CHAPTER THREE

THE EXISTENTIAL ANXIETIES IN THE SELECTED STORIES
AND NOVELS OF R.K.NARAYAN

Every novelist gives us in his novels his own personal idiosyncratic vision of the world through his own experiences. Narayan’s novels are not a textual-philosophical exploration but an actual one. He does not raise the consciousness of his protagonist to a philosophical pitch that is evident in the novels of the contemporary writers of his times, i.e. Mulk Raj Anand’s or Raja Rao’s oeuvre.

The reality of Narayan’s art is not textual but live experiences. Although he has restricted his narratives to the self-imposed boundaries, one must realize that his novels are replete with characters who have their own individuality, identity and who enjoy the vagaries and vicissitudes of life against all odds.

Narayan’s work can be characterized as being simple and undemanding. His stories and novels are laced with humour, irony, moral with a blend of Indian myths, motifs and legends. His writings reflect on his upbringing too. He has been highly influenced by his grandmother Parvati, under whose care he was nurtured during his formative years. His writings have encapsulated the Hindu myths and ideals. Here William Walsh’s, words are apt:

*The religious sense of Indian myths is a part of Narayan’s grip of his reality, of his particular view of human life and his individual way of placing and ordering human feeling and experience.*

What one can say about Narayan is that he believes in the maxim: Experience is the best teacher. Human beings learn the lessons of life through their own experiences and they have a long lasting effect. They help one to mature and tackle the difficulties in life. The concept of freedom is not just confined to the realms of social and economic freedom. It is the freedom from mental makeup and emotional attitude, the need of the hour. They strive for freedom from sufferings and agonies. His characters belong to the middle
class strata of life. He has attempted to show that his protagonists and other characters too not only go through physical suffering but also mental or psychological sufferings in life.

A close study of Narayan’s novels reveal that he has presented the sufferings and agony from various angles. The concept of self-alienation runs through the lives of his characters and they seek their identity, realize their self during their journey of life and thereby discover themselves. Thus they progress towards self-development. However the degree of sufferings may vary but one has to acknowledge and address them separately. In this context, Tabish Khair’s view are as under:

One has to address the issue of alienation in the context of Narayan’s writings because Narayan’s Malgudi however delineated is still a literary construct made of bricks of observation joined together by the cement of occlusion. And such constructs are seldom, if ever, ideologically innocent formations.

Narayan has sought to give voice to those individuals who fail to perceive the very purpose behind life and the relevance of his existence in this hostile world. They face existential predicaments and this creates feelings of anxiety in everyone. The nature of existence cannot be changed. But by developing a positive attitude towards these predicaments, Narayan through his fiction presents his characters creating a worthwhile existence by making choices responsibly and leading a meaningful life as these concerns are viewed as an inevitable part of the human condition and is a natural consequence of human existence.

Existential issues are as old as mankind. Merging the two strands of thoughts of existentialism and positive psychology, one can face any challenges or situations in life. What is important is not the challenges people come across but how people respond to them and with the right attitudes they are likely to overcome these challenges.
G.W.G. Hegel, a noted German philosopher of the 19th century is considered to be the first philosopher to present the term ‘alienation’ as an important philosophical concept.

Alienation is one of the greatest problems confronting modern man and it has a positive meaning. Sean Sayers thinks likewise and states:

Although alienation results in fragmentation of people, it also means that individuality, subject and freedom develop. It is a necessary stage in the process of self-development and self-realization.iii

Identity is the projection of self. Self-image moulds and transforms self – identity. One’s identity is rooted in the culture in which one lives and hence the alienation from the culture leads to the loss of one’s socio-cultural identity. The individual's alienation from the society is the manifestation of his quest for the assertion of his identity. The identity of the person may be established on evidences. A person knows his identity by means of what John Locke calls it ‘consciousness’ and it is this consciousness that constitutes personal identity.

The problem of individual identity has a complexity in its different manifestations. Psychologists and philosophers come across the predicament of modern life and man and found in both traits of deep-rooted anxiety, alienation and absurdity.

M.K. Naik writes that Narayan is primarily preoccupied with man's filling of the life-role entrusted to him by tradition and environment. In Narayans’ world human beings are strange indeed!! The following words reveal his power of thinking:

“The impact of life, the material and substance of our thought are the same everywhere, in any state, traditionally Indian. In the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas the values remain the same in every village. A stage full of characters is presented by the narrator. His characters are limited in variety and simpler by nature. Hence the inhabitants of the fictional world are bound by the fact that they are human beings prone to commit errors.
Even intelligent and precocious characters are shown to commit blunders because they are mortals.\textsuperscript{iv}

As David E. Cooper points out:

\textit{Value, in the special sense is something a person places not upon the actions and goals, which he authentically adopts, but upon those which he sees demand of him by others. The pursuit of these latter goals or values is then described as ‘alienated.’}\textsuperscript{v}

In most of Narayan’s novels, the protagonist is almost the Other. That may be religion, society, parents, husband, wife or lover. But the protagonist continues to draw his identity by reference to this Other. The impact of the themes like the East west encounter, marital discord, death, self-deception etc. has penetrated deep in to the Indian ethos. The belief that the novelist of the pre-independence period to a larger extent dealt with the external climate and not the climate of the mind is not justifiable. However, it is far from truth to state that the Indian novelists did not deal with the crisis of identity. They are concerned not only with the milieu but also with their self-consciousness. The characters are encouraged to experience their life and particularly their relationships more deeply. Narayan in all his novels focuses on human relationships, their emotions, and their experience in life.

The three pre-independence novels anticipate Narayan’s own striving and self development in the early 40’s. The thematic interest goes beyond one’s accountability to family and society and the post independence novels show a deep sense of maturity of the writer. His modest experience bloomed into maturity. In his direction M.K.Naik rightly comments: \textsuperscript{vi}

\textit{Narayan’s art reached its maturity after independence when he finally able to enlist a good humoured irony as a firm ally of serious moral concern in his novels: Mr. Sampath, The Financial Expert, The Guide, and the Man-eater of Malgudi.}

Malgudi, the fictional town of R.K.Narayan has characters whose existence is immortal and they have their kinship with all humanity. His approach to the
subject matter is always marked by intellectual inspirations. His artistic excellence lies in his authentic explorations and straightforward manner. Narayan’s novels are teemed with consciousness in human relationship. K.N.Sinha rightly observes:

*R.K.Narayan is keenly aware of the fundamental irremediable incongruitities which life and world are confronting us.*

We do find Narayan’s characterization commendable. His novels are full of variety of characters. All kinds of characters, both fair and foul are present in his novels. The real greatness lies in the realistic presentation of the whims and fancies of the character, the ironic implication giving ample opportunity to present the fears, frustration, happiness, unhappiness defeat and triumphs of the middle class men and women. The element of conflict between the traditional values and modern outlook towards human relationship is clearly evident.

H.L.Williams has pointed out the presence of several aspects of alienation in the novels of R.K.Narayan as:

*The young quarrel with the old, leave Malgudi for England or America, eat beef and many foreigners return to vex and haunt and cruelly or comically disturb the pools of Malgudi.*

Narayan analyses the condition of the alienated individual with social, psychological and philosophical insight. He explores the psychological implications of human behaviour. The malaise of the modern man has gone out of proportion and the need of the hour is to think positively and face the crisis boldly. He says that when a man comes to realize that he is solely responsible for his decisions and destiny, he feels unnerved.

In this situation Kierkegaard calls it. *anguish in the face of freedom.* To Sartre, *freedom is absolute and a man can look inward.* "According to the existential theory, defying the reality with its sorrows, pain guilt, loneliness offers “existential catharsis”. This
philosophy of existence strikes a profound note on the essentials of life which are the predicaments of human existence.

