the return of the native. Narayan uses strategy of ‘rite de passage’ to suggest the growth of the protagonist; and it also shows development of Narayan’s flat characters. The French novelist Albert Camus in his book ‘The Rebel’ emphatically reflects on rebellion:

The problem of rebellion only seems to assume a precise meaning within the confines of Western thought….In fact for the Inca and (Hindu) pariah the problem of revolt never arises, because it has been solved by tradition before they had time to raise it – the answer being that tradition is Sacrosanct.” (Camus, 1951: 25 - 26)

Rebellion as such is part of human consciousness and it has its roots in the story of “Man’s first Disobedience” Satan in the appearance of the talking serpent seemed to have instilled the essence of rebellion into Eve’s consciousness. The temptation for the forbidden fruit has a universal appeal. It emphasizes the natural tendency of breaking the code and disobeying the commandment. The concept of rebellion seems to be paradoxical and tends to be irrelevant in the context of the setting of Narayan’s novels. The characters of Narayan have karma consciousness and hold the tradition. According to Albert Camus, the Indians cannot rebel because the answers to revolt are ready in their myths and as such India is a land of myths and legends and Malgudi is no exception with the abundance of local myths and legends from the days of Lord Rama, Gautam, the Budha, Adishankara and others.

2.4.1 Swami and Friends

‘Swami and Friends’ is the picturization of South India before independence in which Narayan shows Swaminathan and his experience in Malgudi town in a world of adults-parents and teachers and a world of innocent-Swami’s friends. The different themes like theme of relationship and rebellion move around these characters. Narayan’s fiction underlines micro-cosmic India which is caught in the tradition. He observes society and presents realistic picture of Malgudi.
The theme of relationship between Swami and his mother is very noble. Swaminathan does not feel comfortable in her absence. She shows deep affection and love for her son. “Swaminathan missed her very much in the kitchen and felt uncomfortable without her attention”. (Narayan, 1935:117) Like traditional Indian mother, Swaminathan’s mother is conscious and careful about him. Consequently, he finds more happiness in his mother’s company than his father’s. When Swaminathan suffers from fever she does not allow him to go to school. She does not prop up Swaminathan’s evil deeds. Being attentive mother she hates Swaminathan’s aimless travel in the scorching heat of the sun and always enquires about the place when he is about to leave his house. Swami’s mother is seen pathetic and miserable when he disappears from his house.

Swaminathan’s father is a typical Indian father who takes care of his son’s betterment and sees his own future in his son’s future. One may underline a simple kind of relationship between Swaminathan and his father. Cautious and disciplined father always thinks of Swaminathan’s privacy and individuality. He desires him to be in the house which prevents Swaminathan from playing cricket. It shows his strict and harsh attitude towards his son. The emotional intimacy is reflected in the scene in which father’s condition becomes very pathetic. When Swami fails to return home in time “He was going to cross the street and gaze into Sarayu-for the body of his son. His son, Swaminathan to be looked for in Sarayu.” (Narayan, 1935:151) Swami attempts to observe the age-old beliefs in the company of his parents and traditional values and does not challenge them.

Narayan’s child protagonist Swami in ‘Swami and Friends’ is imagined as the innocent and harmless rebel. His rebellion in its entirety is taken as a deviation from the accepted norms of Malgudi. Swaminathan the first typical rebel appears to be establishing the rebels in the later novels of R.K. Narayan. He is an ordinary average school boy from the middle-class family who strongly desires to act as a rebel. The novelist focuses on the psychology of the middle-class boy that he always urges to reach his decided goal. According to him they determine in their day to day activities in the home and out of it either in isolation or in a group of their age.
There are numerous instances of rebellious influences on Swami shown by R.K.Narayan. Mani is considered as Swaminathan’s alter-ego who has left his permanent influence and effect on Swami. He seems to be summarizing and oozing rebellious inclinations. Swaminathan, touchy and influential begins to hero-worship Mani and supports heroic acts. Swami’s rebellious deeds and thrust stirs up as Rajam, the most influential and magnificent son of the police super-intendent comes to Malgudi.

Narayan’s conception and attitude to education are elements of social vision of Malgudi. Education has remarkable place in the structure of his novels and thematic design. R. K. Narayan focuses on oddity and eccentricity of education in ‘Swami and Friends’. Narayan comments that what teachers teach in classes is false consciousness of education. Narayan stresses on an education system which is liberated from routine life and that at present the system is nothing but an intellectual slavery. Hence some examples are to be noted to show Swami’s rebellious deeds. Swaminathan joins his comrades on the day of strike and denies attending the class even though the headmaster requests them to return to the classes. Swaminathan performs on this scene his first defiance. He shouts loudly on seeing square glasses of ventilator in the Head master’s room in good condition. “He sent up a stone at it and waited with cocked up ears for the splintering noise, as the piece crashed on the floor.” (Narayan, 1935:28) It is a thrilling experience for Swami. Swami’s act of breaking window panes shows influence of mob psychology on him.

The second act of rebellion is taken as the result of the first. In order to teach lesson to Swami, for his impish behaviour, the headmaster in a fit of anger gives him six sharp blows of cane and orders him to stand on his bench. Swaminathan acts quickly. Taking his books Swaminathan jumps down and runs out murmuring ‘I don’t care for your dirty school’. (Narayan, 1935:106) The third act of Swami’s rebellion is strongly noticeable. Receiving severe punishment for bunking drill practice Swaminathan becomes vigilant. He does not understand what he is doing. In a grip of anger Swami plucks the cane from the head master’s arm and throws it out of the window.

The rebel, Swaminathan taking wrong turn enters into the ‘Mempi forest’ at some distance from Malgudi and goes through unpleasant journey and the hallucinations.
He is taken back home by the forest officer. Narayan seems to have increased importance to the spirit of rebellion. The journey of Swami underlines the writer’s strategy as ‘rite de passage.’ Considered in its sense of “the passage of educating experience, normally by change of place” (Ramanujan, 1978:142), the ‘rite de passage’ proposes a distant view to Swami’s rebellion.

Swaminathan’s rebellion may be taken as the writer’s skill to present the world of Swami’s illusion. Swaminathan appears to be deceived by enticing influences of Mani and Rajam. In their company he becomes reckless to the reality of his self and he is pushed off in the world of illusion. The experience in the Mempi forest makes Swaminathan to apprehend the reality about himself and at last leads him to the normal state of mind. It is obvious that the ‘rite de passage’ indicates development in the character of Swami.

It is realized that Swaminathan has grown by taking illusion for reality. The development of Swami is underlined in his return to the ordinary and normal state of existence. The theme of illusion versus reality is emphasized by Narayan’s technique of rebellion. His notion of rebellion may be considered as the protagonist’s deviation from the reality to the unpleasant world of illusion. The artistic handling of rebellion is understood through the cyclic pattern of Swami’s development. One may underline the theme of the return of the native and effect of the tradition as the defending spirit.

2.4.2 The Bachelor of Arts

The theme of relationship in terms of mother-son, lover-beloved, and father-son is underlined in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’. Chandran’s mother wants to save her son from English way of life which indicates motherhood of Indian woman. She is reluctant to send her son to England for further study where students learn smoking, drinking and dancing with white girls. Fascinated by Malathi’s simplicity and innocence Chandran falls in love with her. This is the beginning of their lover-beloved relationship. He has no courage to ask the name of his beloved as he fears that someone will see them. It underlines that Malgudi does not allow Chandran to communicate with Malathi before marriage. When Chandran decides to marry Malathi without consulting astrologer, his emotions have not been appreciated by the norms and tradition of Malgudi.
When Chandran decides to marry Malathi his father does not want to go to the bride’s house first. It is because he has to obey Malgudi tradition, and social values. For the betterment of his son’s future and emotional life he is ready to responded the proposal of marriage if it comes from the bride’s side. Understanding emotions and feelings of each other is the basic thought in Indian Hindu family system. Chandran and his father in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ respect each other. Chandran’s father wants to maintain and respect rules of the society and his son’s choice of marriage. He is ready to go against the age-old traditions and customs of the Malgudi society for the emotional involvement of his son. It shows that the Indian fathers give due attention in their son’s individual life by considering their sons as their future life. He allows his son to marry Malathiri but the horoscopes do not match. Chandran and his father do not behave beyond the traditional values of Malgudi. Chandran’s rejection of marriage system at the initial stage shows his revolt against the age-old traditions and customs. Yet he does not dare to object the authoritative attitude of his father. Chandran’s return to Malugdi from Madras indicates Narayan’s inherent theme: return of the native.

‘The Bachelor of Arts’ underlines the novelist’s skill of presenting rebellion to as the basic theme of illusion versus reality. Chandran, the protagonist seems to be the better and developed version of Swami as a rebel who is understood more as a deviant and less as a defier. He appears as a rebel fundamentally through his love for Malathi, a beautiful girl. He is very much overpowered by the haunted thought of love but he can not express his desire to the elders because being traditional dwellers of Malgudi they have strong faith in astrology and the system of marriage. Ignoring, the traditional norms of society, Chandran’s assertion of marrying an alien gives a severe blow to the parents. Infatuation of Chandran for Malathi leads him to creep in fantasy: “Could he not just dash into her house hold, hide in the passage, steal up to her bed at night, crush her in arms and carry her away?” (Narayan, 1937:71)

The hero, Chandran’s second rebellion pursues the first. The mismatch of horoscope results in giving up the idea of marriage. Disappointed and grieved by the unsuccessful outcome of his love with Malathi, Chandran realized his inability to fight against Malgudi norms. He then determines to leave Malgudi for Madras. His
departure in a sad mood to Madras is taken as his rebellion. In his madness for love Chandran, initially fails to realize the illusory notion of love, secondly he has violated the sacrosanct tradition, norms, rules and regulations of the family. He even behaves against the spirit of place, Malgudi.

One may witness Chandran’s last rebellion in Madras. Chandran like a picaro has to experience terrible reality of the situation in the big city. Unfortunately, the young Malgudian comes in contact with Kailas, a sickly sentimental etomorph, and visits a brothel.

“This was the first time he had been so close to a man in drink; this was the first time he had stood at the portal of a prostitute’s house. He was thoroughly terrified” (Narayan, 1937: 200-101)

The evil experience suddenly brings about a windy crisis of understanding of what is wrong and what is right in the hero’s mind. Seeing the magnificent Kapaleswar temple at the Koopal village, a bold and reckless man plays the final rebel and becomes Sanyasi. Unable to go beyond the orbit of social norms, the rebel could not be a true ‘Sanyasi.’ The rustics take his appearance for reality and see in him qualities of a sanyasi. Knowing this fact, Chandran decides to cease deceit. Realizing that he is being fed on the poor people’s ignorance Chandran prepares to abandon the place for ever. The Malgudi rustics do not want him to leave the place. Wandering about the street of a strange city, Chandran flings away the long and loose garment of a Sanyasi and returns to Malgudi. About Chandran’s return to the reality K. Venkatchari rightly observes:

What follows such a critical event is ‘the ordeal of consciousnesses on a gradual awakening on the part of the protagonist may disentangle himself from the automation of his past actions or dreary dirunal routine. What follows such a critical event is ‘the ordeal of consciousness’ on a gradual awakening on the part of the protagonist to the need for acceptance of life in spite of all its trials and tribulations, which is suggestive of a fatalism that marks the common Indian attitude to life. (K, Venkatchari, 1970:76)
Using the technique of rebellion, Narayan describes the theme of illusion verses reality and focuses on the spiritual thought of acceptance. The dominance of illusion is witnessed in the picturization of Chandran’s romantic love and his role of a Sanyasi. It is realized that Narayan’s conventional idea of man-woman relationship does not harbour the thought of love before marriage. In this regard the novelist says:

“... We believe that marriages are made in the heaven and the bride and a groom meet, not by accident or design, but by the degree of fate, the fitness for a match not be gauged by letting them go through the period of courtship but by the study of their horoscopes, boy and girl meet and love after marriage than before.” (Narayan, 1965:122-23)

Narayan’s novel ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ reveals the rhythm of order-disorder-order. An illusory love affair makes him run away and even become a sanyasi for a few days. But the life of a sanyasi does not hold him for long. Meeting with Mohan, his friend, explains Chandran that loves and friendship are the various illusions and that the people marry to satisfy their sexual urges and manage house. Says, Mukherji:

“There is nothing deeper than that in any man-and woman relationship.” (Mukherji, 1969)

Ultimately, normalcy returns when Chandran through infatuation, disappointment, disillusionment and realization comes back, takes a respectable job and finally settles down with Susila in a traditionally arranged marriage. Mukherji says:

These developments give a neat and rounded ending to the novel. Chandran has passed through the bewildering process of growing up and has happily come to terms with life. Narayan has succeeded in portraying the inner confusion of a character who has a limited capacity to expand. (Mukherji, 1969 : 81)

In the context of Chandran new goddess of love he views “Susila, Susila, Susila.” Her name, music, figure, face and everything about her was divine. Susila, Susila-Malathi, not a spot beside Susila; it was a tongue twister; he wondered why people liked that
In addition to the apparent irony Narayan has prompted disposition of human mind. One may be entertained by the reaction of innocent rebel. Chandran’s gradual awakening to the realities of life and his final realization through a crisis of unconsciousness enables him to come to terms with life. He settles down into a sober state of regained ‘tranquil restoration’ to become the chief agent of the ‘Daily Messenger’.

In a few weeks he settled down to a routine. Every morning he left his bed at five o’clock and went to the station to meet the train from Madras at five-thirty. He took the bundles of papers and sent them in various directions with the cycle boys. After that he returned home and went to his office only at eleven o’clock, and stayed there till five in the evening, when Mohan would drop in after posting his news for the day. Often Mohan would set him on the track of new clients. (Narayan, 2000:142)

2.4.3 The Dark Room
The relationships between mother and son, father and son and husband and wife are chained together and are not studied separately which are influenced and shaped by Indian social milieu, culture and way of life. Ramani, Babu’s father like Swaminathan’s father behaves in strict manner with him and does not like his child wandering aimlessly. Babu is compelled by his father to go to school even when he is ill. The mother, Savitri loves her children as Indian mothers do.

