An analysis of Narayan’s characters would reveal a definite journey of the self from innocence to experience and then to wisdom. There is a movement towards ‘ripeness life again gets reunited to its moorings. Swami matures from the sensuous delight of his childhood years to a sort of metaphysical awareness in The English Teacher, as much as Raju matures from his adolescent recklessness to a transcendental existence. The illusion are abandoned in course of time in favor of some ‘stabilizing factor of life’ (Mr. Sampath, p.138). Narayan’s characters are like caravans journeying along life’s varied experiences. Diverse facets of human nature are presented. At times the social order is threatened. But the comic always presupposes some stable social value against which the instincts and aberrations of individuals are focused their awkward postures. In spite of their frailties, there is an elemental simplicity about them. There is a sure human feel in the virtues as well as in the vices of the Malgudians.
What John palmer says about Shakespeare’s comic plays seems to hold good for Narayan’s novels also:

The appeal of his comic characters, even as we laugh at them, is to the touch of nature which makes the whole world kin. A delicate balance is constantly sustained in the person of the play between the folly which frailties of faults which lay them open to rebuke and a common humanity with ourselves which calls for charity and secures for them an immediate understanding.

All the human follies and idiosyncrasies are the visible manifestations of life, however, absurd or old these might appear. Natraj with his ‘original Heidelberg’, ‘Vasu with his pythons and carcasses’, Mail with his story-producing machine, the cousin with his listening capacity, the monosyllabic poet with his epic ‘Radhakalyan’, Sampath with his film ‘Burning of Kama’, Ravi with his vision of beauty, Jagaon with his philosophy and many other strange creatures crowd the stage of Malgudi. The countless frailties and fantasies of their existence are juxtaposed to project a sense of comic incongruity. They act and react as a result of which the harmony in which the various components of the society exist, gets disturbed. Of the erring individuals to the fold of the society. But in all their attempts, however, irrational these may be there is an intense throb of life which binds them to us in a shared
human situation enables us to accept them not with hatred, but with affection and sympathy.

Narayan’s moral stance makes his characters discard their jaundiced visions and realize the reality of things. Through frequent rise and fall. They move until their experiences culminate in wisdom. After many adventures and misadventures in life the characters return to the all-pervasive reality of Malgudi sadder and saner. And during this journey, Narayan observes the vast spectrum of life.

Swami and Friends The Bachelor of Arts and The English Teacher appear to constitute a trilogy that in-visages the journey of life from the tender, innocent existence of a child to the transcendental awareness of the Beyond. In successive stages of this journey Narayan brings his hero closer and closer to the point of Maturity.

The childhood pleasures in Swami and Friends and the adolescent emotions of The Bachelor of Arts are effectively caught with numerous comic details. But these are also punctuated with episodes of parting and loss, of trials and tribulations of life. All these experiences, through a process of encounter, interaction and mutual absorption lead to the final moment of the journey, a moment that discloses eternity
when, as Krishnan in *The English Teacher* declares, the past, present
and the future welded into one’. (p. 212).

*Swami and Friends* present not only an idyllic Malgudi and the
fun and play of its little inhabitants like Swami, Rajam, Mani and
Samuel but also a picture of a child gradually getting groomed to the
complex ways of life. Stage by stage Swami gets acquainted not only
with different schools, but with cricket and even politics. The flirtations
of Swami and his friends with politics and the exploits in cricket, their
innumerable adventures are rendered in vivid comic details. The
children’s world of innocence in *Swami and Friends* stands as contrast
to the adults’ world of wiles which has been more pointedly presented
in Narayan’s later novels. Here we can see the various activities and
feel the innocent minds of children. The comic vision is reflected in the
children’s simple ways of interaction with a world that is of far serious
dimensions. 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 panes in the schools. The
incongruity ensues from an interaction between the real world of
serious business and the children’s world of unadulterated pleasures.
For a moment the gravity of the freedom struggle give place to the play
of children’s impulses. Similarly the endless debate over the formation
of a cricket club, the M.C.C. (Malgudi Cricket Club) with an implicit reference to the world famous Marylebone Cricket Club, the letter to Messrs Binns and many such episodes speak of the children's innocent attempts to enact roles of an adult world. In all their activities and adventures, Swami and his friends quite unwittingly make a parody of the adult world.

But Narayan's intention is to bring Swami, through various stages of experience, to terms with reality. The fantasies of the earlier days gradually recede into the past and Swami moves to experience the first shock of reality in the parting of Rajam, his dearest friend. Swami already has had the full experiences of his childhood, its wonders and excitements. Now when he steps from childhood to adulthood, he needs to be first initiated into the workings of the world; he needs the first feel of some natural sorrow, loss or pain. In the pangs of separation from his friend Rajam, Swami moves away from the simple pleasures of his childhood years and comes one step closer to maturity.