Narayan first created a small town of Malgudi, which provided a setting for all the novels and stories during his literary career of six decades. It is this search for the essentials and for a peaceful co-existence, his characters experiencing oneself the existential predicaments with grit and determination find a path—an existential way to self-discovery.

Narayan's fictional world addresses the existential concerns like lack of freedom, sense of loneliness and alienation- introspection-search for one’s identity-self-realization in a subtle way. One cannot overlook the development of majority of his protagonists, especially correspond outwardly to the existential of self estrangement/alienation. (David Cooper,). Angst, anxiety, alienation, etc. stems from the realization of one’s existential freedom to a remarkable degree and it is a natural consequence of existence. In his stories, Narayan touches upon the emotions of the protagonists. They too assert their individuality and in search for their identity. They too experience conflict with the society and face crisis. Narayan aims to identify and enhance the human strengths and virtues that make life worth living for the individual development.

THE STORIES OF R.K. NARAYAN

Narayan enjoys writing a short story because it does not require a long consistent effort or a minutely worked out detail like a novel. He says that he cannot utilize his experiences in novels, as they are most of the time centralized on a major theme. The short story, he says affords a writer a welcome diversion from the hard work put in a novel. While unveiling his characters, he gives the reader an insight in to the character’s mind and brings out the unrecognized pathos so often found in the common man.
He relied upon the living characters rather than the imaginary ones. His caricatures are real. In literature, a caricature is a description of a person using exaggeration of some characteristics and oversimplification of others but is actually the depictions of real life people.

The cover page of the book of *Malgudi Days* has the illustrations of the rustic characters. His youngest brother R.K. Laxman, known for his distinct illustrations in several books, newspapers, also had illustrated for Malgudi stories in *The Hindu* in the beginning. He said in one of his interviews that he was the first one to listen to Narayan’s stories. Narayan would ask him to read them and solicit for his opinion. R.K. Laxman’s illustrations enriched and highlighted Narayan’s characters.

The caricature of the people at the foot of the statue include a street vendor, an old man and two others; they are engaged in conversation. Each story stands out for its simplicity, innocence and has captured the Indianness. His real greatness lies in his realistic presentation of the will, temperament and attitude of his characters. Even his use of irony does not distort the originality of his characters.

The term characterization was introduced in mid 19th century. Aristotle promoted the primacy of plot over characters that are a plot-driven narrative. Characterization is an essential ingredient of a story. C.V. Venugopal observes and states about Narayan:

> His success lies in individualizing his characters. “His strength of characterization lies rather in his thorough and close observation of life’s little incidents, a healthy sense of humour … and more than in his ability to bring a character to life with a few deft strokes of pen.”

Uma Parmeswaran argues:

> There is no overwhelming moral communication communicated in his stories. He is not passionately concerned with any social or spiritual ideal. He has no Open-sesame password to salvation. He is seldom more than a story-teller.
But Narayan has always focused on character. According to him if his personality comes alive, then the rest is easy for him. These are the words of Narayan and he is indeed a master of the art of characterization. He just records his observations with a rare artistic detachment. He does not give any moral views or personal views in his novels or stories. He grasps the psychological essence of his characters and probes into their minds.

Narayan's sense of irony, his deep religious sensibility, his humour, his consciousness of the significance of everyday occurrences, and his belief in a Hindu vision of life are all revealed in his stories. His characters pass through a crisis of spirit or circumstances. Almost invariably the central character faces some kind of crisis and resolves it or lives with it. Despite difficulties in life, his characters face them with fortitude.

He attaches great importance to human emotions and human relationships. Through his characters, he presents emotions like fear, frustration, failure, grief, guilt, anger etc; in his stories. In his stories even the beauty of the surroundings is evident. He has described a garden, a hut, marketplace, a cinema hall, or a wayward railway station in a lucid manner.

He draws a very vivid picture of the lives of those involved, be it a snake charmer, a domestic help, a celebrity singer, an astrologer, people travelling together in a railway coach or a pickpocket. During the war, Narayan did not publish any full-length novel except The English Teacher, which was autobiographical in nature. Between 1939 to 1945, after his wife’s death, Narayan had plunged in to despair. However, it is a mistake to think that the creative muse of Narayan was lying absolutely mute during those years. He contributed short stories to The Hindu and his own short-lived quarterly journal Indian Thought. He paints, objectively both sides of the picture and makes a thorough analysis of the characters that are erring mortals and essentially human beings. He accepts life as it is and covers a wide range that encompasses every aspect of life and every variety of character.
Out of the 32 stories from the *Malgudi Days* \(^{xi}\), I would like to throw light on a few characters in the following stories:

- Forty-Five a month
- Out of Business
- The Martyr’s Corner
- Iswaran
- Father’s Help
- Like the Sun

The characterization in the following short stories is appropriate to the medium and we get a good glimpse into the lives of the people Narayan decides to talk about. He has presented various emotions through them.

1. **Forty-Five a Month:**

   *Forty-Five a Month* presents a picture of hope, anxiety, and despair of Shanta “growing up without having any amenities and the simple pleasures of life. She gets excited and thrilled for her father has promised to take her to the cinema. Shanta becomes restless and is not able to stay in the class any longer. The day’s activity comprises clay-modeling, music drill, writing alphabets and number. She had completed everything. She was cutting the coloured paper and was losing her patience. She waited for the bell to ring and waited for the teacher to instruct them to go home. As soon as the teacher said, “Now you may all go home,” or put away the scissors and take up your alphabets--- Shanta was impatient to know the time and asked her friend sitting next to her

   *Is it five now?”*
   
   *May be, she replied. Or is it six?”*
   
   *I don’t think so, her friend replied because night comes at six.”*
   
   *“Do you think it is five?”*
   
   *‘Yes!”*
‘Oh I must go. My father will be back at home now. He has asked me to be ready at five. He is taking me to the cinema this evening. I must go home.(MD 74)

With great expectation Shanta runs home early and gets ready wearing her favourite dress. Her hope begins to dwindle as it gets dark. Tired of waiting for her father, she goes to sleep clinging to a ray of hope that at any moment he might come and take her out. Shanta’s mother tells Venkat Rao when he comes home late:

She wouldn’t even change her frock thinking that any moment you might be coming and taking her out. She hardly ate any food and wouldn’t lie down for fear of crumpling her dress.(MD79)

Shanta’s anxiety and unhappiness is revealed here.

2. **Out of business:**

Rama Rao in the story *Out Of Business* suddenly found himself on the streets when the gramophone company collapsed in which he was working. His family adopted various measures to be economical. They sacrificed their luxuries which they had enjoyed once upon a time. He sent out a dozen applications a day and wore his feet out looking for employment.

His frustrations were at the peak is revealed in the following narration:

‘He sent his card in and asked. ‘I wonder sir, if you could do something for me. My business is all gone through no fault of my own. I shall be grateful if you can give me something to do in your office……

What a pity Rama Rao! I am awfully sorry, there is nothing at present. If there is an opportunity I will certainly remember you.(MD 81)

Rama Rao lay in bed and spends sleepless nights. His only source of income was the rent they were getting for their house. He came across the journal ‘The Captain’ and would solve the crossword puzzle week after week but it proved futile. In despair, one fateful day he realized that there is no going
back. He would end his life. All the losses, frustration, disappointments of his life came down on him with renewed force. He felt that life is not worth living. Wife, children… nothing mattered. He lay across the lines. But to his dismay, not a single train passed that way. He discovered that a goods train had derailed. He went back to his wife who was waiting for him anxiously……He realized that God had been merciful to him. He learnt a lesson. He decided to face the ups and downs in life with fortitude and decided to never to give up hope.