Being a social reformer in disguise Narayan has presented the changing aspect of husband-wife relationship. He has projected Savitri as an Indian woman who is victim in male dominated society. The traditional Indian family is the main element of the social structure which is cautious about norms, mores and values. Unable to tolerate her husband’s infatuation with Shanta Bai, Savitri, submissive and suffering wife leaves home for committing suicide. Ramani tries to provide everything to Babu but he feels nostalgic in the absence of his mother. Unable to leave away from children, Savitri returns home. This shows that she cannot live without her children. It also reflects that Savitri is aware of the sublime nature of mother-son relationship and
husband-wife relationship. These relationships are treated by Narayan in the traditional Indian way.

Savitri’s return to husband and children justifies her strong desire of creating happiness in her family. Her spirit of resignation and compromise give a chance to stop the social crime of committing suicide. She does not want to break away with her obligations as the mother and the wife. Giving importance to the household duties and children Savitri makes the self pride to disappear from her mind which suggests psychological catharsis. By portraying Savitri as a woman of self-respect and pride, loving mother, and dutiful housewife, R. K. Narayan tries to focus on the ideals of Indian social life.

The theme of illusion versus reality, in the novel, ‘The Dark Room’ is projected through the rebellious husband, Ramani, the wife Savitri and Ramani’s fatuous beloved, Shanta Bai. The stream of rebellion oozes from the marital disharmony. Ramani’s character as its major contributor is boldly underlined. With reference to Ramani one may underline the rebellion as a deviation.

The rebellious deviation of Ramani is reflected in his malicious affair with Shanta Bai. It indicates Ramani’s violation of family codes assigned by the Hindu religion. According to the Hindu family system one must be faithful and loyal to one’s wife. The failure of faithfulness and loyalty causes disharmony in the house. Infatuating with Shanta Bai, Ramani comes to ignore his wife Savitri, “My Pet” (Narayan, 1938:110) is suggestive of Helmer’s in ‘The Doll’s House’ “Is that squirrel frisking around.” (Ibsen, 1979:120) Savitri’s threatenting of leaving the house if he did not come to senses is responded by his callous saying “You can please yourself. Put out the light. I want to sleep”. (Narayan, 1938:111) Ironically one recalls Othello’s words “put out the light” and his unbound love for Desdemona. Ramani’s extra-marital relationship with Shanta Bai shows his callous nature.

Ramani, in ‘The Dark Room’ is a deviant who stands out to be an inborn rebel from the school-days. The quality of rebellion in Ramani is birth gift to him. After seeking success in matriculation he was advised by his father to continue his studies but a self centred Ramani treated him with contempt: “I know better, what I must do.”
(Narayan, 1938:140) He vaunts of resigning if his decisions were not taken into consideration by the company. Instead of being a loving father and husband in the domestic affair, he is the prominent contributor of fear because his wife, Savitri and children are illtreated by Ramani. Even after Savitri’s passing out of his sight, Ramani resumes affair with Shantabai. This shows his violation of social norms. One may notice Ramani as a thorough deviant. The readers feel that rebellious inclinations of Ramani seem to be supported by Savitri because she is helpless, submissive and feeble wife. She is unable to oppose her husband. Narayan vividly presents the tale of Savitri’s acceptance.

Savitri represents herself as a devotional wife who awaits her husband till midnight without eating food. She is a true Hindu woman who has been treated badly by her husband. She is named after mythical wife to whom husband is God, Satyavan. Savitri’s rebellion in ‘The Dark Room’ shows disharmony in the domestic life of Raman’s family. For the other woman, Shanta Bai, he neglects to respond to his wife. Narayan’s views of society are based on reality and not on illusions. Being a member of Malgudi society Savitri follows traditional rules of the society. She revolts against Ramani’s way of life which is not according to traditional Malgudi society. When she understands that Ramani does not respect the emotions her rebellion begins. “Don’t touch me…..you are dirty, you are impure. Even if I burn my skin I can’t cleanse myself the impurity of your touch.” (Narayan, 1938:112) Savitri’s revolt reflects humiliating tyranny of the traditional morality.

In Indian society woman has nothing except husband and children. She cannot claim money or property and she has to depend on her parents, husband and children for the needs of life. The independent tendency of the Indian woman is underlined by the novelist in the act of Savitri’s leaving the house “What possession can a woman call her own expect her body? Everything else she has is her father’s, her husband’s or her son’s.” (Narayan, 1938:113) A puppet in the hands of man is caged that a man is superintendent. So to say the father looks after in childhood, the husband in youth and the son in her old age. The authoritative opinion, of Manu states:

Pita raksati kaumare, bhrata raksati yauvane, raksanti sthavireputraha nastree svatantryamarhati. (Manusmrti, 9.3)
One may recall Nora Helmer, in Ibsen’s ‘The Doll’s House’. “When I look back on it now, I seem to have been living here like a beggar from hand to mouth. I lived by performing tricks for you, Torvald….You and your father have done me a great wrong.”(Ibsen, 1979: 89) Savitri is not Ibsenite heroine. Unlike Nora, who banged the door, Savitri simply “walked out softly closing the door behind her.”(Narayan, 1938:114) Leaving the house in despair, Savitri’s attempts of committing suicide symbolise punishment for disobeying the husband. Embarking upon an independent living by working in a temple Savitri feels homesick. Savitri’s leaving the house and her doings after that are not accepted by the Hindu religion and Hindu tradition. Her idea of living independently comes to end because she believes in religion and social tradition. Savitri realizes that she cannot live without society and she has to live in it by accepting its limitations. A tormenting anxiety for her children, however, makes her restless. Compromising with her lot, gulping down all insult and self respect she returns home to her children which indicates Narayan’s recurrent theme: the return of the native.

Savitri of Narayan appears to show the Indian womanhood reflected through the idealized roles of wife and mother in the male dominated society. Savitri waits for her husband till the clock strikes midnight by sitting at the door without eating anything. She is also unable to forget her children even when Savitri is away from the roof of her husband’s house. Consequently she returns to her husband’s house. Savitri’s returning to her house has prevented the house from falling to pieces fall. The norelist has advocated sanction to the philosophy of acceptance emphasize the theme: the return of the native.

Shanta Bai in Narayan’s ‘The Dark Room’ wins Ramani’s compassion by telling a story of her past life in the course of the interview for the job of a probationer, and wins his heart by her beauty. Her philosophy of life in her own words is “Living today and letting tomorrow. Take care of it, honour being the one important possession.” (Narayan, 1938:81) Referring to her great admiration for Omar Khayyam she frankly tells Ramani that it is difficult for her to exist without a copy of Khayyam: “life is a continuous boredom”, Shanta Bai said. (Narayan, 1938: 108) Shanta Bai’s daring affair of car driving and her going late to see movie with Ramani has an airy appearance. The flat character, Shanta Bai plays a pivotal role. She exhibits herself as
a devotee if free lover. She causes Savitri’s marital disharmony. Shanta Bai’s enjoying a film with Ramani gives a chance to Janamma, Savitri’s friend, to tell her about their ‘togetherness’.

2.4.4 The English Teacher

The theme of domestic harmony in contrast to domestic disharmony in ‘The Dark Room’ is portrayed by R.K. Narayan through the characters of Krishnan and Susila. The husband wife relationship leads to spring the theme of rebellion and illusion verses reality. The relationship between Krishnan and Susila as the husband and wife presented in ‘The English Teacher’ is sublime because it underlines understanding, self respect and communication between them. The role of fate and chance becomes significant when the love between husband and wife is established through marriage in the traditional way. The role of love, sex and death is dominant in the formation of husband wife-relationship which indicates theme of domestic harmony. The marriage between Krishnan and Susila has taken place in the traditional way which shows fulfillment of romantic love. But fate and chance affect the relationship and they are separated. The death of Susila teaches Krishnan a lesson of inevitability of loneliness. Krishnan accepts the truth of death and loneliness as the law of life.

Krishnan’s communion with Susila at physical and spiritual level reflects ‘life after death’. (Rao, A.V. 1967) They are profoundly attached to each other. His love for Susila is Platonic. Krishnan is a devoted husband and Susila is a submissive wife. There is mutual understanding for each other. Krishnan’s true love for Susila does not allow separation from each other. Narayan contrasts this ideal relationship between Krishnan and Susila with the opposite type of relationship between the Headmaster and his wife. Susila, as a traditional wife is able to win the heart of her husband by her practical wisdom and domestic knowledge. His wife’s irresponsible nature brings depression and unhappiness in the headmaster’s domestic life.

The theme of rebellion is focused on by R.K. Narayan in the novel ‘The English Teacher’ through the character of Krishnan, the central consciousness of the novel. The uncompromising idealist Krishnan, at the very beginning of the novel is seen expressing a restless and nagging sense of missing something valuable in India. Working as a lecturer in English in Albert Mission College he ardently desires to
bring vigorous change in the society. He witnesses the Indians around him are the victims of superstitions, and social evils. Hence the work of the teacher according to him is to put new life and spirit in the convention-ridden society.

The rebellious attitude of the protagonist is witnessed in his complete opposition to the system of education which is implemented by the Britishers in India. According to Krishnan the British education has made Indians ‘cultural morons’ (Narayan, 1945:206) and the Indians have forgotten their glorious past, cultural heritage and values of life. He has been teaching Shakespeare and Carlyle and is dictating the same notes from year to year. Consequently, he feels displeased with himself and imagines that his work as a teacher is mechanical which leads to destroy happiness in his life. Krishnan does not even spare himself and says:

If they paid me the same one hundred rupees for stringing beads together or tearing up the paper bits every day for a few hours, I would perhaps be doing it with equal fervour (Narayan, 1945: 12)

Krishnan’s sense of missing something matters most and his sorrow with himself is suggestive of the poet’s inward yearning for “a life freed from distracting illusions and hysterics” felt by Chandran. (Narayan, 1945:123) Krishnan’s inner yearning disappears for a while as he gets connected with his beloved wife, Susila. The happy relationship between the English teacher and his wife Susila puts an end to the restlessness of the poet. Hence Krishnan’s rebellious nature may is suppressed by the relationship in the domestic sphere.

A change in Krishnan’s life takes place because he leaves the hostel and begins to enjoy happy and balanced life with his wife Susila and daughter, Leela in a rented house in Malgudi. It underlines domestic harmony which is moulded by the traditional world of Malgudi. Krishnan’s coming back to the house after lectures; his enjoying coffee in the house with the family members shows him to be a caring Indian husband and loving Indian father. Susila’s monthly-budget and her firmness underline her as an Indian house wife. She loves her child and knows how to treat the child psychologically, which reflects her Indian motherhood.
The untimely death of Sushila causes the loss of harmony in the life of teacher, Krishnan, and it forces him to express his views on the cemetery. “This is a sort of cloak room, a place where you leave your body behind.” (Narayan, 1945:106) One may point out Krishnan’s dejected reaction—“nothing will worry to interest me in life hereafter.”(Narayan, 1945:107) It suggests the negative attitude of Krishnan towards life which is temporary. The thought of despair comes out of illusions of life. It takes positive turn as soon as he is able to link with Susila’s soul. The process of meeting is considered as the union of two souls. It is underlined that Krishna enjoys pleasant company of his wife, Susila in life after death. Krishnan is a spiritual rebel. The restless spirit occurs again when the teacher establishes a psychic contact with her soul. “Krishnan’s journey in this world is full of innocence and his real development takes place in the spiritual world where he communicates with Susila psychically.” (Mishra, 2010:22-23) It is the notion of rebellion. Krishnan, indulging in many trials finds successful in establishing the link with the soul of his beloved wife Susila. He, thus, describes:

When I opened my eyes again she was sitting on my bed looking at me with an extraordinary smile in her eyes. (Narayan, 1945:212)

Krishnan’s positive philosophy of life, spiritual maturity and union of two souls contributes him to arrive at, ‘the spiritual catharsis of despair and salvation.’(Harrex, 1968:52) Krishnan accepts the truth of death and his feelings that he is alone. Acceptance of death and loneliness is the law of life. They are two natural agents of the bond of human relationship. He realizes that there is no escape from loneliness and separation. According to him the company of wife, child, brothers, parents, and friends is not permanent but temporary. All these people go away from us as we go away from them. This is the positive philosophy of life and Krishnan’s attainment of spiritual maturity. Narayan presents a spiritual rebel. Krishnan’s last rebellion is considered as the extension of spiritual rebellion. The resignation underlines Krishnan’s dissatisfaction with his job as a teacher.

Krishnan’s rebellion seems to be peeped in his act of resignation from his teaching profession and his decision to ‘join the headmaster’s school ‘Leave Them Alone.’ The British system of education he feels has subdued the learner’s power of imagination.
and hence he keenly expects social freedom and independence of mind. Giving up his job as a lecturer in English in the British ruled atmosphere Krishnan prefers to work in the headmaster’s ‘Leave Alone System’ of education where the headmaster treats children very affectionately and leaves them alone to do whatever they like. To him, ‘Leave Them Alone’ exists as a God sent mission, where he can pursue the work of his choice. Krishnan’s intention in his decision is commendable:

I'm seeking a greater inner peace, I find I can’t attain it unless I withdraw from the adult world and adult work into the world of the Children.” (Narayan, 1945:211)

The headmaster’s system of education ‘The Leave Them Alone’ is ideal to the Indian students, which can make children wholesome human beings. He thinks that the British education system has no relevance to the students in India. In the draft of Krishnan’s resignation one may notice a reflection of an idealist’s outlook towards education:

I am up against the system, the whole method and approach of a system of education which makes us efficient clerks for all your business and administrative office. (Narayan, 1945:206)

Narayan’s concept of “Positive rebellion” leads to the positive philosophy. A born and selfless rebellion, which sets apart for a noble purpose, has been given a place of pride in Malgudi. The rebellious spirit of Krishnan in ‘The English Teacher’ appears through ‘Grahasthashrama.’ Krishnan undergoes development through his journey from despair and doubt to hope and belief in the Malgudi environment to attain inner place and spiritual maturity.

2.5 CHARACTERIZATION

Characterization is one of the significant aspects of the novel. By depicting middle-class family in the novel R. K. Narayan has established himself as the master of characterization. He presents human drama of Malgudi through his characters. Narayan’s novels may be called novels of character. As a novelist, he has always
made efforts to investigate human life with its domestic issues through the central consciousness in his novels. His persistence on character portrayal is of great importance. Narayan skillfully puts life into the corpus of novels through his characters. Narayan’s eminence is estimated by dexterity in characterization. He initially selects a central-figure and prepares other events accordingly. In this context Narayan says:

My focus is all on character. If his personality comes alive, the rest is easy for me (Wolseley, 1953:273).