Swami and Friends ends with this parting between Friends, marking the culmination of innocence reflected in children's lives. Logically enough, in the next novel, Narayan leads us along the corridor of time, to the years of youth. In the next move Swami
becomes Chandran, the adolescent youth of the college days. The first part of The Bachelor of Art provides a vivid account of the happy college life, just as the previous novel catalogued the sweet reminiscences of the school life. Here the character is blissfully ignorant of the various constrictions and compulsions of reality: Narayan’s task is to shift his character from the plane of innocence and ignorance to that experience and knowledge. That is why in Swami and Friends the character is made to suffer the first shock of the world in the experience of parting with his intimate Friend. In The Bachelors of Arts and The English Teacher, he is to be exposed to further shocks. Accordingly at the end of part one of The Bachelor of Arts Chandran bids Farewell not only to one friends, but to all his college friends. A chapter of life is turned over and he has to enter the portals of the wide world. Whereas Swami is aware of it only in simple, emotional terms, Chandran realizes it not only with an intensity of feeling, but also with a factual understanding of the ways of the world:

...Chandran was aware that he had passed the very last moments in his college life, which had filled the major portion of his waking hours for the last four years. There would be no more college for him from tomorrow. He would return to a fortnight hence for the examination and (hoping for the best) pass it, and
pass out into the world, for ever out of Albert college. He felt very tender and depressed. (p.51)

From this moment Chandran moves through a series of experiences till he gets himself finally reconciled to Malgudi. Out of the conservative background of Malgudi, and the assured comforts of home, Chandran makes forays into the outside world. He passes through infatuation and frustration and frustration, and comes to know the confusing ways of the world outside. His mind, nurtured by the moral values of an orthodox society, refuses to accept drinks and prostitutes in the metropolitan city of Madras. "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 portals of a prostitute's house. He was thoroughly terrified". (p.101) His contact with the outside world reveals to him the sham of things. Also no less sham is his brief spell of sanyasihood. Chandran's bewilderment in a world of strange forces. But in the comic design such predicament is viewed with fun and sympathy. Chandran returns to Malgudi discarding the illusions of his earlier days, because he realizes that for him his home and Malgudi are the inescapable realities which can comfort and caress.

And once these illusions of earlier days are abandoned, Chandran seriously decides to take up a vocation. In the struggle for existence he
realizes that dreams and fantasies have no place in this world of hard, down-to-earth facts. Subsequently a proposal for a trip to England is dropped, because it is nothing more than an usual 'vague desire' (p. 53) of an adolescent who has just passed his B.A stage after stage Chandran gets tuned to the ways of the world and learns to shoulder the responsibilities of life. The carefree life of his college days is a contrast to his mature businessman's attitude when he takes up the agency of the 'Daily Messenger'. His plan for the circulation of the paper seems almost like a military combing of the town with sharp precision, he is taken to marry and build his own home. Before he is made a full-fledged man of the world, he undergoes the various experiences of pleasures and partings, of human relationships in the real world, he realizes the temporality of all these, perhaps as a prelude to the spiritual lessons of his life.

Chandran roes from the gallery and stood. Looking at some group photos hanging on the wall. All your interests, joys, sorrows, hopes, contacts and experience boiled down to group, Chandran thought. You were the first and the last of your kind the college would ever see, and you ended as a group photo; and laughing, giggling fellows one saw about the union now little
knew that they would shortly be frozen into group photos.

(p.144)

This recognition of the transistorizes of things finds a more serious treatment in *The English Teacher* where the character moves out of the bounds of a temporal existence in order to build a bridge with the life beyond, on the plan of the Eternal. At the end of *The Bachelor of Arts* the character is led to the threshold of the domestic life. But in *The English Teacher*, he intimately experiences. It in the journey of life another stage is reached.

In *The English Teacher* Krishna is none other than Chandran of *The Bachelor of Arts*. He is just like his other friends who are lost in this wide world, entrapped by their own problems of existence. Chandran reflects nostalgically.

He met so few of his classmates, though. They had been two hundred strong for four years. Where were they? Scattered like spray. They were probably merchants, advocates, murderers, police inspectors, clerks, officers, and what not. Some must have gone to England, some married and had children, some turned agriculturists, dead and straving
and unemployed, all at grips with life, life a buffalo caught in the coils of a python....(p.145).

In The English Teacher, Krishnan obtains this same awareness. He is entangled in the vicious' grip with life' till he comes to the realm of spiritual experiences.

The English Teacher does not correspond to Narayan's comic design. The action is frequently confined to the domestic scene or more properly, to the husband-wife relationship. In Swami and Friends and in The Bachelor of Arts opportunities exist for the interaction of various discordant forces, for the display of the incongruity which is at the heart of the comic. But in The English Teacher, the harmonious relationship between characters are perceived as existing not only in life but also in death, or life after death.

Krishnan's ordeal of suffering brings him to the realization of the fundamental reality about existence. He reflects:

Wife, child, brothers, parents, friends . . . . . we come to-gether only to go apart again. It is one continuous movement. They
move away from us as we move away from them. The law of life can’t be avoided. The law comes into operation the moment we detach ourselves from our mother womb. All struggle and misery in life is due to our attempt to arrest this law or get away from it or In allowing ourselves to be hurt by it. This fact must be recognized. A profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life. All else is false. (p.203)

It sounds almost like the soliloquy of a tragic hero. Krishnan, after enacting assigned role on the mundane plane of existence feels the striving within:

I was in search of a harmonious existence and everything that disturbed that harmony was to be rigorously excluded, even my college work. (p.205)

And he feels,” I find I can’t attain it unless I withdraw from the adult world and adult work into the world of children”. (p.211)