3. *The Martyr’s Corner:*

*The Martyr’s corner* reflects the rise and fall in the fortunes of the food vendor Rama. He sells food on a street corner that is strategically located. The business is good and husband and wife live in perfect harmony. He has a steady clientele but one day riots erupt in his corner of the world and change the life for him and his wife forever. His food was so good that even a confirmed dyspeptic could not pass by without throwing a look at his ‘assortment of edibles’ and feel the taste of it. He became popular in no time. Cinema crowd formed the biggest part of his clientage. He made a good profit every day. But such security is unattainable in human life.

One night all of a sudden, a babbling crowd gathered at the popular corner. There was a quarrel and fighting over something. It became a political issue. The police intervened and opened fire. Many people died. The ‘spot’ was cordoned off. People collected enough money to set up a stone memorial and decorated it with ornamental fencing and flowerpots. It became a Martyr’s corner'. Rama’s business was finished. At times, external circumstances overturn previously happy lives and characters are not in control of their destiny Such *insecurity* is encountered in human life. Rama is forced to become a waiter when his life starts on a downward spiral after his "old spot"
was taken up by a statue. The character is so universal that one could even identify a person like Rama struggling to survive in this bad world.

Once a hotel owner himself he had to queue up for a job outside a restaurant. It is indeed a change of fortune. In this story there is pathos and it also showed that in the present society politicians do veil their power overnight and the poor bear the brunt of their threat and corrupt practices.

'The health officer no doubt came and said, “You must put all this under a glass lid, otherwise I shall destroy it all someday…Take care!”(MD 114)

4. **Iswaran:**

In India, we seem to have very little tolerance for failure. A carefree college student who after repeated attempts in the story flunks his 12th board examination for the tenth time. He wanted to continue but his parents lost all interest in his examination. Though he bragged about outwardly but inwardly he was a desperado. He was longing and praying for success. He felt that fate seem to have isolated him from his fellow-beings in every respect. He was in a state of **depression** and was extremely unhappy. He watched the same film twice just to be away from this bitter world. The first time he saw he was lost in that film world. Second time when he saw, he knew that all the boys who had come to celebrate their success would rag him, ridicule him and would have mirthful faces the moment the lights went up. He was thoroughly dejected. He desperately thought of a solution. He writes a suicide note to his father before proceeding to the river to drown himself.

The following thought, which came in to the mind of, this younger is as follows:

*I am not fit to live."A fellow who cannot pass an examination…….(MD48)*

He had not even checked his results at the Senate House. He decides to check his result on his way to the Sarayu river. He discovers that he has passed with a second class. He goes insane at the shock of joy and does not
believe in himself. The ironic double twist in the story leaves the reader shell-shocked.

This story rings true for many youngsters in India even today.

5. **Father’s Help:**

Monday morning blues landed Swami the protagonist of the story in troubled waters. Swami had faked a headache so that he could remain at home and avoid going to school. He also describes the violent behaviour of Samuel sir if he would go late. His father’s behaviour took an unexpected turn. On hearing this, father decided to send him late to school as a challenge and send a letter to the headmaster. He knew that the contents of the letter were not true. Swami considered himself as the worst perjurer on earth. He knew that Samuel sir was not a bad man. He knew that he was friendlier than others and had often joked about Swami’s inactivity. He felt guilty at the prospect of getting his teacher dismissed so he decided to deliver the letter at the end of the day. By the end of the day, he would get Samuel do something to justify the letter.

He provoked his teacher many a times so that he could cane him and succeeded in doing so. But to his dismay the headmaster was on leave. He was told to give the letter to the assistant headmaster Samuel. Out of fear, Swami fled from that place. His action only backfired. Father was annoyed at his cowardice. He snatched the letter from his hand and threw it in the dustbin.

The following narration throws light on Swami’s provocation:

*Swami suddenly asked at the top of his voice, “Why did not Columbus come to India, Sir?”*

“He lost his way,”

“I can’t believe it; it is unbelievable, sir.”

“Why?”

“Such a great man. Would he have not known the way?”*
“Don’t shout. I can hear you quite well.”

I am not shouting sir; this is my ordinary voice, which God has given me. How can I help it?” (MD 60)

6. **Like the Sun:**

Sekhar, a geography teacher of the school is thinking about TRUTH. He feels that truth is like the Sun. Just like one cannot look directly at the Sun, one cannot look into one’s eyes if he is not telling the truth. He realizes that morning that the essence of human relationship consists in fortifying truth. He decides to spend at least one day telling only the truth. He feels life is not worth living if one does not set apart a unique day for telling truth. He tells his wife that the breakfast she has made is not good. One of the teachers in his school informs him that some common friend they know had died. Sekhar does not feel sad and bluntly responds to him that the man was selfish and mean. The headmaster invites Sekhar to his house. He knows that Sekhar has a good taste in music and he wants Sekhar to listen to his singing. Here, the headmaster actually seeks for an identity. He always desired to have good vocal chords to be given by God. The following words reveal his desperation:

“Rather a surprise for you, isn’t it? Asked the headmaster. “I’ve spent a fortune on it behind closed doors….” God hasn’t given me a child but at least let him not deny me the consolation of music.”

Sekhar listens to the headmaster sing. His head throbs with the medley of sounds blasting into his ear-drums. The singing is terrible and he is afraid to tell the truth. If he tells, he may be removed out from his job as he remembers that he will only tell the truth that day. In return, the headmaster tells Sekhar that he can have extra time to grade some test papers.

The headmaster asks Sekhar his opinion. Sekhar asks him if he can permit him to answer that question the next day. The headmaster insists that he gives his frank opinion immediately. Sekhar tells him that his singing is not good. The headmaster appreciates him for being honest and he is glad that he that he does not have to pay the music teacher but he tells Sekhar to
handover hundred papers after checking. He warns him that it will be scrutinized by him. Narayan has linked irony with human psychology. It is rightly said by Hillaire Belloc:

*It is the nature of irony that it should avenge the truth….Irony has the quality about it that like some fiery sword it cannot be used with any propriety save in God’s purpose.*

Although R.K. Narayan delineates the cruel circumstances of life in India, he portrays individuals with remarkable resilience to triumph over every adversity. All forms of social injustice: discrimination, prejudice, etc are highlighted. Yet the human spirit conquers everything. His short stories were adapted by the late actor-director Shankar Nag in to a television series, bearing the same name *Malgudi Days*. It was shot in the village of *Agumbe in Karnataka*. The stories of children written by him exemplify the truth. They see all that the adults do which they are forbidden to do. They are keen observers and they emulate them. Hence, Narayan conveys this message that children should be treated normally and given their individuality and adults should correct each other.
THE NOVELS OF R.K. NARAYAN

THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE NOVELS:

Narayan’s pre-independence novels are as under:
2. *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937)
3. *The Dark Room* (1938)

This study attempts to disseminate the six types of existential anxieties the protagonists in each of Narayan’s novels face which are the recurrent themes of human existence. The predicaments, the inner conflict intensifies as the novel progresses. The characters in the novels go through an existential crisis. He possesses a rare psychological insight into the human mind and has a mastery over the inner lives of the characters. He brilliantly portrays every character tackling the inevitable vicissitudes of life and very subtly evinces that these existential situations are essential for human flourishing.

*Swami and Friends* forms a loose triology with *The Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher*, which are also autobiographical, and focuses on young man’s development at various points in the colonial education system. This period explores the transition of childhood, adolescent mind to adulthood.

**SWAMI AND FRIENDS - “From isolation anxiety to the quest for community”**

*Swami and Friends* was published in 1935, which throws light on the protagonist Swami, the most endearing character, he had ever created. It was his first novel and it was of this book that Mr. Graham Greene wrote about it.