There is a truthful and picturesque presentation of the middle class in the Indian society in Narayan’s novels. Narayan, himself belonged to a middle class family of South India; he was intimately familiar with its ways, habits and aspirations. The story in Narayan’s novels moves around the middle-class family in the Malgudi town. Therefore, he rightly limits himself to this particular class in his successive novels.

R.K.Narayan deals neither with the aristocracy at the top nor the poor. He, like Jane Austin, identifies himself with the middleclass people and their various involvements, their clashes and adjustments. (Singh, 1999:7-8)

Narayan’s Malgudi locale is seen as a prototype of the world at large. It has grown over the years in his novels and has even acquired young men with side burns and checkshirts. The novelist deals with wills, hopes, conflicts and frustrations of his characters. The different shades of human life are effectively presented by R.K.Narayan in his novels. But Narayan’s a long steady look has not lost its courteous humanity even one little bit. His description of characters is vivid and acute. Narayan’s perception of Malgudi characters and his inborn feelings of humanity contribute to the portraying of his characters alive and glowing. His characters, therefore, do not lose their identity even in the crowded Malgudi. Narayan declares:

My main concern is with human character – a central character from whose point of view the world is seen and who tries to get over a
difficult situation or succumbs to it or fights it in his own setting.  
(Naik, 1983:2)

The characters are accompanied and surrounded by images and myths of their culture and they are growing and have grown within this culture. ‘R. K. Narayan is deeply interested in the continuity of the classical and mythical tradition.’ (Verma, 2000:100) One can add the story of the ‘Burning of Kama’ to a film in ‘Mr. Sampath’ the snake dance in ‘The Guide,’ the story of ‘Bhasmasura’ in ‘The Man-eater of Malgudi.’ There are many such examples which have major concern with Indian culture and tradition. They play a very significant role in Narayan’s novels.

Contending with their condition Narayan’s individuals attempt to find out answers to solve the crisis between them and the circumstances. The characters such as Swami, Krishnan and Jagan displace themselves and their progress for maturity is witnessed. Narayan’s world of characters in his fiction is profoundly and steadily rooted in the ethos of a particular class. The middle class characters of Narayan do not exceed the boundaries of Malgudi. The characters in the novels of pre-independence i.e. early novels and post independence i.e. middle novels and later novels, are well set in life and do not face serious problems. The characters in the Malgudi houses are orthodox. They are traditional, religious and act and react within decided family system.

The Malgudian world of Narayan has a large number of borders, boundaries and frames as Henderson argues that ‘without the notion of the boundary, there can be no transgression, and without the possibility of transgression, there would be no boundary.’ (Henderson, 1995:3) When the the borders of Malgudi are transgressed, the characters have to attain a kind of Sanyasi-like quality.

Narayan’s individuals attain maturity according to they own society and they leave home for a region beyond their country which compels them to return to their own homes. Returning to the roots reflects the fixed intention of the characters. The turning point to which they get is only through experiencing a situation and which Bhabha calls ‘unhomeliness’ the resolution of the home and the world, the condition of extra territorial and cross cultural initiations. (Bhabha, 1994:9)
Srihivas feels satisfied in his family life and job, Raju the guide decides to to do something for the others, Krishnan finds peace through teaching children in the traditional Indian way, Chandan decides to be married according to the traditions, and even Raja the tiger is eager to be contented in a peaceful existence. After a long and painful struggle through ‘unhomeness’ characters in Narayan’s fiction lastly reach home. ‘It is impossible for the characters to return to an idealised pure pre-colonial cultural condition.’ (Ashcroft, 2001:109)

Narayan’s fictional town of Malgudi conveys its people who are shaped by the tradition of Malgudi and social morals. One feels more characters are around the corner. The spirit of belonging, a sense of community and inborn feelings for humanism are centered to Narayan’s characterization. His commonplace characters from common life come alive under the focus of a compassionate but sharp vision. Narayan prefaces his characters with a distinctive union of detachment and acceptance of life in which one witnesses a blending of evil and good things. This extensive attitude of mind does not allow him to present characters in the same appearance. They do not boast as intentional abstractions but active figures. They are also human in their oddities and eccentricities.

Narayan’s characters are not lined up on opposing sides of the field like a football team, the peasants versus the landlords, workers versus capitalists noble) satyagrahis versus the “Red Men” (The British) as in Raja Rao and earlier still in Anand. (Williams, 1973:53-54)

Narayan’s characters, with their oddities and eccentricities, do not compel us to feel as figures as from Morality plays or comedies of manners or humours. They possess fundamental excellence of individuality inspite of their allegorical and representative character in some cases. The most illustrative characters of Narayan are Margayya, Sampath, Raju and Nataraj.

Narayan’s power lies in his ability to draw upon the sanctions of traditional morality at the same time that he is being most precise and subtle in his realization of individuality and idiosyncrasy. (Chew, 1973:59)
Narayan observes continuous uniformity of setting all through his novels which brings the unique quality of harmony. It helps to the familiarity of his characters. Malgudi seems to appear like a character “the real hero” (Iyengar, 1962:363) and it exercises a shaping influence on his characters in a novel after novel. One may view the saga of Malgudi unrolling itself through successive novels.

Narayan confronts in a novel after novel, to the men and women, the boys and girls, coming from the middleclass family of South India. He focuses light on their habits, fear and aspirations, defeats and victories, happiness and unhappiness. As far as the characterization is concerned, Narayan’s skill lies in the portrayal of his unheroic heroes and heroines who are convincing and true to life. Here M.K.Naik remarks:

He has not great heroes and heroines, only local nobodies and local eccentrics and his style habitually wears a deliberately drab air so that the thrusts of his insistent irony are felt all the more sharply. It is out of its depth only when the author expects his words to take wing or catch fire. (Naik, M.K. 1986:160)

Narayan makes use of epic and legendary characters in his stories and novels. There are brave and selfless kings like Lavana, Harishchandras, Shibi, dutiful Rama and faithful Sita struggling against the evil demon Ravana, Savitri pulling out her Satyavan from the hands of the Death-god, Yama. We witness competitors like Nala and Pushkara trying to win Damayanthi’s favours. There are also Arjuna and his brave brothers pitted against Kauravas.

Narayan speaks about the “inexhaustible vitality” (Narayan, 1965:7) of classical mythology. This contributes the writers to make the contemporary reality more real. The characters in the epics are prototypes and moulds in which humanity is cast, and they remain true for ever. In every story moral significance emphasizes distinction between good and evil. It inspires Narayan to give the imaginative interpretation of myths in a setting which is at once local, regional and universal. To quote Narayan:
With the impact of modern literature, we began to look at the gods, demons, sages and kings of our mythological concoctions but as types and symbols, possessing psychological validity even when viewed against the contemporary background. Passing, inevitably, through phases of symbolic, didactic, or over-dramatic writing, one arrived at the stage of valuing realism, psychological and technical explorations, and technical virtuosity. (Narasimhaiah, 1979:21)

W.J. Harvey divides the characters into different categories emphasizing their nature and intention in the novel. To him, the role of protagonist are the prominent ‘who conflict and change as the story progresses.’ (Harvey, 1965:235) The characters are known as the ‘background’ characters. They are like Hardy’s rustics and may be considered as the ‘voices of the community. Their role as an individual is insignificant. The other category of characters is ‘ficelle.’ They present themselves as individual characters. The last category is the ‘card’. The changelessness is his special feature and he is combined with liberty. Hence he is like a child’s toy.

Narayan portrays a variety of characters in his novels. Fathers have paternal affection for their sons as the Indian fathers. The sons show their qualities of sons who are rooted in tradition and culture. The husbands show their real nature of husbands. It is underlined that the wives in Narayan’s novels are devotional and submissive. The lovers are typical and the beloveds have charm and fascination.

There are some salient features of Narayan’s characters and their contribution in understanding his characters is of great importance to the readers. They are prototypes and are moulded according to the circumstances. They have permanent existence in Malgudi except their temporary departure. The quality of goodness helps them to achieve victory over evil. The characters in Narayan’s fiction donot die at the end. Hence his novel is not treated as a tragedy in the Greek sense. They also have faith in the miraculous power which is used to establish peace and order in their life. Their belief in the cycle of nature enables them to believe in rebirth and reincarnation.

‘Karma consciousness’ is one of the spiritual aspects of human life which is deeply-rooted in the cultural ethos. The ‘law of Karma’ decides consequences of human
action. One may understand the universe through a cyclic structure which moves through the portion of time called ‘Yugas’. It is pursued by illusion i.e. ‘Pralaya.’ After that the universe comes into existence and it moves through the cyclical pattern.

Many characters of R.K. Narayan’s novels are the ‘flat’ characters because they never show any sign of growth in their attitude or outlook. His protagonists exhibit their growth on a different level of realization that is spiritual. They are identified through the cultural ethos and seem to suggest spiritual growth.

Narayan is known for his faith in the eternal spirit of India whose belief in Karma, respect for ancient shastras and his philosophy of acceptance have made him an outstanding novelist in the Indian literature. They no doubt present Narayan’s sancrosanct tradition. Hence, the characters in Narayan’s novels attempt to seize novelist’s spirit of Indian tradition, culture, moral laws and they are realized through them in their real life. Their withdrawal from deviation and coming back to the real life indicates their attitude of acceptance. C.D. Narasimhaiah says:

He has scarcely stirred out of Malgudi nor have his characters; and if by ill-luck they did stray out of the Municipal limits of Malgudi they invariably came back, sadder and wiser—such is the spirit of place, Malgudi the microcosm of traditional Indian society. (Narasimhaiah, 1969:136)

The myths and legends are the sources of inspiration and guiding principles to the Indian man and woman. They are termed as ground realities of life. The Hindu human being who is born and brought up in the traditional society is seen largely influenced and shaped by the myths of his culture. Hence, they become imperceptible part of protagonist’s moral philosophy of life. Rama, Sita and Satyavan-Savitri are the mythical characters. One may underline their appearance on the universe as the ideal personalities. The principles of their life have been considered as the established parameters for the future generations. Consequently, heroes and heroines of Narayan are influenced by them. Their comic nature does not allow them to change. The changeless attitude is taken as their distinguishing quality. Mary McCarthy says that:
The principle growth in human being is as real—as the principle of eternity or inertia represented by the comic. (McCarthy, 1962:289)

The protagonist during his struggle of life passes through illusory world and ultimately reaches some kind of spiritual revelation. It may be elucidated as the growth or the development of the protagonist.

Harvey does not think of keeping ‘cardish characters’ away from change and growth. Mary McCarthy states that their “relative changelessness is combined with a peculiar kind of freedom” (McCarthy, 1962:240). Harvey’s ficelle plays minor roles with their functional values. They work very best to deal with Narayan’s eccentricities. They are entirely traditionally realized characters.

Narayan’s fictional South Indian town, Malgudi represents the place of action and is described with its geographical and distinguishing civic features so graphically that it in effect becomes a “character” in the novel. (Goyal, 1993: 96) A close-relationship enhances between the personages and their circumstances, wherein Malgudi exercises its distinctive power on its inhabitants. It has a controlling influence on them due to limited opportunities. Narayan’s comedy and humour are the products of the gap between the dream and the reality and inconsistent relationship between what is and what ought to be. They also have a certainty of social border.

While presenting characters in contrast Narayan seems to be inclined to some principle. Chandran’s father and mother in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’, Savitri and Shanta Bai in ‘The Dark Room’, Raju and Marco in ‘The Guide’, are not the characters of the same views and attitudes towards life but various shades are visible in their life. However, this ingredient never tones down the emotional essence of the characters through whom Narayan enlivens his fictional world. They react in different ways to the same situation.

There is no attempt to categorise them as good or bad. Narayan sounds no preferences. They not only present their class but also their individual selves. Through these acting and reacting responses,
Narayan weaves the complex pattern of human mind. (Mohod, 1997:110)

Innocence is basically defined as the quality or fact or fact of being innocent. It is realized in a number of ways: freedom from sin, specific guilt, cunning, ignorance, and innocuousness. All these meanings may serve as points of reference. Every character in Narayan’s novels has a nuclear innocence. There appear to be three categories of the characters in Narayan’s novels: children, the grown-ups and the rustics.

2.5.1 Swami and Friends
With ‘Swami and Friends’ Narayan begins his career as a novelist by portraying child life. Narayan’s child characters present several instances of innocence. Hence, one may consider it as a study of innocence. It is an episodic narration of school boys: Swaminathan and his chums and the story has been presented by the novelist through their adventures and misadventures. Iyngar calls it ‘the school-boy’s epic’ (1987:365) which dramatizes boy’s innocence. The inclination of innocence in ‘Swami and Friends’ has been reflected through the ignorance of school-boys and Narayan picturises different stages of their ignorance; lack of acquaintance with the adult experience, their involvement in imagination, and their imitation of the adult world of life in the Malgudi town.

Swaminathan, a bouncing and lively child is the central character of the novel ‘Swami and friends.’ Through his misadventures R. K. Narayan represents innocence. Ebenezar, the scripture master, hates Hindu idolatory and tries to show Sri Krishna in a very bad light, in comparison to Jesus, asking, “Did our Jesus go gadding about with dancing girls like your Krishna?.. Did our Jesus practice dark tricks on those around him?” (Narayan, 1935:5-6) Swami’s response through his innocence indicates his love for the country and spirituality which he achieves performs towards his God.

Narayan seems to portray a typically average and ordinary hero belonging to middle-class, realized through family frame and overall influence of the Hindu cultural ethos. (Taranath, 1968:363) Swaminathan’s story is that of the average boy with its usual rounds of pranks and punishment.” (Naik, 2006:160) Swaminathan is wise and strong
enough to think and react rightly and erase that mark by asking a counter question; ‘If he did not, why was he crucified?’ “If he was a God, why did he eat flesh and fish and drink wine.” (Narayan, 1935: 6) This dramatic scene reflects Swami’s pride for Hindu Gods and goddesses. He does not tolerate insulting words regarding them. He does not hesitate to attack Christian God. It underlines development in Indian milieu during post-independence.