The seriousness and the apparent efficacy of the adult world appeal futile in the face of the void of temporal human existence. The bliss of life can perhaps be attained only in the innocence of children. In
moving into the children's world, Krishna completes a full circle. While Raju has to go the hard way for his salvation, for Krishna, it seems an easier process, for he chooses an esoteric path the typical Indian way of occult. For Krishnan, it is more a readymade solution than the hard way of suffering and self-sacrifice. The episodes of the headmaster and his wife, and the small school of children are beautifully woven into this main plot. As the novel advances, not only does Krishna mature to a metaphysical awakening, but also the headmaster. Simultaneously the wife of the headmaster, who is little short of a shrew, has also been metamorphosed to 'a greatly chastened person.' (p.204)

From Swami and Friends to The English Teacher there is a distinct pattern of development as far as the central character is concerned. In spite of the various in names from novel, one can clearly perceive chronological account of experiences of individual beginning from the innocent fun of childhood to the sorrow and wisdom of adult life. Thus swami, Chandran and Krishnan are the three successive phases of an individual's life-childhood, adolescence and adulthood respectively. Further, there is a significant movement from the atmosphere of humour and fun towards a sense of pathos and redemption achieved through experiences that are apparently ridiculous and incongruous. It is a pattern that characterizes Narayan's fictional
world in novels like The Guide or The Financial Expert. It is in this sense that the three novels, Swami and Friends, Bachelor of Arts and The English Teacher may be considered as forming a trilogy.

In Mr. Sampath, the spiritual quest of Srinivas is almost identical with Krishna’s. In the early part of the novel, we find him preoccupied with the metaphysical problems:

Life and the world and all this is passing ------why bother about anything? The perfect and the imperfect are all the same. Why really bother? (p.30).

To attain the state of knowledge or equilibrium that can sustain his existence, Srinivas undergoes various experiences his existence, of events as in a phantasmagoria. He not only experiences events that happen to himself, but also all the events that happen to all others in the small town of Malgudi. During his travel he comes across many men and women who in unknown ways contribute to his understanding of the mystery as well as the reality of this world.

The problem of communication between the individual the community is a major concern with Narayan. ‘The Banner’, which has stopped its publication, resumes once again because it serves as a viable
medium of communication. 'The Banner' becomes a forum for calm contemplation for realizing experiences objectively in their real perspectives, when Srinivas is away from Sampath and his sorts. He realizes that the individual and the community, as much as man's within and without, are in eternal conflict:

The Banner has nothing special to note about any war, past or future, kit is only concerned with the war that is always going in between man's outside. Till the forces are equalized the struggle will always go on. (p.6)

Till the point of ripeness, when the passions will have been spent of the ego and the eccentricities will have reached their climaxatic stages, human life must take its chalked-out course. At the point of ripeness, the erratic forces will be brought to a halt, the equilibrium will be restored and "the forces are equalized" Srinivas, whose life has been a meeting-ground of all sorts of experiences nor only of himself but also of others, gains most from kit. For him it has been more of an intellectual progress than a spiritual one.2

Srinivas in Mr. Sampath and Nataraj The Maneater of Malgudi serve as springboards for the various forces to act and react. Left to
themselves, they are passive peace-loving citizens who seem to have no difficulty in getting integrated with the community. As Raju, Sampath, Margayya and other heroes of Narayan’s novels grow into ripeness, so also do these humbler characters like Srinivas, Natraj, Sastri and Velan. Srinivas partakes of the experiences of Sampath, Ravi, Sohanlal and De Mellor as much as much as Nataraj partakes of those of Vasu. For Natraj, Vasu represents the force of Evil that is inherent in the world of reality. The First chapter of The Maneater of Malgudi, builds a picture of peace and stability in the everyday’s existence of Natraj as well as that of Malgudi. But the smooth sailing of life is suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Vasu. Malgudi is gripped by a fear psychosis, and the free spirit, the community feeling and the normal business of this small town remain under temporary suspension. Implicit in this design is a motive to break the complacent attitude of the Malgudians and rouse their dormant inner spirit to fight against the force of Evil. The festival offers such an opportunity when the community is to be contained with danger nor does the festival, and the people’s faith in their religious roots is asserted. Natraj feels confident that:

God Krishna was really an incarnation of Vishnu, who had saved Gajendra: he would again come to the rescue of the some animal.... (pp.182-83).
Sastri interprets Vasu’s death along the Bhasmasura myth who was ‘unconquerable’ and ‘who scorched every thing he touched, and finally reduced himself to ashes by placing the tips of his fingers on his own head’. (p.242) For the Malgudians the nightmarish presence of Vasu is a necessity for the reassertion of their community spirit. For Velan and for his fellow villagers of Mangal, Raju’s ordeal is not something outside themselves; it also becomes their own spiritual experience. They also fast in sympathy with Raju’s suffering.

In Vasu’s case it is a blast of his tremendous ego. He terrifies everybody. His attic is full of stuffed animals, and his vocation turns him into a symbol of death. He goes on harassing individuals like Natraj, the monosyllabic poet and Mr. Sen., the journalist. He even defied and assaults the police inspector. But his ego swells to its saturation point when he defies the entire community by planning to injure the temple elephant. despondingly his fall becomes absurd and comic.