*It was Mr. Narayan with his Swami and Friends who brought India, in the sense of the Indian population and the Indian way of life, alive to*
...Swami is the story of a child, written with complete objectivity, with a humour strange to our fiction, closer to Chekov than to any English writer, with the same underlying sense of beauty and sadness.

In Swami and Friends, the protagonist Swami from isolation anxiety passes through series of confrontations, which leads to the quest for community. His existential predicament of being lonely and facing isolation is evident in this innocent world. It was Monday morning and Swaminathan was reluctant to open his eyes. He considered Monday especially unpleasant in the calendar. It was the Monday blues and he was not ready to go to school. After the total freedom of Saturday and Sunday it was very difficult to get into the Monday mood of work and discipline.

We see Swami throughout at home or at school resisting ‘discipline’, asserting ‘freedom’ Freedom is a genetic mutant especially in the heroes of Narayan’s novels. This novel was also written during the freedom movement. The yearning for freedom remains inherent in human nature. One does observe that in pre-independence novels, there is a conflict between the urge to be free and the demands of discipline which society and self make. Both freedom and discipline are vital for human fulfillment. For an existentialist being, free and being human is identical. The meaning of freedom changes from generation to generation from circumstance to circumstance and from country to country. Along with freedom comes responsibility. The heroes of the early novels at some point of time realize this truth.

The role of the family, their support and guidance are of prime importance to the heroes of these novels. Narayan’s hero Swami struggles to come with terms with his self, with his society and with the environment. His relations with his doting Granny, with his exasperated father, his mother, his friendships, his teachers, his enemies and all his adventurous stint done in school are artistically portrayed by Narayan. His father questioning him often disturbed him. Such as:

How many days is it since you have touched your books?(SF 96)
Do you think you have passed the B.A.? (SF 97)

The innocent and impulsive Swami, lands in trouble, when he is carried away by the serious unrest of 1930. He felt a sense of insecurity and also was angry with the Britishers. His emotions were at its peak. There were slogans and lathi charges. Videshi goods were burned. His patriotic feelings, agitation, protest backfired. He was caught for vandalism and was expelled from the school.

When the Headmaster caned him for his misbehaviour, he couldn’t tolerate this humiliation. He became bold and out of desperation, he shouted:

*I don’t care for your dirty school* (Swami and Friends p.125)

He rushed out of the class and quit Albert Mission School for good. He becomes involved in a similar confrontation with the headmaster in his new school for missing school to practice for the cricket match. This affected him psychologically. Here he suffers from an identity crisis.

The account of Swami’s relationships with the world around gives us a glimpse of what the child must have experienced: His mingling and friction of two civilizations, his Indian-English sensibility, his childhood escapades and his tangled feeling of helplessness when things got out of hand. He is dissatisfied with his life and lands up in a forest after running away from home. He is able to realize in the loneliness of the night the love and affection of his parents. He feared the darkness, the terrors of that night and prayed fervently to God to rescue him. Through this arduous journey, he realized his folly and overcame this existential predicament. He also felt that he was responsible for the depressing results of the match and the departure of Rajam to the bigger world outside Malgudi.

The following narration reveals Swami’s predicament:

*Every noise entered Swaminathan’s ears. These noises streamed in to his head, monotonously, endlessly. They were like sinister whispers,*
calling him to a dreadful sacrifice. .......He stood frozen to the ground and stared at this monster.(SE p.188)

At the end of the novel, Swami has narrowly escaped death, survived the disgrace of appearing to have deserted his cricket team in a vital match and has successfully bid goodbye to his schoolboy - hero friend. Life goes on with Swami restored to his family and all the Malgudians leading a meaningful life. Narayan’s understanding of child psychology and realistic portrayal of buoyant world of school boys, the novel will definitely understand the existential concerns like loneliness, alienation, separation, uncertainty, guilt, and especially Swami’s self-realization the need for an authentic relationship and for belonging to a supportive community.

Existential Positive Psychology accepts isolation anxiety as an existential issue but it is only through loneliness that Swami seeks community and his quest for help from the community, is the essence of human existence. Isolation anxiety can be cured only by community. It is human nature to have a place of one’s own and to be safe and supportive where one can identity oneself.

Hence P.S. Sundaram remarks on Narayan’s style of writing:

Swami is ‘real’ not only as a dramatic persona of Narayan “... every reader recollects, as he turns over the pages exactly similar experiences he himself has had. xv

But Meenakshi Mukherjee does not agree with V.Y.Kantak who has compared Narayan’s style as a “One-stringed instrument.”

She says that it fails to satisfy the reader as its lack of amplitude. But no other instrument would have a better suited the simple honesty of Narayan’s vision and his writings are unpretentious. One begins to realize the authenticity and strength of his medium.xvi
Narayan presents the dominating role of tradition and culture in playing a significant role in formation of successful human relationship. He believes that any deviation from this brings suffering and unhappiness.

K.R. Iyengar observes:

*There is generally flight, an uprooting, a disturbance of order followed by a return, a renewal, a restoration to normalcy.*

The order-disorder-order pattern is remarkably found in most of his novels. His characters are lively and authentic. He understands the psychology of his characters profoundly as he dives deep in to the mind to understand the inner motive.

This proves wrong what P.P. Mehta categorizes:

*Narayan is a writer of social novels, which are more or less comic novels. Light in their approach to life these novels do not claim to stir deep human emotions or to reach tragic heights.*

This slender novel is also a landmark in our literary history. It was one of the three books in the 30s, which marked a new phase in the development of the Indian novel in English. Somerset Maugham wrote to him prophetically:

*I am hoping that with all the national aspiration you will give rise to a great school of writers and artists.*

**THE BACHELOR OF ARTS** - *“From freedom anxiety to the quest for responsibility”*

The second novel, *The Bachelor Of Arts* (1937) contains an autobiographical element. The novel is divided into four parts and is also an exploration of the protagonist’s progress from the first asramas, the Brahmacharya (the stage of bachelorhood), to the grihastya (the stage of married householder) but this orthodox progression becomes complicated by the forces of modernity.
The protagonist Chandran, the hero of the novel is studying in Albert College doing his B.A. He has very good oratory skills He is appointed as the secretary of the Historical Association. He was selected for the debate by Professor Brown and had to be the Prime Mover. The protagonist is modest and is engaged in a search for freedom. His youthful world passes through freedom anxiety to the quest for responsibility.

At this point of time even his aspirations are dim and his vague feelings of dissatisfaction, disappointment and lack of freedom are highlighted.

    Chandran emerged from the Professor’s room with his head bowed in thought. He felt a slight distaste for himself as a secretary. He felt that he was on the verge of losing his personality. (BOA p.28)

Nazar Singh Sidhu in *Human Struggle in the Novels of R.K.Narayan* with his existentialist psychoanalytical technique observes:

    Chandran who is placed in such a way that “he has to suppress his authentic voice of freedom.” He must earn a degree and cannot incur displeasure of the most superior authority. External forces compel him to take decisions.²⁰

Chandran falls in love with a girl called Malathi. He is fascinated by her charm and expressed his determination to marry Malathi. His anxiety is revealed in the following words:

    I don’t care, I shall marry this girl and no one else. And when his mother asked if he was sure that they are prepared to give their daughter to him, he replied, They will have to. (BOA p.69.)

Chandran was very dejected and angry with his parents. The traditional practices in consultation with the horoscopes were the biggest hurdle he had to cross.

Mighty questions crossed his mind:

    “Why can’t we be allowed to arrange our lives as we please? Why can’t they leave us to rise or sink on our own ideals? (BOA p.71)
He was helpless. Too little freedom in hand lead him to despair.