The three main characters in ‘Swami and Friends’ Swami, Rajam and Mani are recognized in relation to one another. Their interpersonal relationship may serve as a key to the novelist’s art of characterization. They are realized in circumstances and in the company of others. Swaminathan is seen in different situations with his set of friend; with the adult world of parents, grand mother and teachers and his world of fears, gods, spirits and ghosts. “The world of childhood is shown in three different ways: Swami and his ‘set’, Swami and the adult world, Swami and his gods.” (Holmstrom, 1973:36)

Swami and his friends, Somu, Sankar, the Pea and Mani are juvenile characters, this ‘set’ lives in the locale of Malgudi which explains the physical conditions of the characters against which they have to fight.(Mishra,1989:30).Somu the monitor, “the uncle of the class,”. Mani ‘the mightly Good-for Nothing,” (Narayan, 1935:9) who belongs to lower middle class lives in “low-roofed, dingy house”. Sankar, “the most brilliant boy of the class” who could repeat history in his sleep, and Samuel, “known as the ‘pea’ on account of his size just ordinary, apprehensive, weak and nervous.” (Narayan, 1935: 9) He goes back into the background. Samuel stands as a symbol of an outlook on life and becomes an attitude which explores unseen, subtle possibilities of the average.Narayan’s creative use of ordinary becomes the basic structure of his genius.

Swami’s innocence exhibits his ignorance which is reflected in many instances in the novel. Being a small boy Swaminathan is unable to understand tennis game. What does he say regarding it shows his innocence? At the tennis court on watching the game his understanding is: “whenever his father hit the ball, his opponents were unable to receive it and so let it go and strike the screen’. (Narayan, 1935:90) shows his ignorance of the game and the rules of tennis. Swaminathan is more interested in
playing cricket than study. He has dread of mathematics. When he fails to get correct answer to the problems in figures Swaminathan finds a clue to avoid disaster. He asks “father, will you tell me if the mangoes were ripe? (Narayan, 1935:86) It shows Swami’s ignorance and the listeners feel delighted.

Malgudi denizens are under the influence of Gods and Goddesses. The hold of the traditional Indian values on Swaminathan is as strong as the effect of modern civilization. Narayan’s themes are usually built round Indian beliefs and superstitions. When Swaminathan meets disappointment in search of money everywhere, he puts a couple of pebbles in a cardboard and carries the box in the Pooja room, Swami appeals to the God to turn the three pebbles into six pies enabling him to buy the covetous hoop. Swaminathan recalls that Rama had slain the ten heads of Ravana and hence it is very easy for him to grant the boy two three-pie coins. This event is elaborated on the basis of The Indian folk-lore. The failure of converting pebbles bought tears to his eyes. He wanted to abuse Gods, but was afraid to…. He was afraid that it might get on without money, but it was dangerous to incure the wrath of Gods; they might make him fail in his examinations, or kill father, mother, granny, or the baby. (Narayan, 1935: 71)

The freedom movement was started everywhere in India and even in Malgudi. Realizing rights and opportunities, officers in the government offices joined the movement in response to the call of their leaders. Swami and his friends also joined the agitation. When the police started lathi-charge Swaminathan cries, “Don’t kill me. I know nothing.” (Narayan, 1935:100) Swaminathan as an average type and coward shows innocence. Swaminathan’s act reflects suffering under fear psychosis. Narayan presents protagonist’s innocence through the egoistic nature. Swaminathan’s innocent mind feels proud to be called Tate of M.C.C. Swaminathan’s ego underlines psychology of an innocent boy who is from middle-class family. Swaminathan’s acts such as breaking of the window panes, persecution of the cartman’s poor son, make him feel that he is the only faithful bowler in the M.C.C. team.

The fairy tales, stories from myths and legends are told to children by their grandmothers. These stories can develop their positive and spiritual attitudes right from
their childhood. They can also develop qualities of heroism in them. Swaminathan launches a paper boat with an ant seated in it in a gutter:

The boat made beautiful swerve to the right and avoided destruction, it went on and on. It neared the fatal spot where the waters were wrecked beyond recovery. He took a pinch of earth, uttered a prayer for the soul of the ant and dropped it into the gutter. (Narayan, 1935: 29)

It underlines that the fancy of the child is conditioned by the fairy tales and myth narrated to him by his grand mother. The gods and demons inhabit the state of mind of the child to be feared of doing bad things. It also makes children to know right path of life by realizing their guilt and feeling repentance for wrong deeds. Swaminathan is Narayan’s young and heroic protagonist. Swaminathan’s efforts to save the ant after its ‘death by water’, his prayer for the soul; secondly his denial to buy a lemon for his granny, his feeling guilty and thirdly his attempt of preserving the spider as a pet are the instances of his goodness. Swami is presented as a living character. Narayan has manipulated the strategy of the ‘rite de passage’, a mistaken boy apprehends his folly and ‘returns to the world’ of reality. It suggests spiritual growth in Swami.

These various instances demonstrate the influence of Magudi on the innocent children because the development and progress of Malgudi step by step brings them to the routine of Malgudi town. The various shades of innocence are underlined in individual delineation of Swaminathan’s friends. Somu, the figure of confidence is known as the uncle of the class. He, as a thumb-nail character is an egoist, who possesses quality of taking things very easily even though not studious. All his acts are read by the readers through the narrator’s ‘telling’.

A low-roofed, dingy house of Mani in Malgudi presents him as a lower middle-class boy. He is not lifeless character. Mani, the class bully is a sensible combination of ‘telling and showing’. The spirit of innocence lies in Mani’s wicked deeds, and his fame as a muscleman has become a myth. His plan of breaking Rajam’s head and throwing his body in the river remains unsuccessful because of Sarayu’s controlling power. Mani stops himself from doing so and their friendship is restored once again. Mani’s confrontation with Rajam, his fight with Somu, and his fear of his own uncle
reflect examples of his innocence. The episode of leaking question paper in exchange of brinjals exemplifies devils’s ignorance and it shows even children in Malgudi are not free from the idea of corruption. A psychological reflection of Swami’s fantasy, Mani plays the role of a ‘catalyst’ in extending Rajam’s hand of friendship to Swami. Hence, they are reconciled by settling quarrel between them. Mani, a ‘cardish’ character possessing devilish innocence remains a round character.

Shankar characteristic flair for God’s name and his ‘Mr Know All’ of the class image is a ‘type cast’, who is understood through the narrator’s strategy of ‘telling’. His hard work and speed of learning establishes him as a boy of extraordinary qualities against the British education system in Malgudi. Hence he becomes symbolic of the myth of intelligence. Shankar may be considered as a typecast. He is a sycophant who obtains a high percentage of marks by ‘washing clothes for his master.’ (Narayan, 1935: 8) This instance reflects the importance of learning for the better future. The spirit of traditional Malgudi is a source of inspiration to him for earn while you learn method. He seems to be a follower of India’s great tradition of learners.

A picture of ordinary and extraordinary students represents every school in India. The school in Malgudi cannot escape from this reality. Samuel is presented by the novelist a weak boy in study and health. In spite of these qualities he is not hated by other school boys. He is friendly to everybody. Narayan suggests the idea of integration among the students of varied interests and likings. Samuel recognized as the ‘Pea’ on account of his size illustrates the average and the ordinary. (Taranath, 1968:362) “He was just ordinary, no outstanding virtue of muscle or intellect.” (Narayan, 1935: 9) Rajam, an example of innocence, is a type-cast: an innocent snob whose mind represents ego. Narayan’s comic overtones have been emphasized in Rajam’s innocence. He does not know the meaning of the word ‘obliged’ and ‘remittance’ and returns the letter to the firm Messers Binns, Madras telling “we are sorry that you sent me sombody’s letter. Please send our things immediately.”(Narayan, 1935:119) His comment on the Villard bat, “there are actual springs inside the bat, so that when you touch the ball it flies.” (Narayan, 1935: 114)

The innocent boys of Malgudi play the roles of adults. Their behaviour shows imitative nature. Rajam pretends to be an adult before his friends when they are invited to visit his house. His adult role is underlined in ordering the cook when
Swami and Mani are invited home: I went in and gave the cook such a kick for his impertinence that he is lying unconscious in the kitchen.” (Narayan, 1935: 28) The attitude of pardoning comes under the Indian philosophy of forgiveness which is considered as Malgudi’s distinguishing feature. It is against Vessex’s philosophy of capital punishment that is death. Rajam’s pardoning of Mani’s enmity and accepting him as a friend underlines his good nature and makes him a ‘type’

The life of human being is a long journey which sets about in childhood and concludes in old age. They may share one common feature: innocence. The childhood has symbolic realization in old age illustrated through the character of Granny. An individual human being in the old age is seen entering the state of innocence. The old age seems to mirror the childhood. Describing a notion of the second childhood in his play William Shakespeare says:

> Last scene of all is second childishness and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything. (Shakespeare, 1923:7)

The child’s first school is his home and family in which he perceives education of customs in society, conduct, conservation of health, love, sympathy, cooperation etc. Granny has a significant role in the traditional joint family system. Her very appearance in the home seems to be set aside for the grandson and her importance in Swami’s life can not be neglected. She is the only character who seems to await for her impatient listener and her intimate relationship with Swami shows her innocence. Swami is more attached to his granny than to his parents to whom he talks freely, opens his heart before her. Swami discusses adventures of his friends with Granny which reflects his strong attachment to Granny which is one of the characteristics of Indian family.

> ‘Oh, Granny!’ he cried ecstatically, ‘you don’t know what a great fellow Rajam is.’ He told her the story of the first enmity between Rajam and Mani and the subsequent friendship. (Narayan, 1935:21)

Granny learns a lot about Rajam’s bravery from Swaminathan. She has perfect faith in the truth of life and relates Story of Harishchandra who lost his throne, wife and child for the sake of truth. Granny loves Swami very much and his evenings happily pass
with her. After the night meal, with his head on his Granny’s lap, nestling close to her, Swaminathan felt very snug and safe in the faint atmosphere of cardamom and cloves. (Narayan, 1935:21) Granny represents Indian grandmother in whose arms grandson feels very happy.

Loving and affectionate Granny augments Swaminathan’s happiness by telling him stories from Hindu mythology, and Swami in this way becomes acquainted with Hindu Gods and other outstanding figures and episodes of Hindu mythology.

When Granny suffers a severe stomach ache and asks Swami to fetch her lemon immediately he turns down her request and hastens to the cricket ground. All the time he suffers from the pangs of his conscience for his Granny may be writhing with pain while he himself is enjoying cricket. He feels guilty and calls himself “a snake.” The progress or the spiritual growth of the protagonist may be seen in his realizing the folly and his return to the world of reality. The writer has employed the strategy of the ‘rite-de-passage.’

The comic vision is noticed in the children’s simple ways of interaction with the world around. The inhabitants of Malgudi demonstrate against the arrest of a political-worker in Bombay by the British Government. The children’s participation in the freedom movement without any mature understanding of the problem is manifested in the burning of clothes and breaking of glass in the schools. In all their activities and adventures, Swami and his friends imitate the adult world.

The young hero Swami, as the rebel, undergoes painful journey through Mempi forest, a sense of fear in the gloomy darkness of forest symbolizing punishment for disobeying the Headmaster. Swaminathan’s father is a typical Indian father, who spares a lot of time of the day for the bright future of his son. Despite his careful and strict attitude he tries to maintain emotional and close acquaintance between him and Swaminathan. When Swaminathan is not seen in the house after the evening his tension mounts high. As the Indian father he desires his son Swaminathan should study more instead of meaninglessly wandering with his friends. He is disciplined but very soft from within which is hard from the outer side and delicate from inside like a coconut. The cartman Ranga, a rustic from the neighbouring village has brought
Swaminathan to the forest officer. The role of the background character in the life turning of Swaminathan is, as ficelle. The journey underlines strategy, known as ‘rite-de-passage.’

2.5.2 The Bachelor of Arts
Chandran a young jobless graduate in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ walks leisurely on the banks of Sarayu where an unforgettable scene leaves wonderful effect on his life. During rambling he sees Malathi, a beautiful girl on the bank of the river. His mind overcomes with the feelings of love for the girl. Chandran, the hero, a son of “South Indian middle class family” (Singh, 1999:15) ignoring the traditional norms, conventions, and manners of society, desires to marry Malathi without considering her caste.

Representing any Hindu father and Hindu mother, Venkatachala Iyer, the retired district judge and Sushila his mother intend to marry their son to the most pleasant girl with dowry and not Malathi whom Chandran loves intimately. Narayan prominently underlines this traditional and normal attitude of father and mother towards life. Venkatachala Iyer is a simple minded person and loving father of Chandran. On the other hand, the role of his wife in domestic matters is more conspicuous which reflects her as a traditional mother of Indian household. When Chandran confesses his intention of marrying Malathi, a beautiful girl of about fifteen years, his father after collecting information says:

I don’t know anything about these things. I must speak to your mother.
(Narayan, 1937: 69)

Attitude of understanding between husband and wife in a Hindu household in South India is praiseworthy. They discuss the issue regarding the family matters and then make the right decision. Marriage is an important aspect in the life of human being therefore they are not in hurry in their decision. Narayan presents mutual understanding between them regarding their son’s marriage. Being the inhabitants of Malgudi they think to marry their son according to Hindu traditional system of marriage. In this regard H.E.Bates remarks:
Mr. Narayan’s rendering of human relationship has perfection of phrasing and depth of understanding that makes Chandran’s life very real. (Bates, H.E)

The people of Malgudi are obsessed with the thought of a class as the background of the party’s financial condition. The economic situation is taken into consideration in marriage affair. Narayan gives true insight into the human minds, manners, and economic status of the family in the society. Chandran’s father does not display feelings of dislike against Chandran’s choice which reflects his Indian father-hood. Giving dowery is a matter of status. So parents of bride-groom before the marriage of their son collect the information about the financial condition of the family. The rich family of the bride-groom is a subject of pride to them. Hearing that Chandran would marry only the girl Malathi, his mother is shocked because the girl’s father is a mere head clerk and not a big officer hence cannot afford a big dowry. She protests immediately:

“They can’t be all right. We have a face to keep in this town. Do you think it is all child’s play? She left the room in a temper.” (Narayan, 1937: 70)

A discussion on social customs and traditions takes place in the house when the proposal of a marriage for either a son or a daughter is received. On this occasion father’s role generally remains passive and mother strongly thinks of custom. The parents of Malathi are prepared to accept the proposal of Chandran’s marriage with their daughter but his mother is obliged to customs and traditions of the family and community:

He did not appear to place active obstacles in Chandran’s way, but little else. He appeared to distrust his own wisdom in these matters and to have handed the full rein to his wife. Chandran once or twice tried to sound him and gain him to his side, but he was evasive and non-committal. (Narayan, 1937:70)
It is a system in the Hidnu society that the parents of the bride are supposed to propose the parents of bride-groom in the initial stage and at the same time they consult the astrologer to see if the horoscopes of their children rightly match. It is done for the son’s best future and to avoid evils in his life. For the sake of their son’s happiness they agree to consider the proposal if it comes from the other side and the horoscope matches. Chandran’s father does not believe in the horoscope matching practice. He is dependent while his mother is too confident. The failure of horoscope brings a dissatisfactory end to Chandran’s love. “With rigid caste prohibition to be respected and difficult astrological hurdles to be crossed, how can there be ‘love-marriages’ in India?” (Iyengar, 1983:366) It marks the common Indian attitude to life. Narayan underlines orthodox Indian belief in astrology. It shows that fate and astrology have dominance on the emotional relationship, which is strongly determined by the mercy of the astrologers. Chandran is not permitted to marry inspite of all fitness as the society believes that marriages are decided by fate and astrology.