In the school life, Narayan’s characters learn to discover their own follies and discard their illusions and pseudo values. The compulsions of reality weigh heavy on the characters; Man’s ego is
trimmed and he matures into a blissful state of knowledge. Margayya, Raju and Jagon, Narayan's three prominent comic heroes demonstrate this process in their respective lives. All of them, through sheer wit and efforts, attain commendable material heights, but in the long run they are made to witness their own monuments crumble and life for them begins a new with a different set of values. Once the fever and the frenzy of the material world are over, the individual's vision of existence gets tuned to the expectation of the world of reality. Both Margayya and Jagon undergo the same painful experience of a spoilt son. Both of them in their own ways pursue the materialistic ends of life. Margayya climbs the social ladder by dubious means such as the dishonest banking business. Dr. Pal who is Margayya's adviser becomes the evil genius for Balu, Margayya's passionate desire to becomes rich, reflected in such events as his forty days ritual, leads him to a state of hysteria. His meteoric rise calls for our admiration as well as censure. He shapes things to suit to his own interests and a time comes when he is no more able to extricate himself from the things he has been associated with. Dr. Pal, with all his vulgar obsessions of sex and money moves from being Margayya's successful attempt to rise from the obscurity in the modern society is a testimony to his cunning. Till Margayya reaches the summit of his success, no morality, no social custom is allowed to come in the way of his ambitions and
achievements. His observance of the religious rituals, the publication of ‘Domestic Harmony’ and his material cravings provide a picture of a funny medley. In him the value-oriented past the money oriented present simultaneously exist and for a time the illusion is nursed and carried to a point when no longer can it sustain itself and a split soon occurs making Margayya aware of the truth of things. The course of his life moves through two stages. He defies all orthodox values and all norms of decency to attain his materialistic aspiration. It is the struggle of comic hero striving to assert his individuality in the face of all the odds of the world. But in the next phase of his life, it becomes almost the pathetic preoccupation of father to contain his spoilt child. The comic hero who can defy the limitation of reality and have his own ways and terms becomes a helpless victim of his own misfortunes, being no longer able to shape things to his desired mould. His humble desired mould. His humble desire poverty to position of comfortable means gradually becomes an intense passion for ‘wealth’ (p.158). This frenzy not only swallows his mental existence. But also his very physical existence:

In his home the large safe was filled up, and its door had to be forced in, and them the cupboards, the benches and tables the space under the cot, and the corners. His wife could hardly pass into the small
room to pick up a sace of towel, there were currency bundles stacked up a foot high all over the floor. (pp.163-64)

Right after this Balu comes and demands his share of the property. Margayya also learns of Balu's degeneration-his drinking habits and his flirting with woman. As he learns all this, he suffers from a sense of pathetic indecisiveness, because all these things have been, in a way, his own doing. And soon the bang comes razing Margayya's entire fortune to the ground. But simultaneously it restores to him the harmony of life, the inner peace which Margayya has, for quite a long period, deprived himself. He is united to his brother and son. Seems like a family reunion, made possible through sorrow and an understanding born out of it. Suffering brings Margayya to a wisdom and he is now able to see through the veil of illusions. He is prepared to go to the Banyan tree in front of the cooperative bank once again, with his 'old knobby trunk' (p.178) and start life afresh. He has not forgotten, and now realizes it with a renewed understanding, that the Banyan tree, the 'old knobby trunk' with its pen and ink bottle are the realities to which he is basically ordained. He realizes the 'vanity of this gross materialistic world. Like Krishnan and the headmaster in The English Teacher. Margayya seeks an emotional refuge in the innocent world of
children. He had neglected this joyous aspect of existence, being
blinded by the glitter of money; but now earnestly asks.

Now get the youngster here. I will play with him. Life has been
too dull without him in this house. (p.178).

In this state of knowledge when the sham of life has been exposed and
abandoned after immense suffering, Margayya is able to build a bridge
to the world of innocence.

While for Margayya it is a home-coming, a return to humility, for
Jagon it is a spiritual journey. Jagon is a vendor of sweets, a self
proclaimed Gandhi and a curious amalgamation of hypocrisy and
sincerity. He has in him an elemental innocence which evokes
sympathy in spite of his fads and fancies. He is deeply involved in his
own worldly affairs in spite of his frequent pious statements on

Gandhi, the Gita and the Upanishads. Yet Jagon is set for a spiritual
destination in the journey of lifetime's experiences. When he feels he
has already 'outlived' (p.182) himself in this mundane world. He must
now detach himself from all the routine drudgeries of life and have a
'new Janma' (p.182). He reduces the price of sweets just out of
sympathy for poor people and children, just at a time when his fond
hopes about his own son have been betrayed. To a question of the
cousin about the reduction of prices, Jagon replies, "I've had enough" (p.98). The reduction in prices leads to the meeting with the white
bearded man and consequently to Jagon's final rest rest to the deity. The
contact with this man suddenly transforms him, and opens before him
hitherto unknown vistas of experience. Estatic visions of the entire
cosmos flash before him:

He went on talking and Jagon listened agape as if a new world
had flashed into view. He suddenly realized how narrow his
whole existence had been----between the Lawley statue and the
frying shop. Mali's antics seemed to matter naught. 'Am I on the
verge of a new Janma?' He wondered. (pp. 119-20)

But Jagon does not instantly get transformed into a sanyasi who
renounces the world in search of higher truths of life. With Jagon it is a
gradual process involving pain and conflict. Once his spirit reaches the
threshold of the spiritual, he no more feels crushed by the weight of this
world. Eternity begins to unfold before him:
Sweetmeat vending, money and his son’s problems seemed remote and unrelated to him. The edge of reality itself was beginning to blur......... (p.118)

Jagon renounces the world, but does not forget to take the bank book. He also writes down a cheque for the lawyer’s fees and is prepared to arrange a ticket for Grace, if she desires to go back. It seems as if Narayan does not allow his comedy to lose its foothold of the earth, even though the realm of the spiritual has already extended its invitation. Or perhaps, Jagon has been able to establish the desirable balance of which Srinivas speaks in Mr. Sampath, among various roles as father, father-in-law, shopkeeper and even a sanyasi. As far as Jagon’s spiritual transformation coupled with his possession of the bank book is concerned, one would tend to agree with K.R.S. Iyenger that”...the demon has been worsted; but the Deity hasn’t arisen yet.”