Chandran’s marriage does not materialize as the horoscopes are incompatible and he feels dejected and disappointed. Chandran’s family demonstrates a range of acculturations and his travels lead from ambiguities (Malgudi) to alienation (Madras).

Through the mental flux of Chandran, Narayan portrays the hackeneyed caste system that has generated the crisis of conscience and values leading to social compartmentalization and alienation and individuation of self.

He views marriage and its ancient dogmas as a threat to our country’s prosperity.

*If India was to attain salvation, these water tight divisions must go—community, caste, sects, sub-sects and still further division. (BOAp.85)*

His frustration is revealed to his friend Raghavan:

*My heart is dead, Ragavan. I lost everybody I love in this world. (BOAp.105)*

He became extremely sentimental and when he failed to get his dream girl he decided to become an ascetic (sanyasi). He renounces the world not for any spiritual purpose. His renunciation was revenge on society, circumstances and even on destiny. He had lost all interest in his life and also thought of committing suicide. It was a mild and painless suicide, he could not think of living for sixty more years especially with Malathi married and gone. He decided never to return back to Malgudi, as he hated the place and everything that would remind him of Malathi.

The simple emotional situation develops into a crisis. The frequency of Chandran’s meetings with Malathi on the banks of Sarayu, a symbol of romance and emotional freedom, formed grooves deep inside the
consciousness of Chandran. He strays into a social vacuum and thus alienates himself in the world of things.

He suffers so much and for eight months wanders aimlessly and remains on alms and charity. But soon he realizes his mistake of becoming a Sanyasi. He discovers that becoming a sanyasi does not solve his problem.

Viktor Frankl opines that freedom implies responsibility as we are responsible for the consequences of the choices and the fear of taking any responsibility. This fear will make us flee from freedom and refuse to take any responsibility and drive us to abuse the freedom in hand.\textsuperscript{xxi} Frankl has repeatedly warned that freedom without responsibility leads to disaster.

Chandran’s gradual maturity and sobriety is seen when he finally reunites with his parents. The conversation below shows his changed attitude:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Are you still thinking of Malathi?}
\textit{I have trained my mind not to. She is another man’s wife now.}
\textit{Do you love the memory of her still?}
\textit{I do not believe in love. It does not exist in my philosophy. There is no such thing as love.}\textsuperscript{(BOA p.156.)}
\end{quote}

After his \textbf{realization}, he finally decides to settle with Susila, the 15 year old daughter of Advocate staying at Talapur. Chandran proved to be a loving husband to Susila and his conjugal life seemed to be peaceful and happy. Narayan portrays the hero’s effort towards achievement of maturity. He narrates that maturity is achieved by the minutely satisfied circumstances. He attains existential maturity only after passing through various vicissitudes of life. He had the freedom to make a choice but realizes that all need to be anchored in the society. Thus, through his existential lens, it is proved that Narayan’s protagonist identifies himself and his potential.
William Walsh quotes Chandran to the effect that the primary aim of Narayan’s protagonists is to achieve a life freed distracting illusions and hysterics. Walsh along with some other critics calls this aim an aspiration towards spiritual maturity and commends Narayan for avoiding the pitfalls of such a potentially formless and bewildering metaphysical endeavour.

However, Tabish Khair, in his book Babu Fictions observes:

*The style and attitude of Narayan has indeed saved him from a number of pitfalls and suggests that his characters whatever the rhetoric ---- do not aspire to ‘ spiritual maturity’,instead they aspire existential maturity. Most of the time Narayan’s protagonist are not very spiritual and are primarily concerned with the secular problem of living though they often mechanically observe religious customs.*

Reviewing the novel the Irish Times journalist Pamela Hansford said that the author has portrayed his characters so sympathetically and with an insight that no foreigner has achieved till date. She praised Narayan’s purity of style and clarity of thought.

At this juncture, I would like to state Hegel’s point of view. He defined *Alienation as the natural consequence*. For Hegel, man objectifies himself in the aim of work/actions and thus alienates himself in the world of things.

The desire to enter a rhythm of life which he feels “*that there ought to be proper synthesis of life*”(BOA p.138) and in accordance with the wishes of his family takes a decision to participate in the rituals of marriage and makes a choice to lead a meaningful life. Thus Narayan is successful in conveying that life should be lived, not negated and the realization of the realities of life.

It is rightly stated by Graham Greene about the appraisal of the author’s “*complete objectivity and freedom from comment….., the boldest gamble a novelist can take*” and *his light vivid style* with its sense of time passing of the unrealized beauty of human relationships”(BOA Preface) Thus one can say
that Chandran, the protagonist in quest for responsibility, faces freedom anxiety which helps him to overcome his existential concerns.

**THE DARK ROOM** - "From the crisis of discontent to the quest of happiness"

The third novel before independence is *The Dark Room*. It presents the marital unhappiness and domestic disharmony. Narayan sets down a fragment of life as he actually sees. Though the storyline is thin, underlying theme is profoundly realistic and presents the struggle of a sensitive woman to come to terms with her predicament. The crisis in the novel is adultery. The heroine is left trapped in an existential predicament of unrequited moral struggle close to life in death:

* A part of me is dead. (DR p92.)

*The Dark Room* and *Savitri* are deliberately named so by Narayan. The Dark room for the dark room in the house is a room used to store junk of the house. The protagonist Savitri identifies herself with the junk, which has outlived its utility. The room is dark and she feels that there is no light waiting at the end of the tunnel. Her self-worth is wounded. According to S.C.Harrex, the dark room here symbolizes as:

*the emotional and domestic claustrophia which can result from a circumscribed marital orthodoxy.*

*The Dark Room* portrays the protagonist alienated from herself, from the society and from the world and is in quest for marital identity. Savitri also goes through the crisis of discontent to the quest for happiness.

Savitri of the ancient legend is a paragon of virtue and courage who confronts even Death to save her husband is finally victorious. Ironically unlike the legendary Savitri, Narayan’s Savitri chooses to leave home, husband and children once she comes to know of her husband’s infidelity. There is a touch of irony at the start of the novel when her husband tells Savitri:

*What a dutiful wife! Would rather starve*
**Than precede her husband. You are some of the women in our ancient books. (DR p.11)**

Contrary to the legend, Savitri is just an ordinary, amiable, housewife. Our first impression is that of a traditional, docile and submissive Indian wife.

The wives, mothers, grandmothers all illustrate the passive feminine characters in Narayan’s novels. They are not even named. They are merely slotted. *The Dark Room* is the only novel of Narayan which is woman-centric until *A Grandmother’s tale* (1993), his last book which was a nouvella. After the first two novels ending with a positive note, the narrative technique with a dramatic element is incorporated with themes of dissonance and despair in marital relationship between the protagonist Ramani and Savitri. The heroine of the novel is Savitri. There are two critical phases in the novel. The second phase has greater intensity as it throws light on the disintegration of the family whose familial ties were amiable in the first phase.

In the first phase, Ramani showers all the love and affection and takes Savitri to the cinema. He sits in the first class seat with his wife by his side. He is proud of her and has a satisfaction of possessing her. He decides to take her separately and take the children the next day. He is very possessive and constantly enquires if her chair is comfortable.

It’s a Tamil film. I thought you would like it. (DR 22) He also wants her to see the film care free without bothering about children.