Narayan shifts his characters from innocence and ignorance to experience and knowledge. The character of Swaminathan in ‘Swami and Friends’ suffers from the experience of parting with his friend. Chandran in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ says goodbye not only to one friend but to all college friends. Swaminathan takes it in simple and in emotional terms. But Chandran understands it with an intensity of feeling and realizing the ways of the world. Chandran, from this moment has to experience ups and downs of life till his reconciliation to Malgudi. Going out of conservative background of Malgudi, Chandran passes through infatuation and frustration. The moral values of an orthodox society prohibit him from accepting drink and prostitutes in Madras. Chandran understands that dreams and fantasies have no place in this world where one has to struggle for existence. Consequently he drops the proposal of going to England for further studies saying, ‘It is nothing more than a usual ‘vague desire.’ (Narayan, 1937:53)

The magnificent grey spire of Kapaleeswarar temple impresses him during his moving in a state of dislike into various parts of South India and turns him a ‘Sanyasi.’ Under heavy pressure of social conventions parents’ disapproval of marriage caused considerable frustration in Chandran’s life and renounces it to become a Sanyasi. He could not be treated as a true Sanyasi because he is strictly
prevented from going beyond the orbit of social norms and his becoming a ‘Sanyasi’ is the alternative of the ‘social stigma’ leading to suicide. (Singh, 1999:16) Realising realities that his home and Malgudi are only his comfort and cares, tired in purposeless roaming, Chandran renounces his ideal and returns to his parents in Malgudi. On his returning to reality from “distracting illusions and hysteric” (Iyengar, 1973:365) Venkatcharhi says:

What follows such a critical event in the ordeal of consciousness on gradual awakening on the part of the protagonist to the need for the acceptance of the life in spite of all its trials and tribulations which is suggestive of fatalism that makes the common Indian attitude to life. (Venkatchari, 1970:76)

‘Renunciation’ an Indian ideal of life operates behind certain “situations and characters.” (Sharan, 1993:53) Pert says “characters in situation.” (Mishra, 2002:69) The appearance of Chandran, the place, the simple peasants—all help to obtain the desired effect. The situation reminds one of the Railway Guide, Raju, who turns a Swami in Narayan’s novel ‘The Guide’. The guide a habitual convict could hold on and become a Swami. Chandran who lacks experience, returns from the underserved role of the ascetic forced on him by others. Willingness of Chandran to marry Susila, a chosen girl by his parents is suggestive of vibrant irony. His returning to the world can only mean his “reconciliation to reality.” (Goyal, 1993:102) Chandran’s marriage with Susila brings new dimensions in his life. Narayan intends to present the elements of conflicts which appear in the mind of the hero as G. B. Verma comments:

Chandran is a sensitive youth, caught in the conflict between the Western ideas of love and marriage instilled into him by his education and traditional social set up in which he lives. (Verma, 1992:15)

A typical village community in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ is that of the rustics who save Chandran from self-deception and receive him as a sanyasi when he determines to leave Koppal village, the rustics force him to stay and play sanyasi. They bless him with his spiritual presence. The same community is witnessed in the later novel ‘The Guide.’ The rustics on one hand are realized as traditionally religious and spiritual.
On the other hand, they are also assigned the choric roles. Their presence seems to be “the collective consciousness.” Chandran leaves the place giving up the borrowed role of Sanyasi. Narayan’s irony has a double dimension. The faith in the rustics implores the fake sanysi to stay on and the collective consciousness of the rustics beseeches him to leave the place. One may notice Chandran’s illusory existence through the rustics.

Chandran’s mother is portrayed as a traditional mother who gives importance to the social norms and emotional life of her son. One may underline in her two roles of a traditional wife and an Indian mother.

A moderate mother in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ who is involved in notion of her son and husband. She recites mantras for the welfare of her son and husband. She has faith that role of Destiny is pivotal in everybody’s marriage affair. Remembering her own marriage scene, she says:

It is all a matter of fate...You can marry only the person whom you are destined to marry and at the appointed time. When the time comes, let her be the ugliest girl, she will look all right to the destined eyes. (Narayan, 1937:34)

Mother’s views about beauty are shaped by her experience of traditional life which is considered as her philosophy of beauty against the conservative family background. It has physical as well as social implications. According to her the concept of beauty is not generalized because the view about it changes from person to person. Imposing on a customary philosophy of beauty, she says ‘Beauty is always related to one’s vision’, she adds, “Ugliness and beauty is all as it strikes one’s eye.” (Narayan, 1937:36) Chandran is also devoted to his mother and holds her in very high esteem. When Kailas, the drunkard, insists on taking wine, Chandran replies;” Excuse me. I made a vow never to touch alcohol in my life before my “mother” (Narayan, 1937: 41) It reflects Chandran’s traditional attachment to his mother.

A scathing attack on the English way of life and infatuation must be underlined when the mother does not favour sending her son to England for studies. ‘What is the use of sending him to England? What do our boys, who go to England, specially achieve?
They only learn to smoke cigarettes, drink wine and dance with white girls.” (Narayan, 1937:129) Seenu, Chandran’s brother, the innocent face in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ is a linear or a pencil sketch. The cricket fan illustrates irony in life.

2.5.3 The Dark Room

Exhibiting the typical Indian attitude of life, Narayan portrays an Indian household in ‘The Dark Room’ where the husband seems to be lord and the wife an obedient doll. M.K. Naik on the vivid presentation of Indian housewife says:

> It is a sort of thing that takes place in every society where the old double strands are still valid and the women are economically so helpless that they just have to lump what they do not like. (Sundaram, 1973:48)

A pathetic novel ‘The Dark Room’ calls up a tragic and sympathetic scene, not less than Rama Mehta’s ‘Inside the Haveli’ which ‘is a domestic novel and offers a fascinating peep behind the wall of Rajasthani noble man’s house where a housewife struggles against the orthodoxy and tradition but finally yields to the ways of family’. (Singh, 1999:18)

Ramani in ‘The Dark Room’ represents a typical Indian husband who generally does not pay attention to the will, emotion and devotion of his wife. (Singh, 2002:138) Because of his adulterous relationship with his assistant, Shanta Bai Ramani comes to the house very late at night and goes to the bed without talking to his wife a single word or enquiring about her dinner. Hence, one may underline Savitri’s psychological exploitation which denies her emotional life. He is the real cad whose cruelty clashes with the character of Savitri’s devotion and submisiveness. Ramani’s adulterous relationship with Shanta Bai, an outside force threatens harmonious relationship between husband and wife. Realizing importance of Savitri’s devotion Ramani the continuous rejector of will and emotion of his wife accepts Savitri and establishes balance of his character which suggests restoration of normalcy in the house.

Ramani the hero of ‘an anti-domestic novel’ (Poddar, 223) as Kaul considers, is a man of middle-class family. Belonging to the old conservative set of husband Ramani does
not believe in marriage system. According to him woman is a doll-wife who can be moulded according to the wish of husband. He is under the illusion that woman is a child producing machine and who has no feelings. Ramani opines ‘marriage as an institution in which the wife has to have implicit obedience and bear children ungrudgingly. (Singh, 2002:45-46) Ramani is aggressive, domineering and unfeeling as a husband and father with “a streak of the ruffian and the cad” in him. (Iyengar, 1973:371) Narayan reflects a typical Indian husband in the character of Ramani who bosses over his wife for money they earn and spend over their children and household affairs.

The moments of love and affection of Ramani are not true, but the efforts at exhibitionism and show off. The eccentric husband sometimes is shown by the author in a pleasant mood. One may underline the pretentious nature of Ramani in relation to his wife. Raman’s jolly mood is reflected in his remarks. But it is not reflected in his actual conduct in the house with wife and children. In real sense Ramani is a man of western influences against the traditional background of Malgudi. When he learns that the children have finished their dinner but Savitri is still waiting for him like a dutiful wife he says:

“Oh how poorly you eat”, he exclaimed. “Have a little more ghee. Eat well, my girl, and grow fat. Don’t fear that you will make me a bankrupt by eating. If I grow fat, people may not recognize me.” (Narayan, 1938:177)

When Ramani goes out at evening for watching movie with his wife, he would order her in a dictatorial manner “Are you coming with me to the cinema or not? Savitri I will count sixty. You must dress and come out before that.” (Narayan, 1938:180) His behaviour at the cinema hall suggests his exhibitionism: He is very proud of his wife. “She had a fair complexion and well-proportioned feature and her sky-blue saree gave her a distinguished appearance.” (Narayan, 1938:277) One may underline that the character of Ramani has the trait of Indians under the considerable impact of western style and culture.
Savitri is both an individual and a type (Girla, 1984:173) of the convention bound faithful Hindu wife who symbolizes a traditional Indian womanhood (Sharan, 1993:74) and is replica of stoicism. Despite indifference and mortification at her husband’s hands, which is her unavoidable destiny, she remains attached and devoted to her family. Without uttering a single word against her husband Savitri tolerates the severe distress of Ramani and rushes to a dark room in his house where she peevishes and grieves. With regard to a Hindu wife’s tolerance and suffering Mahatma Gandhi says:

“Perhaps only a Hindu wife would tolerate these hardships, and that is why I have regarded woman as an incarnation of tolerance. A servant wrongly suspected may throw up his job, a son in the same case may leave his father’s roof, and friend may put an end to the friendship. A wife, if suspects her husband, will keep quiet, but if her husband suspects her, she is ruined. (Gandhi, 1984:21)

The profound depth of the Indian woman’s perseverance and endurance seems to be reflected in Savitri’s resolution “that it would be better to suffer in silence than to venture a question”. (Narayan, 1938:75) It is indicative of a true picture of the age old servility which the Hindu wife is caused to experience in the name of religion and tradition.

R. K. Narayan skilfully narrates manners of Indian people with quests through Savitri. Indian woman does not show hesitance when arrival of the guests adds more work responsibility to the housewife. The Indian tradition is to honour a guest and share with him the edibles. Being very faithful to the husband Ramani she tolerates his scolding and browbeats. Ramani brings guests to the house without information in advance to Savitri. Indian woman is a spiritual sufferer whose will is the will of her husband. Her will and desires have no liberty. They are controlled and restricted by husband. Showing no hesitancy she endures things patiently and liberally. “R. K. Narayan presents woman in the traditional image of ‘Patiwrata.’ She is an object of pity and has no will of her own. To suffer in silence is her only life.” (Sharma, 2010:45)
Savitri finds her husband infatuated with his new office assistant, Shanta Bai. Savitri and Shanta Bai in ‘The Dark Room’ stand in sharp contrast to one another. Loving and obedient Savitri is traditional Hindu wife and religious in her way. By running her household economically she always takes initiative in saving money.

Savitri, however, had other methods of dealing with sudden guest. She had a genius for making the existing supply elastic and transforming an ordinary evening course, with a few hurriedly fried trimmings, into a feast. (Narayan, 1938:13)

Creating the myth of Indian wife in ‘The Dark Room,’ representation of Savitri is of the traditional Hindu wife, after the ancient Savitri of Savitri Satyavan legend. Savitri of Satyavan and modern Savitri of ‘The Dark Room’ have devoted their lives for the sake of their husbands. Inspite of being an ideal wife, the old Savitri is an example of an eminence, a model of righteousness: courage, steadfastness, obstinacy and ability of decision making. By her mental ability, she even conquers ‘Yamraj’, the God of death, and possesses the soul of her husband again. Thus, Old Savitri is successful in establishing her own identity as ‘a life giving force’.

Some times Savitri from ‘The Dark Room’ rebels against her husband saying “I’m a human being”. (Narayan, 1938:97) But this thought of being a human does not remain forever when she flies out of the four walls. Savitri’s sparks of protest and rebellion are momentary. The fears of loneliness, and the insecure world outside the house inclines her to trample her pride and her self respect and forces her to return to the home of her husband, Ramani. If one considers modern Savitri on the background of Savitri–Satyavan legend she symbolically stands for the failure of married life. Laxmi Holstorm points out:

The two dark room—one in the home and one in the temple—are used symbolically and reflect directly the limits of free choice and the implications of individuality. (Holstorm, 1973:42)

R. K. Narayan presents the modern woman in the form of Shantabai against traditional Hindu wife Savitri. A self-made, bold and educated Shanta Bai is modern in her ways of life and views. Being modernized she is not worried about
conventional norms of virtue. She does not bother about the traditional relationship between husband and wife. Unable to endure her husband’s misbehaviour she deserts him unexpectedly. She candidly discloses her view in the words:

“Oh, I love unconventional things”, she said.” Otherwise I shouldn’t be here but nursing children and cooking for a husband. (Narayan, 1938:79)

Narayan, through these women attempts to present two contrasting reactions to the situation in which they face cruelty of their husbands. Savitri is submissive and tolerant who is incompetent to stay separately, gives up her pride and returns to her unrepentant husband for the shelter. She realizes the dependent nature and position of a woman in Indian society.