In the first phase of awareness, Jagon realizes:

An internal transformation had taken place; although he still cared for the shop and house, this latest contact had affected him profoundly. (pp. 127-28)
As this ecstatic spell continues, he triumphantly declares, "I am a free man". (p.191) From the bondage of his shop and son, he moves to metaphysical experiences. From that height of blissful freedom, he looks upon Mali, Grace and others with sympathy, who are lost in the quagmire of worldly attachments; and dutifully enough. Jagon makes provision for them.

Jagon knows too well that suffering would bring Mali back to sense. He wisely comments, "A dose of prison life is not a bad thing. If may be just what he needs now". (pp.191-92) Mali's perversion leads him to a height or buffoonery when he tries to manufacture stories with machines. The arrogance in his behaviour with his father, his contemptuous defiance of the sacred tradition drag him to a point where he outgrows himself. Soon the punishment follows to shock him back to sense. Jagon knows the course of things to come when he advises the cousin.

Open the shop at the usual hour and run it. Mali will take charge of it eventually. (p.191)

Jagon has learnt to discard his weaknesses arising out of his worldly involvements. For his spoilt son Mali, he believes in the efficacy of
punishment, or, in other words, of suffering. And as far as Jagon himself is concerned, even though he has not been able to leave this world of attachments completely, he is already bound towards the Spiritual.

Among all the characters of Narayan, Raju’s character is most completely and clearly drawn. From the innocent days of childhood to the days of his ordeal he undergoes innumerable experiences related mainly to an instinctual way of living without any respect for social ethics. In a long series of unscrupulous acts he cuckold a husband, drives out his mother, forges Rosie’s signature and at last plays on the beliefs of innocent villagers. His entire career becomes one of deception and he is gradually led to its height where he must meet the inevitable fate of being doomed or being resurrected as it was with the Pandit Ratnakar in the Indian mythology. It is because of the inherent goodness in him and the unique compulsion of his mask that Raju is metamorphosed from an imposter to a martyr. His life takes a dramatic turn when he meets Rosie and after this incident, he is engaged in perpetual conflict with the society or the world outside. For the satisfaction of his libidinal instincts he offends not only Marco, but also his mother, uncle and Gaffur and the whole Indian tradition. A small jail sentence for just an ordinary offence does not seem adequate to his expiation. His salvation is to be worked out on a far sins------of
exploiting the innocent faith of the villagers ------where his suffering in
the process towards redemption will also be correspondingly more
intense. And since the transformation is on a spiritual plane, what is
warranted is not a decree of jail sentence but a willing acceptance of
suffering. To borrow the words of T.S. Eliot:

What we have written is not a story of detection of crime and
punishment, but of sin and expiation The Family Reunion, part II,
se. II

In his eventful career, Raju assumes various roles. When one role
proves insufficient for him he immediately discards it and takes up a
new one until the optional are exhausted, and a new possibility begins
to offer itself on another plane. With a determined effort. Raju rejects
his role of the fake swami and volunteers to martyr himself for the sake
of others:

For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort, for
the first time he was learning the thrill of full application outside
money and love; for the first time he was doing a things in which
he was not personally interested. (p.213)
Here the comic hero ceases to be himself and enters the arena of the sublime. He transcends his ego, forsakes the physical of life and from a fake swami emerges as a saint.

*Waiting for the Mahatma* with its predominant political theme does not explore the potentialities of the individual's character. The narrative centers round the general theme of Gandhi's movement keeping the individual, the workings of his mind and the gradual development of his character subservient to the compulsion of that theme. That is why the growth of the character is not conspicuously evident in this novel. In spite of so many experiences of the freedom struggle, one still wonders if Sriram has grown from his adolescence, of course, his marriage with Bharati gets postponed from time to time till he passes the test of service and sacrifice and gets the blessings of Gandhi for the marriage. In *The Dark Room* the comic pattern is very faintly perceived because all attention is focused on Savitri whose pathetic puerility evokes a kind of gloom and seriousness. Her feminine helplessness has been presented in poignant terms and it pervades the entire story.

The Painter of signs is marked by a difference in the treatment of the comic theme. The intensity of feelings and emotions of the deep vibrations of life, that underlie the process of transformation of a
character are noticeably absent in this novel. The plot is based on an unusual relationship between Daisy, a family planning zealot with her fanatic idealism, and Raman, a painter of signs still roaming in adolescent recklessness. The relationship which begins with a business transaction temporarily moves to an intimate bond. The claims of the ‘deals’ gradually disrupt this intimacy and the relationship meets a premature end. From Daisy’s idealistic standpoint, this relationship helps her to be wise and humble. She realizes with repentance the betrayal of her emotions and instincts.