When Ramani claims the children as his own, she breaks down:

Yes, you are right. They are yours, absolutely. You paid the midwife and the nurse. You pay for their clothes and teachers. You are right. Didn’t I say a woman owns nothing? (DR 88)

She is totally heartbroken and in Harish Raizada’s words:

She feels that she has been denied the dignity of living a human being and has to depend on her father, husband and children. (DR 26)
Realisation of her helplessness hits Savitri:

I don't possess anything in this world. What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything else that she has is her father's, her husband’s or her son’s (DR)

Ramani’s words pierces her heart when he says:

They will get on splendidly without you, don’t worry. No one is indispensable in this world!! (DR)

Ramani has been very domineering and cynical in his ways and is very authoritative. He is also very strict with his children. He has complete control over his family and this behaviour is enough for Savitri to go through the mental agony. Now, to add to it he also has an affair with his office secretary, Shantabai, a new employee in his office who has deserted her husband and has joined as an insurance canvasser. Savitri confronts him and forewarns him of the consequences.

Realizing that all her life she has been treated as a stooge first by her father before marriage and secondly by her husband, she grows in to a rebel against the traditionally defined position of women in Indian society. A meek Savitri turns against the mythical implications of her name, protesting that she is a human being and that in general men never agree to it. For them women are playthings. When they feel like hugging, they hug otherwise are slaves to them. She also retorts that men should not think that they can fondle women whenever they wish and kick them whenever they choose.

He does not bother and refuses to change his ways. She rebels and shouts at him saying that he should not touch her, He is impure and even if she burns her skin, she will not be able to cleanse herself of impurity of his touch.(DR 87)

The scene vividly depicts the agonized and tormented wife’s rage and sentiments. Savitri is shattered with the repeated reprimands, rebuke, and now infidelity from her husband of fifteen years, leaves the house to commit
suicide. She decides to go empty-handed leaving all her ornaments. She also leaves behind the ornaments given by her father too because she feels that all men are alike and doesn’t want to depend upon any men. Her existential agony is unbearable and she rightly retorts:

*What is the difference between a prostitute and married women?*—the prostitute changes her men, but a married woman doesn’t; that are all, both earn their food and shelter in the same manner. *(DR 97)*

Her interior monologue reveals her mental anguish and she feels pity for the women who have no support. Savitri is on her way to commit suicide in the Sarayu river. Narayan reveals her state of mind where she herself is amazed at her rebellion. She feels that she has changed. She imagines whether she is the old Savitri or someone else. This must be a dream and she does not have the courage to talk back to her husband and she has never done it in her life. *(DR 115,116)*

She can never think of indulging in any controversies with her husband. Thus, after her decision of leaving home she is caught in a conflict between a wifely devotion and her new individual existence.

It is my contention that Narayan is being realistic in portraying his women as influenced by traditions and customs and other values upheld by the society. We can see that women even today believe in conforming to conventions at least most of them do. By presenting both the kinds of women—the conventional and non-conformist side by side in this novel, R.K. Narayan is being true to life. It would seem too artificial and contrived if we had only one ideal type of woman because this is not the case in the society.

Shantabai has questioned the traditions and conventions of the society. She defies them in leaving her husband and ending her marriage. The need to be free from bonds of matrimony and commitment is great but in her attempt to be free, she drifts anchorless for want of an ideal alternative to traditional values. In modern woman’s quest for self-fulfillment, apart from facing personal and social conflicts, she also has to undergo the painful experience
of severing the family bonds and re-establishing herself. Shantabai is the proverbial butterfly, the type of woman who imitates her western counterpart. She is an educative, manipulative seductress who knows how to use woman’s charm to win the man. She is cunning and makes the right move to trap her prey. He visits her home for the first time; her style of talking is conspicuous of her intention of enticing him. She narrated her sob story and at the end of every ten minutes of her narration she would say:

As for me life is…” something or other, some simple affair like Living Today and Letting Tomorrow Take Care Of Itself or Honour being the One Important Possession and so forth (DR 63)

She defies the traditional status of the woman in Indian society. She abandons her gambler and drunkard husband and her family. But her independence proves detrimental to Savitri’s familial peace. In Shantabai we find all the characteristics of a ‘coquette’ in Indo English literature. Narayan skillfully portrays her every action and in his ironic subtle fashion puts across the artificiality behind it. She shows how she compresses her lips, tosses her head in perfect Garbo manner: the temperamental heroine and the impending doom.

Narayan shows that how she poses as an intellectual and explains her own philosophy of life:

Tonight, I feel like pacing the whole earth up and down. I won’t sleep. I won’t sleep. I feel like roaming all over the town and the whole length of the river. I will laugh and dance. That’s the philosophy of my life. (DR 68)

R.K.Narayan has created Shantabai not just to reveal or portray the other type of woman but also to point out indirectly the hypocrisy implicit in middle class value systems. Shantabai represents the pseudo-emancipated woman who in her outward manner seems to know exactly what she wants and how she gets it. Ramani is hopelessly spellbound by her. Her theatrical display of hysterics moves him deeply and he contrasts it with his wife’s crude sulking in the dark room. Shantabai indirectly brings certain hypocrisies of the male psyche to the fore.
Narayan gives the women a chance to break away from the fold and assert their strength. But then again it cannot be said that making them return is a contrived act. When the women break away from the fold as Savitri does or when they undergo suffering they become aware of their inner selves and of the predicament of women in general. The experience of self-realization is a transforming experience.

Her existential crisis is vividly portrayed in the following lines:

*One definite thing in life is fear. Fear from the cradle to the funeral pyre and even beyond that, fear of torture in the other world. She is also afraid of her husband's displeasures and of the discomforts.*

Gangu is an educated woman and Savitri’s friend, who stays in the neighborhood. She aspires to be a professional singer. Her husband is a teacher. She is a Malgudi delegate to the All India Women’s Conference and a politician. She has full support of her husband who believes in women’s freedom. Her husband is very broadminded and she manages to keep a balance between tradition and independence. She too has her daily squabbles and has thrown everything at home. She comes to meet Savitri and confesses her mood swings that day. She tells her husband:

*Don’t expect any tiffin this evening when you come back from school. I would advise you to fill your stomach in a hotel.*

She tells Savitri that he has to get a packet for her and the children otherwise he will be driven back out to get them. Gangu is the new woman, whom Narayan throws light on being at par with her man.

Gangu is the one to convey to Savitri about her husband’s scandalous affair. She had seen Shantabai with Ramani in the theatre watching the film. She indirectly instigates her to assert herself, question her husband about the affair.
Narayan throws light on the woman Ponni of the Sukkur village whose husband Mari saves Savitri when she attempts to commit suicide. Mari was a burglar at night and a blacksmith during the day. He cared for his wife although he chased her about and threw things at her whenever he was drunk. Ponni has been a dominating woman and Mari does fear her. Ponni is a childless middle aged woman, who is vulnerable but is a woman who has complete freedom and dominance over her husband Mari.

After listening to Savitri’s predicament, Ponni advises the vanquished Savitri how to manage and treat a man. She says:

_Sister, remember this. Keep the men under the rod and they will be all right. Show them that you care for them and they will tie you up and treat you like a dog._ (DR, 105)

Perhaps what Narayan wants to emphasize in his indirect subtle way is that self-realization is the first step towards self-actualization. In fact to emphasize that all women characters in his novels conform to conventions and traditions, does not mean that they are passive and meek. They are inherently passive because they are conditioned to be passive and in embracing the traditional values and upholding them they prove not only wiser but also stronger. The women emerge after the turmoil stronger in spirit and go about their lives with greater knowledge and strength. While Narayan makes them come back and accept the dictate of the society, the women are no longer the same, docile weak persons that they were at the start.

His novels reflect on his narration. He is detached observer and leaves the interpretation to the reader. In India men make fun of a woman if she speaks of freedom. Men may appear to think that when woman becomes aware of her capabilities, she stops being a woman! Herein lies their faulty thinking.