Savitri even though fights for the echoes of Shakuntala for the right to live and die realizes that she cannot live without the support of her home and family. It is because Savitri knows that she is deeply rooted in the customary role of wife and can not transcend Malgudi norms of family. Coming back to her home she accepts defeat by saying “I am like a bamboo pole, which cannot stand without a wall to support it.” (Narayan, 1938:161) This is defeat. I accept it. I am not good for this fight. I am a bamboo pole.” (Narayan, 1938:162) Considering, all this Savitri in ‘The Dark Room’ is a shadowy and lifeless character. M.K. Naik in this connection says:

Narayan’s Savitri is certainly no tragic figure, since she appears to be only a weak, whimpering, timid, spineless, and a vacillating creature. (Naik, 1983:19)

The Narayan protagonist is compelled to accept life as it is, since there seems to be no way out of one’s fated condition. One underlines that this acceptance is motivated by the dead weight of a tradition which strikes unnatural and irrational fears in peoples hearts and heavy price has to be paid for this ‘acceptance of life’ Her attempt of declaring individual identity in an orthodox society signifies an early testament of the ‘women’s lib’ movement. Male dominance has afforded woman a secondary role.
Consequently she fails to take into account views of her independence, her individuality and strength. Narayan quotes:

A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances. My novel deals with her with this philosophy broadly in the background. (Narayan, 1971:119)

On the other hand, a fashionable Shanta Bai is frank and manages everything without anyone’s support. Being modern, she often makes us remember of Shanti in ‘Mr. Sampath’ and Rosie in ‘The Guide’. She has her own views about life who does not think life as meaningless without husband. Shanta Bai has left her husband because he was a liquor additct. She has her own philosophy of life in her own words.

To night I feel like pacing the whole world up and down. I won’t sleep. I feel like roaming all over the town and the whole length of river. I will laugh and dance. That’s my philosophy of life. (Narayan, 1938:80)

Her views on film producers convey that Shanta Bai is extremely modern in her style, discernment and inclination of mind. She thinks that the Indian mythology is a soure to the producers for making good film. It reflects taste of the Indian audience and their pride for mythology. They like films which have mythical themes to enjoy and entertain. But she hates the films picturising the life of holymen. Her admiration for Omar Khayyam enforces her to state that it is difficult for her to exist without a copy of Khayyam:

“Life is a continuous boredom”, Shanta Bai said, locking her arms behind her head and leaning back on the pillow. “I can’t exist without a copy of the Rubaiyat. You will always find under my pillow or in my bag. His philosophy appeals to me, “dead yesterday and unborn tomorrow.” (Narayan, 1938:130-31)

Ramani and Mari in ‘The Dark Room’ are also characters of opposite views regarding their life styles, social outlook, and culture. Ramani, literate man, the office secretary
of Englandia Insurance Company is not polished and Mari, the burglar and blacksmith is poor, uneducated but well refined. The emotional Ramani gets allured towards Shantabai when she comes before him for an interview. On becoming emotional one can comprehend his feelings as:

Ramani looked after her and mediated. What a delightful perfume even after she was gone. (Narayan, 1938:73)

Listening Shanta Bai’s domestic disharmony Ramani feels sympathetic to her. In order to win Shanta Bai, Ramani expresses his anger for Shantabai’s husband for ill-treating her. Ramani, forever feels compassionate for Shantabai, but shows anger and rudeness towards his wife children and the servants. Being careless, he does not bother to observe the norms of conduct and does not bother for public opinions. No one marks him as an ideal husband, as expected in Hindu household.

The rustics often imagined as background characters are Mari and his wife Ponni who play individual roles in the novel. Mari resembles Ranga in ‘Swami and Friends’ who is the protector, and brings change in Savitri’s attitude regarding life. He, even though, is a man of low profession like burgling; he behaves more than an average character. Seeing, a lonely and beautiful woman Savitri at midnight, Mari instead of taking disadvantage of her, tenders all types of help to her and saves her life from drowning in the river Sarayu. He may be called a protective force. Even though a minor character, Mari may be considered as the ‘saviour of life’ and becomes ‘ficelle’. He also co-operates in getting a job for Savitri in a temple for her to earn without harbouring any evil thought in the mind. On the other hand, Ramani haunted by beauty of Shanta Bai and to twist her beauteous health employs her in his company.

Greatly affectionate and compliant husband, Mari behaves according to wish of his wife, Ponni. Her remark, “Poor man, he really works hard” (Narayan, 1938:192) shows intimacy between them. In her symbolic role Ponni stands a contrast to Savitri who knows the skill of treating a drunkard. Feeling thrilled she says: “I trip him up from behind and push him down, and sit on his back for a little while; he will wriggle a little, swear at me, and then sleep.” (Narayan, 1938:136-37) Ponni is a foil to Savitri.
Babu and his two younger sisters in ‘The Dark Room’ are ‘stock’ characters and ‘types’. The author displays childhood behaviour through these characters. The girl has fascination for the dolls and Babu likes cricket, and their interest in the story is the children’s world. The daughters, Kamala and Sumati, mainly focus on Savitri as the mother’s role who are involved in a dispute over trivial issues. Their mother’s life like a doll makes them feel excited. Narayan has contrasted Savitri’s happy and tentionless past life against her dull and sad life of the present. Coming back to her home, Savitri attempts to swallow her pride. Babu represents the male being. His refusal to be with the sisters and his realization as a male may remind of the role of adult which underlines Wordsworthian piquant saying ‘The child is the father of man’. The children are viewed symbolically.

### 2.5.4 The English Teacher

There is development of the central character in the early novels, from ‘Swami and Friends’ to ‘The English Teacher.’ Which is presented against the growth of of Malgudi. Narayan’s task is to shift his character from the world of innocence and ignorance to the world of experience and knowledge. (Gor, 2011:29) One may witness chronological account of experiences of an individual beginning from innocent adventures of childhood to the sorrow and wisdom of adult life. Hence, Swaminathan, Chandran and Krishnan are the three phases of human life—childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Chandran, the young graduate from Albert Mission College, in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ may be imagined, to have grown as Krishnan, the lecturer in English, in the same college, in ‘The English Teacher.’ (Iyengar, 1987:366-67)

The novel is ceaselessly confined to the domestic scene: the husband wife relationship which is harmonious and does not exist only in life, but also in death, or ‘life after death.’ (Biswal, 1987:38) It underlines philosophy of life and death. The title of the novel makes one realize that ‘The English Teacher’ is not the story of Krishnan, the individual but that of English Teacher. Krishnan is not a ‘type’ but an ‘individual.’ (Ramamurti, 46) who derives his individuality and identity as an English Teacher.
The profession of a teacher has one of the aspects of the setting influences and controls Krishnan’s thoughts, actions and consciousness. Krishnan views the vocation of the English teacher is not a profession but a way of life which is reflected when the protagonist speaks on his day in the college.

I was on the whole very pleased with my day—not many conflicts and worries above all not too much self-criticism. I had done almost all the things I wanted to do, and as a result I felt heroic and satisfied…but always leaving behind a sense of something missing. (Narayan, 1977:1)

Krishnan, the central character who is a lecturer in English in the Albert Mission College, Malgudi undergoes an emotional, intellectual and spiritual journey. The profession of the English teacher has shaped and moulded a personality of the teacher. Consequently, he is delighted with the days in the college and feels free from the conflicts, worries and self-criticism. The protagonist has accepted his position as a teacher of English and not as an occupation. Therefore, the first section of ‘The English Teacher’ is confined to the narrator’s Lamb-like self analysis, and to his reflections on his life as an English Teacher.

The term “English Teacher” hints definite characteristics of personality and social status. To be an ‘English teacher’ is an experience of unique value in the Indian society. The awareness of this status dominates and shapes all the thoughts, actions of the protagonist- narrator and lends significance, meaning and continuity to the story of his life.

Krishan, the English teacher is the centre of consciousness and the work of art. Narayan has reflected narrator’s nostalgia for his profession and disillusionment with the teaching “Shakespeare and Elizabethan metre and Romantic Poerty.” All this makes one realize that the experience Krishnan meets with in life is coloured by an inner life which is that of an ‘English Teacher’. The entire attitude of Krishanan to life and death is continuously influenced and shaped by a deep inner life which is full of Shakespeares and Wordsworths.
As a social reformer, Krishnan, desires a vigorous change in the Malgudi society. The work of the teacher of English is to fight for putting a new life and spirit in the society which has strong belief in blind faith and and customs. ‘Most of the Indians were self-assured victims of superstitions, social evils and complacency’. (Singh, 1977:56)

Krishnan the opposite counterpart of Ramani is presented as the responsible and devoted husband to his wife Susila in ‘The English Teacher’. The young man Krishnan respects the emotions of Susila who is submissive to him in all respects. Krishnan is represented as a traditional husband who cares for his wife’s feelings. There is a sense of happiness and mutual understanding between them. “He is so devoted to his wife that even the tragic and untimely departure of his wife does not keep him apart from his wife.” (Singh 2002:138) It reflects traditional type of relationship in Malgudi.

Krishnan is exhausted by not his desires or ambitions but by the atmosphere of the British system of education where the thoughts and opinions of individual being are meaningless. Hence, his belief in sponteneity of thought and freedom of mind leads him to oppose the British education in Malgudi. ‘The change in Krishnan comes about not as a result of any grand plan or ambition, but as a result of his response to a series of challenging circumstances which rise once he begins to take steps away from the cloistered and protective environment of his school.’ (Panda, 2010:96) Predictable and ordered life of Krishnan at his school makes him feel, he lived ‘like a cow’ and had continuous ‘sense of something missing. (Narayan, 1945:295)

Krishnan’s pupil writes a word ‘honour’ without the ‘u’ reflects students’s disinterest in education. The news that his wife and child, the sources of Krishnan’s happy domestic life is coming to join him seems to be the reason for his moving out of his lodging at the hostel and begins to search a house for them. These reflect Krishnan’s journey out of cloistered world of the school and into the real world of ordinary people leading ordinary lives. He thinks study of literature and philosophy is not useful in practical life of traditional Malgudi. Krishnan’s journey of experience helps him to come out of illusions.
Narayan represents Krishnan as a careful and loving father. He symbolizes typical Indian fatherhood. Everything is looked at from the point of view of little Leela. The greatest worry of Krishnan is to take down the child from the train in time. When they are in search of a rented house, the main focus is that their daughter Leela should have plenty of room for play. Krishnan opines that the quarrel between husband and wife should not take place before the child which leaves bad effect on the child’s health. Seeing that the houses look alike, Susila comments: “The child will lose her way not knowing which her house is?” (Narayan, 1945:30) All these instances reflect clearly that domestic harmony and ‘parent-child’ relationships are prominently observed in Indian families. Krishnan’s saying to his wife ‘I will call you jasmine hereafter’ underlines tasting the joy of young love.

The death of Susila disturbs harmony of the house and enables Krishnan to establish a psychical contact with the spirit. The death of Susila in the first half and her ‘resurrection’in the second: Paradise Lost is being followed by Paradise Regained. (Iyengar, 1987:290) The relationship between Krishnan and Susila is the basis of the philosophical understanding of life as well as death.

On the eve of farewell party Krishnan returns home with a garland of Jasmine (Narayan, 1945:114) ‘the symbol of life’. In sleep he perceives the dead Susila sitting on his bed. The flower of Jasmine which incorporated Krishnan’s life stands for Susila’s ‘sweetness’, ‘innocence’ and love and by calling her Jasmine he discovers inspiration. Jasmine is symbol of life. It also symbolizes immortality of life, rememberance of lovely feelings and recollection of past time. It also brings frangrance of another world in the life of a person. ‘I felt like calling her Jasmine once again.’ (Narayan, 1945:213) Illustrating ‘the acceptance of life’ in ‘The English Teacher’, Venktachari observes:

The dawn that Krishnan watches in the company of Susila signifies the end of the long night of his travel and his emergence into the light of spirtual enlightment, since according to Susila the soul is greatest ecstasy in feeling, ‘the Divine Light’ flooding us. (Venkatchari, 1970:77)
Even though, Susila loses in the flesh, Krishnan fetches her from the heaven to stay with him forever on account of platonic love. The promise of psychic communication persuades self-realisation in him. Krishnan’s way of communication helps him to maintain his health. Body and mind are the related concepts which remind of Swami Vivekananda’s dictum ‘sound mind in the sound body.’ The psychic contact also gives peace to Krishnan’s mind, he is not able to get from any other sources.

Krishnan’s reunion with his wife achieves his spiritual rebirth, which is strongly believed by the Indians. It also resumes an active life which may be termed as re-enactment i.e. ‘lila.’ Krishnan’s attempt to create a psychical contact with the spirit of his dead wife, suggests immortality of the soul. Susila relates the mythical story of Savitri who makes efforts to win back her Satyavan from the God of Death, ‘Yama.’ (Asnani, 1982:23) It shows how the life of Krishnan is completely shaped by the Indian legends.

Krishnan, the young, ardent, self-deprecating is a complex and well-developed character, whose communication with the spirit does not seem incredible but his experiences as a college lecturer and search for self-development through psychic practices convert into his spiritual maturity.

He is, in fact, Narayan’s first study in three-dimensional characterisation. Krishnan’s tragedy is the tragedy of personal loss and loneliness. He suffers but survives the ordeal through courage, patience and devotion. Partial success in his attempts to communicate with the spirit of his dead wife gives him what he needs most: peace and harmony. (Mukerji, 1969:81)

One may witness Krishnan’s quest for a positive philosophy of life and attainment of spiritual maturity. (Singh, 2010:27) Between despair and hope of seeking the meaning of existence Krishnan comes to the thought of loneliness and accepts existence as the law of life. In this situation he consents to depart with Leela who seems to be considered as the only source of emotional stability in the absence of his wife Susila. Everybody has to go through the last stage of life i.e. death which is unavoidable.
Human beings come together in different forms. The following statement rightly focuses on the ultimate truth of life:

Wife, child, brother, parents, friends...we come together only to go apart again. They move away from us as we move away from them. The law of life can’t be avoided. (Narayan, 1977:203)

The second part of ‘The English Teacher’ is about planchettes and ghost-writing. ‘The spiritual we appreciate because after all that is India’s speciality.’ (Prabhakar, 1995:55) Narayan deals with the superstitions in Indian society. Swami’s mother fears the curse of a sanyasi or Chandran’s parent’s believe in stars and horoscope or Susilas’ belief in “Evil Eye” or headmaster’s belief in “astrologer’s report” or Krishnan’s belief in “Ghost” are the illustrations of Indian’s faith in supernatural element.