At some moments and moods, we say and do things——like talking in sleep, but when you awake, you realize your folly. . . . (p.180)

This repentance makes her humble: “First time in her life she was humbling herself”. (p.180) And now with this rate humility that comes out of repentance, she can devote herself to family planning work with greater dedication. Even thought it is not going to be a spiritual experience for her, it is bound to strengthen her idealistic commitments. What happens afterwards is beyond the scope of this novel.
For Raman, there is no spiritual progress and hence the poignancy that is felt in various trials and tribulations of life in the career of Jagon or Raju is missed here. Compared to theirs, Raman's experience is of minor significance affecting only some adolescent dreams. After undergoing this experience, he discards his earlier sentimental self. O.P. Mathur considers Raman's act of throwing the key, which Daisy wants to be handed over to the watchman, as an 'act of existential defiance of the universe'. He further adds:

One of the movements of the novel seems, to be towards a greater degree of self realization by Raman, He is now developing into a sort of rebelliousness against the unknown.4

He looked at the key in his hand. "To hell with it", he said, and which somehow produced the great satisfaction of having his own way at last. He mounted the cycle and turned towards. The Board less—that solid, real world of sublime souls who minded their own business. (p.183).

The illusions over, the returns to the reality of Malgudi, that solid world' of The Board less. And he even can take pride in having' his own way at last' by throwing the key to the gutter. But this gesture of
Raman is declaring his freedom to have ‘his own way’ appears childish before the triumphant declaration of Jagon, “I am a free man,” Raman’s experiences have been far less intense than those of Raju or Jagon or Margayya and hence his realization is not deep intimate enough to be able to life the comic to the sublime height of human possibilities.

An overall analysis of Narayan’s fiction makes it clear that in his Comic vision, comedy transcends itself; as ignorance leads to knowledge, and the temporal yields to the Eternal. In the ripeness of events folly is discarded, illusion is abandoned and knowledge reigns, humility returns. This new awareness born out of suffering brings calm and repose. The gravity and clam that descend into the depths of existence wash out all the claptrap of the comic hero. The spirit of the comic, in a benign sweep over individuals and the unity, assures life once again. Herein lies the triumph of the comic vision.

Narayan’s fictional world is circumscribed by a traditional Hindu society where men than woman hold a superior position. In his novels, Narayan’s immediate concern is with the oddities and eccentricities of men. Women are generally confined to the home and the hearth, and all sorts of taboos and traditions are clamped of them. But as the milieu
gradually changes from a strictly orthodox one to that of progress and liberation which comes in the wake of modern civilization, women slowly and subtly begin to assert their independence in the society. Caught between the pressures of the old and the lure of the New, a few women do venture to realize their potentialities only to face hostility and end up in failure. Narayan is quite aware of the position of women in the society. He says in *My Days*:

> I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of woman as opposed to man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament of the ‘women’s Lib’ movement. Man assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety an cunning that she herself began to lose all notion of her independence, her inviduality, stature and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances.5

Yet, as one notices in *The Dark Room*, Narayan does not advance his theme of women’s Lib to a decisive resolution, as Ibsen does in *A Doll’s House*. As A.N. Kaul comments:
The point here, however, is not that, unlike heroine, Narayan doesn't bang the door but has it banged on her and that in the end, her dream of feminine independence and dignity over her returns submissively to the house never again to stray in thought of dead. 6

Her revolt and her quick retreat are the alternate facets of the predicament that the adventurous Indian Woman faces in a society where the orthodox traditions still have considerable influence. This predicament reverberates in Narayan's novels in different degrees. It seems worthwhile to see how far this plight of women contribute to the comic design of Narayan's novels.

Narayan is not preoccupied with romantic love as a theme in his novels. He says in *My Days*:

> I wished to attack the tyranny of love and see if life could offer values than the inevitable man-woman relationship to a writer. 7

Narayan's major concern is to being out the elemental humanness in men and women out of their various relations and reactions and to that end the man-woman relationship has figured in Narayan's fiction. But, *The Dark Room* is an exception in so far as it concentrates only on the plight of woman locked up within the confines of an orthodox society.
This society has nothing to offer her except material refuge. The peace of Savitri’s family life gets disturbed when the glamorous Mrs. Shantabai arrives at Malgudi. She proudly declares “If I had a family to hinder me I shouldn’t have come here with my application”. (p.46) Shantabai comes as an intruder defying and despising the traditional values. She dreams of owning a Baby Austin and dismisses films like ‘The Ramayan’ as sheer mythological non-sense. She flirts with Ramanai to promote her selfish interests. She combines her feminine independence with a shared opportunism that characteristically belongs to the new civilization. Ramanai’s romance with her and his willing servility to become a toy in her hands only makes his look ridiculous. To an equal extent, Shantabai evokes our derision. She abandons her drunkard husband and her family and successfully crushes the walls of the doll’s house. But she carries her new-found feminine liberty to a perverted height, quite unlike Nora who makes a revolutionary attempt to realize the essential human being in her suppressed self. Shantabai appears comically odd in Malgudi where traditional values govern human relationship. Narayan also does not make Savitri a martyr like Anti gone Nor a crusader like Nora. But as P.S. Sundaram Suggests:

Refusing to be a discarded drudge, Savitri goes out of the house, not dramatically banging the door like Nora, but fleeing like a
hunted animal..... Freedom is a fine concept but creatures lids
Savitri can do only one thing with it----commit suicide. 8

She moves from the darkness of her house to the darkness
of the temple, both the house and the temple being considered as
sacred social institutions, in spite of the oppression they inflict.
But parallel to the husband-wife relationship of Savitri and
Ramani, there is another relationship between Mari his wife.
Pooni, Mari is a blacksmith-cum-burglar, who maintains wife.
Their peculiar world seems to be a pleasing liberation from the
oppressive inhibitions and the accompanying hypocrisies of the
middle class society. The Dark Room, of course, does not
presents any particular creed about women. It rather presents the
novelist’s aesthetic realization of the predicament of woman in a
particular social contact. In different forms and degrees it has
figured in Narayan’s other novels. But because of a society that
respect women, Narayan does not make this women characters
and their mistakes and moral lapses explicit targets of ridicule.

Discarding the austere life of a widow and leaving her son
to the care of strangers. Shanty in Mr. Sam path accepts a life
of easy morals in the tinsel, celluloid world and thus moves to
one extreme of permissiveness. But her return to the fold of the society is equaled dramatic. In rejecting the jaundiced vision of her earlier film life, she now prepares herself to move to another extreme of religious austerity:

I am sick of this kind of life and marriage frightens me. I want to go and look after my son, who is growing up with strangers. Please leave me alone and don’t look for me. I want to change my ways of living. You will not find me. If I find you pursuing me, I will shave off my head and fling away my jewelers and wear a white sari. You and people like you will run away at the sight of me. I am, after all, a widow and can shave my head and disfigure myself. (p.218)

Her arrival in the Sunrise studio creates sensation as well as complications. She becomes a mistress of Sam path who is also a householder and coincidently she also turns to be Rave’s lost vision of beauty. Shanty soon becomes the centre of the plot and various human drives and deeds related to her create an atmosphere of incongruity, which is represented in concrete physical terms in the scene of
kidnapping. But in the midst of all these confusions, Shanty, quite like a typical Indian woman, let's herself carried on by the events, she flirts with Sam path and moves with a handbag made of the hood of a cobra. She becomes a glamorous film actress, but stupidly sells herself. Yet underneath all her immoral acts there lurks a certain naive which draws sympathy rather than harsh judgment.

This attitude is evident in the character of Rosie in The Guide. Opposing compulsions weigh heavily on her life, propelling her along a path usually uncharted for women in an Indian Society. Having been born onto a family of temple dancers who "are viewed as public women" (p.75), she has no is quite unconventional and funny. Rosie recollects:

I had myself photographed clutching the Scroll of the University citation in one hand, and sent it to the advertiser. Well, we met, he examined me and my certificate, we met, he examined me and my certificate, We went to a registrar and got married. (p.75)
She marries an archaeologist husband with no human warmth:

Dead and decaying things seemed to unloose his tongue and fire
his imagination, rather than that lives and moved and swung their
limbs. (p.72)

Confined to a mechanical existence, Rosie's instincts for dance cannot
find fulfillment till she walls of the family. Marco's apathy and
indifference towards her feelings and desires take such a cruel form that
Rosie readily receives the reader's sympathy. As events proceed, she
gradually rises to fame. But, all through, her passion for dance has
been so intense and her devotion has been so sincere that her
aberrations are viewed with kind understanding. Time and again her
repentant self is brought to the fore- front of the narrative through her
repeated brooding over her husband. C. D. Narasimhiah remarks in
this context:

. . . . Especially in the way he takes' care to preserve Rosie
from inner taint Maryann seems to be affirming what has been
hailed in the Indian tradition as the Feminine principle in life.9
During all her unethical transactions she remains the figure of a docile, innocent Indian woman and her inner self seems not to have bin stained by what she does on the surface. After Raju’s imprisonment she becomes a completely pathetic figure, being virtually alone in the world. She tries her best to save Raju, which she considers an obligation and duty. Her sins, if not from an ethical, yet from an existential standpoint, are vindicated and her suffering combined with her moral lapses makes her strikingly different from other women characters in Narayan’s novels. Her predicament verges almost on the tragic.

Bharati, the young heroine of waiting for the mahatma, comes full way out of the traditional inhibition and chooses a public life dedicating herself to the service of Gandhi. It is a conscious attempt made by an inspired girl and even though in pre-independence India the orthodox taboos still hold good, Bharati is never made the but of ridicule. Rather her sacrifice, purity and humility bestow on her a certain dignity in spite of her sharp divergence from the common code.
As Misguide registers changes in urbanization and material advancement, a liberated atmosphere begins to prevail. The age has its own slogans and shibboleths and family planning is one of them. The spirit of liberation has been manifested in the character of Daisy, whose dynamism controls all the events in The Painter of Signs. Whereas Rosie has the traditional woman in herself in her dependence on the men folk (first on Marco, then on Raju), Daisy is strikingly modern in her spirit of independence. Even in the Malgudi of the 70s Daisy appears absolutely unconventional and she shatters all our routine impressions of woman. She has a “sort of unmitigated antagonism to conception” (p.87) that flagrantly violates the traditional Indian notion that a woman ‘s glory lies in giving birth to a large number of children. Ironically, this family planning zealot is always alienated from the institution of family in some way or other. She gets suffocated in a joint family into which she is born and feels that her individuality is strangulated. Right from the age of thirteen, when the prospective bride-groom visits her, she becomes conscious of her humiliating status as a doll:

And then they seated me like a doll, and I had to wait for the arrival of the eminent personage with his parents.(p.131)
At this very moment, she decides to break the walls of the doll’s house. She offends the groom on his face and thus also offends a whole orthodox tradition. In her early years she flees her family and in later years, unable to rid her self of the feelings of guilt, he fails at translating her courtship into marriage. Somehow or other she cannot get herself reconciled to the idea of a family. In the familiar background of Malgudi, she is she is a bizarre figure. “She had no taboos of any kind” (p.57) and “the only topics she could appreciate are birth control, population and allied subject” (p.84). She roams the countryside with her mission of family planning:

If she found an upturned packing case or a stone-slab, she sat on it, cross-legged and never stirred until the bus came, without saying a word or noticing the people who stared at her. In order to be unnoticeable, she wore a sari of the drabbest shade, never used any powder or make up, and did her hair up indifferently, and if it was ruffled in the wind, she smoothed it out with her palm. (p.60)
She is the ‘New Woman’, on who on social inhibitions are clamped. With rare exception to her emotionalism at times, Daisy can be said to be nearer to the female version of Marco. Both of them are clearly not cut out for a married life, both of them are heart and soul dedicated to their projects—one to the archaeological survey in the Memphis hills. The other to the cause of family planning. In daisy, the cold professionalism of Marco and the revolutionary zeal of Barite exist together, If Savitri and Rosie revolt against their doll ‘s house, Daisy seems to carry this revolt against this revolt father, even to a hysterical height. If the Dark Room is ‘an early testament of the Women’s Lib. Movement’, 10 The painter of signs is its more pronounced representation.

William Walsh thinks that in Narayan ‘s. novels . . . . . the women rather than the old represent’ Custom and rather know ‘what is and what is not proper. 11
The sweet old world of Misguide is sustained by grandmothers and aunts and by their innumerable superstitions. The wives of Srinivas, and Naturaj, the very pictures of declivity, are still devoted to their domestic drudgeries. Into such a pattern of traditional life the adventures, or perhaps the misadventures, of women like shanty, Rosie and Daisy, do not instantly fit in and hence they evoke varies responses from the readers wonder and sympathy. Doubt and disapproval and at times mild ridicule. They are not rebels as Nora is. They merely escape the suffocation of an orthodox society and hence they do not have any definite mission and their movements are haphazard. Daisy, who craves out her life with a singular determination, reminds us of the uncompromising idealism of Alcester in Mailer’s The Misanthrope. But in her iconoclastic views and rigid unconventional habits, in the particular social context of Misguide, she is a travesty of womanhood.

In spite of their lapses and violations of social norms, Narayanb’s women characters evoke a sympathetic response. The contribution these characters to the comic design of the novels, they also return to the fold of the society, a little sadder and wiser, Savitri returns to her children and husband and for the time being at least it is a happy family again.
Shanty, once her illusions are over, returns to take care of her son. Experience chastens Rosie to accept a life of calm resignation.

The Malgudi drama possibly would not have been complete without these women characters, since they constitute an inalienable part of the society and thus are subjected to the influences and pressures of the changing times. Narayan is hesitant to extracts the comic potentials out of her women characters to the extent he does et out of his men. The barriers of orthodoxy and social conventions forbid a woman to choose her own way to realize her individuality. Those who have crossed their domestic frontiers even for reasons which can be defended or excused are easily derided by the tradition ridden society. The helplessness of their plight and the traditional concept of dignity in women have obstructed them to rise to the heights of the Comic, yet they have been instrumental in exploiting the comic tension in the novels and also in affecting at times a desired balance between the serious and the comic which is typical of Narayan’s narrative technique.
In Narayan's novels, the characters—the men folk to a greater extent and the women folk to a lesser extent—swerve from the normal path. The men characters move along erroneous paths to realize their ambitions and instincts. On the other hand, the women characters move along unsheltered ways, as far as the orthodox Indian tradition is concerned, in quest of some relief from the suffocation or oppression of domestic life. As they move, they clash with the established codes of a traditional society and thus appear funny, pathetic and absurd. They are ultimately led to a point where their whims and fancies can no more sustain them. When the stage of ripeness is reached, their illusions crumble and normal reality is restored. Narayan's comic vision ensures normalcy and harmony as his men and women ultimately and inevitably mature into wisdom.

2. Srinivas questions himself in chap II, "Life and the world and all this is passing-why bother about anything. The perfect and the imperfect are all the same. Why really bother, "(p.30) Shirley chew comments on the process of realization in Srinivas' Character: "This impression of the resilience of life produces a sense of elation in Srinivas . . . . A properly understood detachment which is both a defense and an assertion and yet not so detached as to forget the calls of humanity----- this is the answer Srinivas has been given to the question he raised in chap. Two. . . Perhaps Srinivas apprehended as nearly as possible the poise and rhythm shadowed forth by the little figure of Nat raj before whom he prays every morning "", Shirley chew," A Prorer Detachment: The Novels of R. K. Narayan ""Reading in Common-wealth literature, ed. William Walsh (London, oxford unit. press, 1973), p.75.


7. My Days, p.95.


10. My Days, p.119