The word ‘freedom’ is misconceived, misunderstood. Freedom from whom? Freedom from what? In fact the Indian woman has chained to her own misconceived ideas, there are number of shackles around her. But the fact is today these shackles are rusted but she is not aware of the rust. She has to
awaken from her slumber. She has to see the things in their true perspective and colours. She has to recognize her own SELF. That can happen only when she discards her fear out of her mind. But in reality is it easy for an Indian woman to cast fear of society and its dictates, to lead independent individual life?

**Freedom** is certainly the concept when one is reminded about the women’s lib. R.K.Narayan has admitted being obsessed with the philosophy of woman as opposed to man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament of the Women’s Liberation movement.

The following lines in the book are a standing testimony to his farsightedness and existential vision:

> 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 secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning that she herself began to lose all notion of her independence, individuality, stature and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu of the Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances. My novel dealt with her, with this philosophy broadly in the background.\textsuperscript{xxvi}

R.K.Narayan being a traditionalist lauds the resilience of women who faces all kinds of pressures from different quarters and yet emerges quietly triumphant and all wiser for it.

Today, decades after this novel is written women are said to share an equal status in society. Yet we hear about murders and suicides caused by inadequate dowries or infidelity. The values are gradually degenerating.

As Shyam Asnani says:

> Our Ramani’s can still lay down one law for themselves regarding sexual indulgences and another for their wives and sisters…… \textsuperscript{xxvii}
Psychological considerations underline a critical awareness of general human concerns that transcend the novels’ rootedness in India.

R.K.Narayan has employed the streams of consciousness technique in the context of Indian consciousness and not the consciousness of Camus or Kafka’s protagonist. He documents the critical moments of the protagonists life when she is faced with a psychic crisis in to self-revealing internal monologues:

*A dutiful wife, she has not to be obedient and loyal: There is no quarrel. I have not uttered a word”…..That makes it worse. You should either let your words out or feel that everything your husband or argued with him at any time in my life. I might have occasionally suggested an alternative but nothing more, What he does is right. It is a wife’s duty to feel so.* (DR 42)

Bullying husbands like Ramani and patient wives like Savitri was the scene in numerous household of those times. It is still prevailing in a male dominated society of the 21st century and is the hapless plight of many Indian housewives.

P.S.Sundaram maintains:

*The bully who will bring guests in to the house without notice and expect them to be fed is hardly thought of as a bully by anyone. It is the India tradition to honour the guest as God, to share whatever one has with the stranger.*xxviii

The stream of thoughts of Savitri is not continuous. The objective statements often intercept them. Interior monologue and soliloquy is a sensitive representation of Savitri’s oppressed female psyche. He executes the stream of consciousness technique to project the psychic reverberations of her character in order to lend the authenticity to the narration.

The Hindu mind still prevails. The Hindu philosophy, the classical theory of *Karma* implies a pragmatic approach to life’s problems. It is held that an
effective experience is painful or pleasurable because karmic traces are produced by our actions and so deserved. Every man has to live out his own *Karma*. The reality of the writers’ predicament is the reality of a universal predicament. The quest for an individual identity in the psychological realism is being authentic to one’s evolving self.

Thus, R.K.Narayan cannot be counted as a feminist and he never claims to be one but he really considers women’s issues consciously from the very beginning. The women in R.K.Narayan’s work are reflective of the women he saw in life around him. He does promote the status of women but does not show that westernization to be the only way out. The fiction of Narayan can be regarded as epics capturing modern India’s plight. His fictional town Malgudi serves as the periscope for observing the living state of women, the challenges and problems they face in reality.

Hence, it is rightly stated by Simone de Beauvoir, a French author, philosopher that:

*One is not born a woman, but becomes one.*

Narayan thus gradually creates a better position for women within India’s own traditions. His women characters grow stronger and show the emergence of New Woman who will uphold the traditional values and also be self-reliant. Savitri is fully aware of the dignity a woman possess and she knows that by succumbing to the status quo which includes Ramani’s petty tyrannies and flirtation, she has proved be her own enemy like Janamma.

What she needs is courage recalls Virginia Woolf:

*Courage in the manner of Moll Flanders, the power to stand her ground.*

After such bitter experiences, a new awareness stifles in her. She has to make a choice and lead a meaningful life. When Mari passes by her window, her natural urge is to rush out, hail him and reward him for having helped her. But she feels its futile and is helpless:
What am I? A part of me is dead…. Why should I call him? What have I? (DR 162)

Though such questions worry her, she is not the meek and timid Savitri any more. Her new awareness would enable her to see that her daughters at least do not fall in the same trap when they grow.

Nazar Singh Sidhu asserts:

The dark room in the ultimate analysis becomes a point of irony – the more Savitri suffers behind its dark, the more she achieves her authentic self. xxi

In this context alienation is the very essence of existence and the most glorious recovery of being. She overcomes all the existential storms through patience and fortitude and the belongingness towards Malgudi.

This simple novel brings out Narayan’s concern for the ‘Savitris’ of our country. Savitri is an agent for Narayan’s quest for psychological insight and awareness of the plight of unfortunate woman who has neither the strength of will nor the economic and educational opportunities to withstand unfair male aggression. Narayan’s view matches with Dr. Paul Wong’s duality hypothesis. It states that positives cannot exist apart from negatives and that authentic happiness grows from pain and suffering. This hypothesis reflects Albert Camus insights:

There is no joy without despair.xxxii

Narayan is quite conscious of the complexity of the experience. Uma Parmeswaran, a critic states:

Though Narayan’s vision is positive his ‘affirmation is not a thunderous one, It is found only if one looks for it.’ xxxiii

This justification cannot be accepted. When claim of affirmation is doubted the question whether it is so bold or not is not significant.
THE ENGLISH TEACHER - “From a meaninglessness anxiety to the quest for meaning and purpose”

R.K.Narayan’s last novel before independence The English Teacher (titled Grateful to Life and Death in the American edition) was published in 1945. It is dedicated to his wife Rajam. It is third and final part of the trilogy. It describes how the sweet and happy life of a lecturer comes to a tragic end with the death of his wife and how this unfortunate calamity upsets his life completely.

The story is a reminiscent of the author’s domestic life cut short by the tragic blow of the fate which snatched away his wife away from him after five years of the married life. Krishna, the protagonist takes off from where Chandran left us. If Swami and Chandran signify the first stage of life (Brahmacharya), the second stage is Grihastaya.

In My Days, Narayan describes this novel as:

It has an autobiographical content and a very little part of it being fiction.xxxiv

This tragic experience did make him feel very depressed and he went in to a seven-year hiatus, but the gap is also attributed to variety of factors. It was during the freedom struggle. At this point of time, he had three novels and three collection of short stories and had a fairly good experience of writing for a decade. When he conceptualized the novel and began to write, he was thirty-six, an age as Somerset Maugham affirms that the author’s creativity was at its peak.

Moreover before writing this novel, he had a tremendous and unique emotional, spiritual and mental experience as a result of the tragic, unexpected demise of his wife whom he loved fathomlessly. Inevitably, the novel is a mature work of the writer and it exhibits the maturity level at its peak.
The novel is not only autobiographical but also touches one's heart. Narayan at a young age suffered a personal loss when his wife Sushila passed away. Hence he started writing the novel *The English Teacher*. The novel is mostly on the writer’s personal experiences. Narayan has rendered the grief of Krishna with remarkable restraint. His narration in the first person stimulates the senses of the reader which gives a certain measure of authenticity to an experience through the sufferings of Krishna. The story is about the series of experiences in the life of Krishna as an English teacher and his quest towards achieving inner peace and self-development. Krishna the protagonist undertakes an emotional, intellectual and spiritual journey i.e. from a meaningless anxiety to the quest for meaning and purpose during the course of the novel.