As I passed the school, I saw him standing at the school gate. “Ghost”, Ghost”, I muttered to myself.” I never heard of a ghost being seen by morning light. (Narayan, 1945:189)

‘The English Teacher’ is the centre of consciousness and the narration is filtered and coloured by his sensibility. This sensibility also prepares him for a graceful acceptance of death as another state of existence as life. The English teacher realizes the presence of the ethereal in the earthly and the earthly in the ethereal, of death in life and life in death. He is born and brought up in “the Hindu tradition of Maya and illusion”. (Ramamurti, p.50) On account of the English teacher’s involvement in the study and teaching of English literature he traverses what H.C.Harrex calls “a recognizable Vedantic path to self-hood” (Harrex, op. cit., P.63) The academic life of an English teacher turns out to be an illusion but in that manifesting illusion reality exists.

‘The English Teacher’ is a fine peep into “a little middle class home and the comic irony of the pretty problems of the daily business the living” (Naik, 1983:23) which highlights the plight and predicament of a common house wife in Indian family. Susila is an epitome of the classical ideal of womanhood stated by Kalidas:
Grihini sacicvah sakhi mithah Priya-sisya lalite Ka lavidhau. (You are my beloved wife, a counselor, a playful companion and a dear pupil in all the arts. (VIII: 67)

The wife of Krishnan, Susila possesses the inherent qualities, which are distinctively shown in the novel. The replica of a devotional Hindu wife, she loves her husband sincerely and often awaits his arrival from the college after 4.30. An obedient wife Susila has “picked up many sensible points in cooking and household economy” (Narayan, 1945:39) She is called the cash-keeper of Krishnan and draws up monthly budget with a remarkable accuracy. “In her hands, a hundred rupees seemed to do the work of two hundred, and all through the month she was able to give me money when I asked (Narayan, 1945:39) Krishnan and Susila do not have prejudices in their minds. One may underline their union of souls even after Susila’s death. They do not interrogate individuality, pride and ego. Their lofty nature mirrors their energetic relationship.

Susila realizes that a girl is a liability for the parents of the Hindu society and their worry is her marriage. She saves money for their daughter’s marriage and she does not want to trouble other people in their old age. Krishnan agrees with his wife’s views regarding their daughter and their old age. Susila, representing every mother of the Indian society, worries for the wedding of her daughter, Leela.

Krishnan’s daughter, Leela in ‘The English Teacher’ grows under the care of her father, Krishnan after her mother’s death. The questions, she asks ‘father, why is the door shut?’ ‘Is she alone?’(Narayan, 1945:113) are innocent and Leela, innocently accepts the answers like ‘mother is given a bath.’(Narayan, 1945:113) When she asks the story teller ‘Oh! What will you do then’: indicates that Leela looks more mature at this stage. The interaction between them shows relationship between father and daughter. By telling the truth about his wife’s death Krishnan does not want to create storm of unhappiness in his daughter’s life.

The motherless child, Leela forces Krishnan to join the headmaster’s ‘Leave Them Alone School’ and enjoy pleasure in the midst of the children, who seems to play the
catalyst in the life of Krishnan. It underlines Leela as a careful daughter. She is the only friend in his life. Leela is the only source of stability for Krishnan since the death of his wife, who teaches him, even corrects him. She behaves like an adult and lives up to the truth of the epigram: The child is father of the man.

Krishnan’s mother and his mother-in-law represent various manners of South Indian Hindu community. They are presented as the traditional women of Malgudi society by R.K.Narayan. Both of them are ardent followers of Indian traditions and customs. The decoration of the threshold with green mango leaves and the floor and doorway with white flour designs by Krishnan’s mother shows how Susila is given a warm welcome in a typical Hindu style. Before permitting them to get down from the carriage she moves a pan of vermilion in circles in front of Susila and her daughter Leela. The mother in law of Krishnan in order to show respect for a son-in-law does not present herself before him and speak. It reflects old tradition of Hindu family where the parents from the daughter’s side always display obedient and polite conduct. The mother of the girl covers her face with saree while moving around in the son-in-law’s house, which indicates respect for son-in-law.

2.6 WORLD-VIEW

Any work of art, produced by the artist consists of his views on life. It expresses thoughts and feelings which are formed by economic, social, cultural and ideological perspectives. The world-view permeates the characters, events, images and general mode of expression. It is not irrelevant disconnected matter and cannot be separated from entirety of structure. The abundance and intricacy of literary work expresses richness and complexity of social relationships. As a story-teller Narayan depicts ordinary events which have taken place in the life of characters in Malgudi. They are simple and amusing. The actions and reactions of Malgudians disturb harmony in the society for a temporary period but the normal order is restored again by their return to the society.

The power of knowledge is the consciousness of the author. There is perfect blending of characters, events, images and special quality of world view in the work of the mature artist. Narayan’s art is a perfect fusion of the constituent factors in which the
positive attitude emerges due to artistic assimilation of all the ingredients in a work of art. It all enforces to give direct and artistic expression of thought and feelings. The events and images that he creates are inseparable from the form.

R. K. Narayan’s fiction is a strange drama staged through Malgudi in which all types of human relationships such as the husband and the wife, the lover and the beloved, the father and the mother and the son are enacted skillfully. The socio-economic impact on these relationships is underlined. The fictional town Malgudi, the literary creation by the novelist, R.K.Narayan has more than geographical, regional and national implications. The place, Malgudi has implicit universal appeal because what happens in Malgudi happens in the world. Mischievous Swami and his chums, love-haunters Chandran, Krishnan, Ramani, and Raju, rouguish Sampath, simple minded Srinivas, a passionate Ramani, an emotional Sriram and money maker Margayya are seen anywhere in the world.

The women characters presented by Narayan in his fiction like Savitri; submissive and devotional wife, glamorous Shanta Bai, the cash-keeper and intelligent Susila, a passionate Rosie, modern Grace, self-centred Daisy and Granny, are seen everywhere in the society in India. The psychological behaviour of the characters is projected by the novelist through their deeds at various situations. In order to understand the psyche of his characters Narayan gives liveliness and authenticity to his characters.

The preoccupation with the middle class world which is least affected by social upheavals in the novels of Narayan cannot be ignored. Human relations have been affected by changes in social attitudes and values and Narayan in his novels portrays these changes transforming human relations and human world. Realities in the world of Narayan change fast but human beings do not. Consequently, man battles within and without is rarely reflected in Narayan. He strongly believes that human beings are changeless, change becomes illusory and his world is static. To him, human beings remain like statues, and unmoving in the changing reality. There is no understanding between man and his circumstances. Inability of searching the potentialities within a situation is Narayan’s another world-view. No human being makes efforts to change the course of life or struggles against his fate. Narayan’s men and women accept the
circumstances in which they exist or at the most, they retreat or withdraw. In case they act against, very soon desire to accept status quo by ceasing the efforts.

2.6.1 Swami and Friends
Narayan’s presentation of child-life communicates his comprehension of child psychology. It also reminds of Dickens’s child character Pip in ‘The Great Expectations’ who narrates his visit to Miss Havisham. Likewise, Swami attempts to leave an impression of Rajam on his Granny. The schoolboy mind is the same everywhere. ‘Swami and Friends’ reminds British school life in ‘Tom Brown’s School Days’. The banks of Avon and Sarayu are the same and their role in the narration of both the novels is symbolic and not invisible.

Narayan offers chain of episodes in ‘Swami and Friends’ but there is no agreement of form and meaning. The action in this novel has been surveyed through the eyes of school boys as insiders. The adults act as observers. The boyhood has been elaborated by the novelist which is free from sentimental expression and inner meaning. ‘Swami and Friends’ is a result of series of loose episodes but the novelist is interested in telling the story. Narayan’s use of myth shows that it forms the inner structure of the novel. Swami’s Granny relates the story of Rajam’s bravery to the story of Harishchandra who lost his power as the king for the purpose of truth.

‘Swami and Friends’ is a sociological study of different stages of school life during pre-independence. It focuses on reality that how the Christian teachers were interested in converting their students into Christians. Swaminathan’s school life in English ruled atmosphere and teacher’s behaviour with students and their attitude towards the Hindu Gods are the causes of Swami’s rebellious deeds.

In ‘Swami and Friends’, Narayan chooses material from middle-class family life of South Indian town, Malgudi. The attitudes and reactions to life are recorded through events and actions. The characters in this novel keep themselves away from any crisis. The novel is a simple story of a schoolboy, Swaminathan and his chums who are involved in the activities within the Muncipal limits of Malgudi. The novelist portrays the story through the events of a cricket match. They are the ordinary school boys and
try to win attention of the readers and move in the course of life from innocence to maturity. They do everything within religious and social frame work of Malgudi.

Tradition plays significant role in the formation of human relationship and the act of deviation from the tradition invites misery. The relationships portrayed by Narayan between father and son, mother and son, husband and wife, the lover and beloved, and between man to man have originated from the Indian tradition. Swaminathan’s mother who represents Indian motherhood is sensible and careful. When Swami suffers from fever his mother says ‘There in no better thermometer than my hand. (Narayan, 1935: 132) She feels very sad when Swami goes out of sight. Hence, relationship between Swami and his mother entirely appeals to the emotions. The relationship between Swaminathan and his father is as the Indian fathers have. It is not a complex relationship. Swaminathan’s father, cautious and careful, always thinks about his son’s better future. He feels anxiety when Swami’s returning to the house fails after the evening. It indicates that there is emotional intimacy between Swaminathan and his father.

The theme of illusion against reality is emphasized by focusing on the technique of rebellion. It is considered as the protagonist’s deviation from the reality and moving towards the world of illusion. The novelist skilfully underlines the rebellion through the cyclical pattern which is used as the strategy in the protagonist’s development. The theme, the return of the native is also influenced by the traditional values which may be termed as the defensive and shielding force.

Swaminathan’s act of rebellion is presented in his illusions which are mainly created by the influences of his friends, Mani and Rajam. Turning from reality Swaminathan has started to live in the world of illusion. He understands the reality about his life by experiencing a journey through Mempi forest and goes back to the normal state of mind. The use of the device ‘rite de passage’ is reflected in the development of Swami.

Understanding psyche of his characters R. K. Narayan gives psychological implications of human beings in ‘Swami and Friends’. He presents inner motives and
inner happenings in the minds of the characters. Their emotions, feelings, thoughts about pleasure, unhappiness, morality and immorality are true to their nature.

2.6.2 The Bachelor of Arts

R. K. Narayan has reflected the theme of illusion versus reality in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ to show the philosophy of acceptance. Chandran’s love for Malathi shows the illusory aspect of life and his ‘Sanyasa’. Narayan’s traditional concept of man-woman relationship does not allow the idea of love before marriage. Chandran is called a traditional rebel. His acts of smoking, love show the modern influence on him but he remains a traditional Malgudi boy. Narayan’s handling of the strategy ‘rite de passage’ suggests realization of deviation of traditional marriage system. Finally, Chandran returns to Malgudi and settles in life by accepting traditional method of marriage. The theme like illusion versus reality, conflict between tradition and modernity and innocence versus experience are underlined in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’.

The relationship between Chandran and his father is smooth and simple. Chandran’s father takes interest in his son as the Indian fathers do. There is harmony in their relationship in the beginning but it takes a different turn when Chandran desires to marry Malathi which leads to the theme order-disorder and restoration of normalcy. Chandran’s father does not want to violate Indian tradition and social norms. Hence, he waits for the proposal from the bride’s side. Chandran in order to maintain his individuality does not want individuality, does not want interference of his father with his life style. Even though Chandran revolts against the age old traditions he does not like to challenge his father’s authority as some Indian sons wish. Lastly realizing his folly Chandran returns to his father’s house and settles in his life. He marries the girl of his parent’s choice. Chandran’s revolt against the Indian tradition is temporary and not permanent.

The love at first sight is the main cause of Chandran and Malathi love relationship on the banks of Sarayu. The orthodox and traditional set up of Malgudi restricts Chandran’s life. He is not allowed to talk to Malathi freely. His choice of bride is made limited and his fortune is decided by the traditional norms of Malgudi. Giving more prominence to emotion Chandran decides to marry Malathi by violating Malgudi tradition. Malgudi tradition prevents Chandran’s father from consulting Malathi’s
father for his son’s marriage with Malathi. Hence, Chandran’s emotions and passions become less important than the strong pressure of traditional values of Malgudi. This is how the novelist handles the theme of conflict between tradition and modernity. Born and brought up in Malgudi traditional set up of family Chandran obediently marries Susila. The failure of Chandran’s marriage with Malathi cannot be compensated by Chandran’s marriage with Susila. It may be considered as the continuity of human relationships and acceptance of the social norms.

In ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ society is traditional in its attitudes. Fear of family, importance of horoscope, dowry in thousands, rituals and rites in marriages, are all examples of orthodox nature of the society. Chandran, whose life is affected by traditional values, thinks of fighting against them, gives up, withdraws and accepts philosophy:

Love and Friendship were variest illusions. People married because their sexual appetite had to be satisfied and there must be somebody to manage the house. There was nothing deeper than that in any man and woman relationship. (Narayan, 1937:123)

The common Indian attitude of faith in fate has been brought into prominence by R.K. Narayan in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’. He also tries to show through the episode of marriage proposal the Indian belief in astrology. The basic intention of the novelist is to focus on the marriage system in India particularly in the Hindu household. The youngsters have no free choice of emotional relationship but it is encircled by the fate and astrology. The choice of life partnership is also decided by the astrologer. R.K. Narayan agrees with the view that free communication between a boy and a girl before marriage is not possible. The society believes that marriage is a matter of fate only. According to the novelist marriage without consulting the astrologer brings despair in the future life of husband and wife.

It is philosophically brought out that the orthodox view of life and unexpected experience of “Sanyasa” are not practically appropriate. His renunciation neither obtains for him strongly felt understanding nor yields a radical view of the world. He viewed, his renunciation “was a revenge on society, circumstances, and perhaps, too
on destiny.” (Narayan, 1937:108) The crisis in his life is temporary, when every thing else has failed he returns to normalcy. The reality remains static and values of life do not change. The external things do not bring about a change. Hence he said:

Everywhere, there seemed to be change. Change, change every where. Chandran hated it. (Narayan, 1937:122)

The end in ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ is optimistic and the novel conveys the message that life is a ceaseless flow despite hurdles. Chandran in the beginning of his youth had been upset because of failure of marriage with Malathi but in the end by accepting social norms of Malgudi he settles in his life by marrying Susila and becoming the Chief Agent of ‘The Daily Messenger’ of Madras. His mind is full of his wife, Susila the fragrance of Jasmine. Chandran is able to lead his life happily when he conquers the sentimentalism which tortures his life.

2.6.3 The Dark Room

The Dark Room is a social document which illustrates Indian domestic atmosphere where the husband plays the role of a master and the wife of an obedient and submissive dependent. It also throws light on the typical Indian attitude of life. Narayan rightly shows that women in Indian household are economically very helpless. According to him it is most prominent reason for their economic and social exploitation. The novelist in ‘The Dark Room’ draws the attention of the readers on the relationship between the husband and wife and their emotions and feelings.

The husband-wife relationship is guided and shaped by Indian social norms and values. The best examples are found in the myths which have become sources of inspiration from generation to generation. They are Rama and Sita, Krishna and Rukmini, Harishchandra and Taramati. R.K. Narayan treats husband and wife relationship as one of the significant themes in ‘The Dark Room’. Savitri, Ramani’s wife represents the devoted wife according to Indian myth and legends. The relationship between Ramani and his wife Savitri and Marco and Rosie is based on traditional values. The love relationship between Ramani and Shantabai is against the tradition of Malgudi but that creates havoc in the husband wife relationship.
Savitri’s attitude towards her husband as the traditional Indian wife and her submissive nature are challenged by Ramani’s immoral relationship with Shanta Bai who is typical product of Western civilization. By presenting the character of Shanta Bai in the domestic panorama of Ramani and Savitri Narayan poses a question to challenge stereotyped ideals of Indian society regarding husband wife set up. Savitri is economically dependent and in contrast to her. Shantabai enjoys economic independence.

Savitri’s attempt of leaving the house and committing suicide reflects her deviation as she gets psychologically disturbed. Savitri’s rebellion shows middle class psychology. Realizing the fact that she cannot live without her home and children Savitri returns home. It suggests Narayan’s philosophy of acceptance and theme: the return of the native. Through the character of Savitri Narayan presents the Indian womanhood.

‘The Dark Room’ is about a deviation and focuses on the central theme of a conflict between an individual and his society. It has some resemblance with ‘A Doll’s House’ in which the heroine, Nora tries to get freedom and to establish her identity in the society. ‘The Dark Room’ deals with the tension and tragedy of a woman who tries to gain freedom in a male dominated society.

A traditional wife, Savitri plays a triple role: a daughter, a wife and a mother. Ramani, a typical husband, feels happy with Savitri, who played traditional role faithfully and acted “like some of the women in our ancient times.” (Narayan, 1938:13) Given secondary role to the women in the Indian household they are treated as inferior to the men. At the different stages of life women are called baby-dolls, doll-wives, doll-mothers and doll-grand mothers. They are puppets in the hands of male beings in different authority. They have no voice in the domestic and financial matters. Their opinions are not taken into consideration in any decision.

The study of Indian household in ‘The Dark Room’ is made from sociological point of view. Narayan dramatises the typical attitude of life where husband is lord and wife an obedient and meek dependent. Women in every society are economically so helpless that they have to depend either on their husbands or children. Consequently, they are not able to deal with life independently. They are strictly prohibited from
establishing their independent identity. The novelist has presented pathetic life of an Indian housewife in ‘The Dark Room’. The novel calls up the sense of tragedy and invites sympathy of the readers. Ramani’s illegitimate relationship with an employed woman Shanta Bai does not allow security of life to Savitri. She compares a married woman with a prostitute and tells the difference that; “The prostitute changes her men but married woman does not, that’s all; but both earn their food and shelter in the same manner”. (Narayan, 1938:80) Realising that she is unable to fight against it she tries to adjust herself with the situation.

The social limitations imposed by the society on Savitri are responsible for her defeat. Her caste and generic class act together against her. The first ascribes woman a role of a slave and the second the role of a pet animal. Feudalism made women slaves and capitalism made them prostitutes. The end of Savitri’s rebellion is tragic. Women do not expect change in male dominated Hindu society. Her drama of sad happening begins when she returns to her house. Savitri realizes that she has not achieved freedom to do what she wanted: “Let him go, don’t call him”, she thought: why should I call him here? What have I?” (Narayan, 1938:13) Savitri desires earnestly liberation from oppressive culture by violating the traditional view of a Hindu wife but in vain.

Ramani is not a traditional Hindu husband because tradition does not allow to look upon the wife as ‘my pet’ or a ‘child’. He is a product of a typical new social structure which has rested on smooth attractive values brought about by commercial culture. The attitude of Ramani is revealing when he takes Savitri to the ‘Palace Talkies’ and occupies the first class seat with her. Expressions on his face show gratification for having such a beautiful wife. His sense of satisfaction reaches the peak when audience in the theatre looks at her. It is not a typical attitude of a traditional Hindu husband but of the executive and urban climbers who estimate their cultural position by an individual possession.

The Malgudi careerist, Ramani achieves pride and ideal of materialistic society and seeks egoistic nature via prosperity in career. Raman’s status is considered by his official position and income still he remains irrefutable at home and outside. His lewd life has lost traditional controls and the spirit of comprehension of values. Being
a creation of modernity, Ramani is obsessed with ruthless and egoistic thoughts and has idealized himself by mercantile culture. The people around him at office and at home feel afraid of him only because of his strength of authority and not of character which he lacks.

He views his wife as a ‘plaything’. Calling her ‘my pet’ ‘a child’, Ramani beats his children and creates feelings of fear in them. Ramani is of the view that his wife should not look down upon him as a low class man even though he considers immoral contacts as something special. This type of relationship is not expected from his superior class consciousness. In contrast to this, Mari has respect for his wife though he belongs to low cast category.

The character of Ramani is being presented as the middle-class husband who every now and then is haunted by ego. The crisis, Savitri undergoes has its origin in the middle-class culture. The woman, in middle-class family runs after security of the social framework. Criticising unpleasant situation of the modern woman, Simon de Beauur says:

The middle-class woman clung to her claims because she clung to the privileges of her class. Freed from the male, she would have to work for a living; she felt no solidarity with working women, and she believed that emancipation of bourgeois women would mean the ruin of her class. (Beauvoir, 1981:142)

Financially, the middle-class woman depended on her husband. Knowing her parasitic role, Savitri does not step forward to face the realities on her own. She on one hand experiences the consolation in the caged life, on the other hand, she struggles to keep intact middle-class image of an ideal womanhood from which she is unable to escape. Betty Freidan explains resultant despair in the words:

It is the growing despair of women who have forfeited their own existence, although by doing so they may also have evaded that lonely, frightened feeling that always comes with fear. (Freidan, 1963:270)
Between the options of slavery and security, fear and freedom, Savitri like other Indian women chooses to exercise slavery and security. Consequently, her rebellion collapses very soon. The novelist, Narayan can search out new possibilities of life as it could be possible for Savitri to search out some emerging latent. But the middle-class mind is so deeply rooted in the thought of security and anxiety that no such exploration can be possible.

The writer keenly makes efforts to show critical situation of a modern Indian woman in ‘The Dark Room’ who is liberated by the middle class values to understand that her existence needs complete freedom, which is absolutely not possible in reality. If Savitri has continued her rebellion and achieves freedom or had died in her toil to arrive at liberation it would have become meaningful.

Narayan is tormented between slavery of a middle-class Hindu woman and his affection for the traditional middle-class Hindu family. Eventually, the only option to Savitri remains the tragic acceptance of the ‘Status quo’. The writer can enjoy his freedom of revealing his social ideology in ‘The Dark Room’ but he meets with incongruity that he cannot resolve.

Narayan adheres to be more traditionally Indian. Minaskshi Mukherjee points out that “the action in Narayan’s fiction is often seen as a mistake or unreality”. The world view that appears from, such an attitude is static and inclines to be superficial. V.Y. Kantak finds fault with Narayan for his inability “to explore a more tragical possibility of the situation” (Kantak, 1970) but such exploration suggests attitudinal change. But for Narayan change is an illusion.

2.6.4 The English Teacher
‘The English Teacher’ appeared seven years after his last novel ‘The Dark Room’, in evidently unbroken succession with ‘Swami and Friends’ and ‘The Bachelor of Arts’. The novelist clearly states his world view through his characters and their proceedings rather than situations and movements. The relationship between husband and wife is based on philosophy of life and death which gives deep insight on existence and opens new vision about human relations.
The husband wife relationship has lot of value because it influences people in the family and events occurring in their life. In order to avoid dispute between them mutual devotion to each other becomes a great need. R. K. Narayan studies relationship between husband and wife from the frame work of Indian tradition. The tradition of this relationship is sublime. Both husband and wife are given equal rights. But those who violate the traditional norms have to undergo sufferings in their life. There is no second marriage or and interfering of the second woman which invites conflicts in the husband wife relationship.

Narayan is chiefly preoccupied with the link between life and death in ‘The English Teacher’. The social setting is replaced by a spiritual setting since the novel deals with ‘Life Beyond’. Krishnan has little connection with social life and finds happiness in his small world of friends and family. When Krishnan’s mother moves to help him and his daughter he considers:

As I looked at her, warm and throbbing with life and enquiries, it seemed for a moment a sense of security, the solid factors of life, and its warmth and interest (Narayan, 1945:197).

The novels of R.K.Narayan manifest a sense of security, which is a steady family framework. To him, the ideal of life is the shaping of harmony from the traditional deeds assigned to men and women. Krishna’s sense of duty to his wife and daughter is always underlined in his conversation with fellow persons. This sense of affection creates attitude of security among the middle class people. As the traditional Indian husband he takes care of his wife during her illness. Krishnan’s advice to his wife about his daughter and his search for a room according to needs of his daughter present him as the loving Indian father. Krishnan is presented as the traditional husband who devotes his life for welfare of his wife. Susila runs her house economically with domestic understandings. Krishnan is realized as the careful and loving husband and father.

The husband and wife relationship between Krishnan and Susila in ‘The English Teacher’ stands noble because they live together on the basis of realities of human existence. Understanding between them and respect for each other which are expected
in the Indian traditional norms are at the root of their communication even after Susila’s untimely death. The spiritual and emotional attachment between Krishnan and Susila contributes him to establish contact with spirit of dead wife. It shows Krishnan’s attempt of restoring psychological balance of mind.

The present novel emphasizes meeting between Krishnan and Susila. The communion with the other world is an extraordinary experience. R. K. Narayan presents philosophical thought on life and death through the portrayal of husband wife relationship. Susila is not alive physically but her soul is immortal. Psychic experience is given importance by the novelist. Krishnan’s communion with the spirit of his dead wife is true affair which has spiritual base according to the law of life in the Hindu religion. There is no question of individuality, pride and ego in their relationship. Explaining human realities of life A. V. Rao says “Their life is free from personal prejudices and self consciousness; they exemplify union in this life as well as in life after death”. (Rao, 1907) Krishnan’s encounter with Susila and his resignation of service are not related to each other. He explains in his fare well:

I am seeking a great inner peace. I find I can’t attain it unless I withdraw from the adult world and adult work into the world of children. And, there, let me assure you, is a vast store-house of peace and harmony. (Narayan, 1945)

This declaration does not show any social or national cause behind the resignation but an attainment of inner peace. The scene of loneliness casts it shadow on his life. The philosophy of withdrawl makes Krishnan to feel that londliness is truth and community is illusion. Every human being is solitary and not social in a natural sense of life. The death of Susila teaches Krishnan a lesson of importance of loneliness which has no other alternative in the life of human being. The law of life cannot be avoided. One has to accept death as one has to accept the birth. The fate and chance are the powerful agents who come together and play the role of devil in their harmonious husband-wife realtionship. They have destroyed relationship by taking Susila away from the life of Krishnan. Krishnan profoundly says:
Life, child, brothers, parents, and friends...we come together only to go apart again. It is one continuous movement. The law of life can’t be avoided... All struggles and misery in life are due to our attempt to arrest this law or to get away from it or in allowing ourselves to be hurt by it. The fact must be recognized, a profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life. All else is false....No sense in battling against it. (Narayan, 1945:203)

The most striking fact is that Krishnan could spiritualize his suffering but could not socialize it. The mind of Krishnan is profoundly rooted in that middle class view of life. He feels renunciation is the redress for suffering and not opposition. Krishnan thinks while returning from Susila’s cremation:

Flames appear over the wall...There are no more surprises and shocks in life, so that I watch the flame without agitation. For me the greatest reality is this and nothing else....Nothing else will worry on interest me in life hereafter. (Narayan, 1945:107)

Even though, Krishnan’s speech regarding life is indistinct, it suggests that man is unaffected by anything in the practical world, the world of change. Unwillingness for change, a distinct feature of Narayan’s characters is noticeable in Krishnan which is provided by either the novelist or his own class.

Krishnan’s resignation as the teacher in the British school and joining the headmaster’s ‘Leave Them Alone’ school is considered as his spiritual rebellion which indicates his dissatisfaction with the colonial education system. The system does not have relevance to the Indian students. Narayan’s positive rebellion emphasizes positive philosophy. Krishnan’s rebellion is enhanced through his choice of the course of selflessness and his concern with human beings. His noble attitude is taken as the pride in the Malgudi world.

The pairs like Ramani and Savitri, Marco and Rosie do not have devotion, respect and dedication to each other. There is question of individuality and independence in their relationships. There is no harmony in the relationship between the headmaster and his
wife. Depression and unhappiness in their domestic life are against the relationship between husband and wife of Malgudi tradition.

The novels of early period, ‘Swami and Friends’ ‘The Bachelor of Arts’ and ‘The English Teacher’ complete a circle from innocence to experience and from experience to innocence again. Chandran obtains worldly experience which gives him a new philosophy of life. Krishnan, at last steps in the world of innocence by beginning a school for children. Instead of accepting reality based on experience, he dares to reject it in favour of a higher level of spiritual experience.

The world view that flows from the three novels can be considered as a whole in continuation and suggests a rejection of worldly reality in the preference of a higher spiritual consciousness. Narayan believes that human nature is unchangeable. The novel mirrors human relations and human consciousness. The ideology of the author that shapes the experience is a sign of the consciousness of his class and his social group. It was torn between a will for change and lack of ability to act for it.