In the final chapters the issues of the novel come to a head with Krishna’s resignation from his post as English teacher and his psychic reunion with his wife. In his attack on the system he is rebelling against not only English literature itself but for all those who could be insensitive to Shakespeare’s sonnets or *Ode to the West Wind* but India’s adherence to an educational system, which stifles the spirit of the students and alienates them from their native culture.

The novel portrays man-woman relationship on two planes, the worldly or domestic and the spiritual. It describes in detail the sweet-bitter domestic life of Krishna, the English teacher and his wife Susila. The novel is made of three parts: Krishna’s life before his wife joins him, his life in her company and his life after death. Thirty year old Krishna, teacher of English in Albert Mission College, Malgudi where he has been a student earlier. The very first paragraph of the novel reveals the narrator’s hopelessness, dissatisfaction and a disturbed consciousness. Although the day passed much to his satisfaction without any ‘conflicts and worries’ , he feels heroic and satisfied that he has completed most of the tasks assigned to him. But he feels that something is missing, “some sort of vague dissatisfaction, a self-rebellion” as he has been leading a sort of mechanical existence-‘eating, working in a manner of speaking, walking, talking etc.,
Taking stock of himself, he outlines his daily routine- getting up at eight every
day, preparing his lessons on Milton, Carlyle and Shakespeare for the
umpteenth time, going through the compositions of his students, swallowing a
meal, dressing and rushing out of the hostel just when the second bell sounds
in the college. Four hours later he returns to his room after browbeating and
cajoling his students into mugging up Shakespeare and Milton.

Krishna would say:

Secure high marks and save me adverse remarks from my chiefs at the
end of the year.(TET p.5.)

He is paid a salary of a hundred rupees per month and is called ‘a lecturer; He
ought to be content with his lot but he is ‘constantly nagged by the feeling’ that
he is “doing the wrong work”. This leads to perpetual self-criticism, which is
aggravated by even the ordinary incidents in the course of his work. The
following lines reveal his lamentation that there is something wrong in his life:

What was wrong with me? I couldn’t say some sort of vague
disaffection, a self-rebellion…..but always leaving behind a sense of
something missing.(TET p.5 )

Krishna is a poet with an authentic passion, who realizes that something is
missing in his life. He finds himself alienated in the profession he is in and the
sense of futility that has surrounded him.

He feels that he is hemmed by a system that is totally alien to his ambition.
His colleagues nag him and they and their interests, arguments, irritate him,
their characters exasperate him. Even the boys whom he teaches complain
about wasting time taking attendance and he threatens them regarding it.
Though he is successful in setting them right, he realizes the futility of what he
is doing:

Who was I that they should obey my command?” What tie was there
between them and me? Did I absorb their personalities as did the
masters merge them in mine. I was merely a man who mugged earlier
than the introduction and the notes in the Verity edition of Lear and
guided them through the mazes of Elizabethan English. I did not do it
out of love for myself. 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.
(TET p.12. )

Krishna subjects himself to a remorseless self-analysis and broods over his
state of unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Narayan’s humour is evident in such
remarks as the angels take someone to the hostel bathroom ordained by God
to wait his turn as a mark of punishment.

His colleagues in Albert Mission College are described by Krishna with a tinge
of humour such as Gajapathy “swelling with importance” Rangappa “the dry
philosopher” the purist Brown, Gopal the mathematics teacher who is as
sharp a knife-edge in mathematical calculations, Sastri the logic teacher and
others. We discover that Krishna is a lover of Nature. He wants to write about
its beauty but with little success because he measures his output by the
number of verses he can manage to write everyday. He broods like Hamlet
but his humour surfaces, when he thinks of his wife and elder brother and
their habits.

The second part of the novel begins with his wife. When he returns to his
hostel room, he finds two letters for him. One from his father stating that he is
sending his wife Susila and their seven month old daughter to Malgudi so that
he can set up a proper house and stop living in a hostel room. The other letter
was from his wife about her joining him at Malgudi and the behaviour of the
little girl Leela. He is tempted to see her at once. But still has the doubt of his
ability to manage a family. He was assured that his mother will be
accompanying his wife and child to help him in setting the house.

He was thrilled at reading the letters and looked forward this domestic bliss.
He is reminded of his wife whenever his eyes fall on the jasmine bush. Now it
covers the library walls and he starts feeling nostalgic when he looks at it.
I am about to leave you....after all these years... after ten years.” --- the time he has spent in the hostel, first as a student and then as a teacher.(TET p.21)

But with the prospect of domestic life looming large before him, he starts hating hostel life. Now he wants to be with his wife and daughter at the earliest. He sets about searching for a house and at last finds one. He moves in to a rented house a few days before his family joins him there. The next three days Krishna is very busy getting the house swept, cleaned, hangs his clothes on a peg, arranges the papers and books neatly in order to escape the wrath of his mother. She arrives ahead of Susila with a sackful of vessels and helps Krishna stocking the store room and in rearranging the kitchen, spoke about the house-keeping philosophy. Housekeeping was a grand affair for her and the whole day she was wrapped up in her duties.

The essence of her existence consisted in the thrills and pangs and the satisfaction she derived in running a well-ordered household. She was unsparing and violent where she met slovenliness. If a woman can’t take charge of a house and run it sensibly, she must be made to get in to a man’s dress and go out in a procession.....(TET p.29)

She has complaints about Krishna’s father and his elder daughter-in-law, the daughter of the High Court Judge. However she feels Susila, his wife has been brought up well and is very modest. She has already been trained by his mother and her parents are very impressed with her achievements in this direction. Yet, Krishna shudders at the very thought of two woman coming together in his house at Malgudi.

Krishna receives them at the station and his mother stays with them for two months till she is satisfied that her daughter-in-law can manage the house in her absence, she leaves for her village. Krishna and Susila live a happy and contented life for several months with their daughter Leela. He hands over his salary to his wife on the first of every month and she being a ruthless accountant would keep an account of every paisa. Thus he enjoys the harmony and peace of the domestic life quite necessary for his poetic
creativity. Krishna begins to see in Susila the essence and the future possibilities of his being. Here one is reminded of Sartre’s tenets of existentialism:

Existence precedes essence.\textsuperscript{xxxv}

She was a constant source of inspiration for him. They also had their minor quarrels and brief misunderstandings between them. They both feel miserable and uneasy after that. Such squabbles disturb their peace of mind and hence they decide not to fight for petty things, as it will affect their child. So, she compromises and as they are both fond of each other live blissfully.

But their blissful state of family life is short lived. Krishna father offered to give him money to buy a house and that it was not wise to live in a rented house. Both Krishna and Susila are very happy with the offer. They have endless discussions to decide the house, the rooms needed and the site. They set out for their mission. They go the Lawley road extension with the contractor and Sastri. They find a house very attractive, which had jasmine creepers train over the arch on the archway. While Krishna is negotiating the price with Sastri and the contractor, Susila decides to take a detour at the backyard. She uses the bathroom and has a bitter experience. There are lots of flies and filth in the bathroom. She contracts typhoid and is treated for it. A new phase of struggle starts for Krishna. Every possible effort is made to save her life but unfortunately she faces an untimely death. After Sushila's death, Krishna is forced to face the harsh realities of life and is tortured by the loneliness he undergoes.

His mental agony at the funeral is poignant and touching. His interior monologues reveal his mental anguish when he says that he cannot resist the impulse to turn and look back at the flames. It has left him high and dry. He is in severe pain. He feels that that there are no surprises, no shocks in life and that he watches the flames without agitation. For him after this incident, he has no life. Nothing else in life will worry him or will interest him in life henceforth.
The feeling of existential emptiness pervades. At this juncture the narrative of the narrator offers a different perspective. The secular themes underpinned by Hindu beliefs are replaced by a more philosophical line of enquiry and the reflections on the meaning of existence and the possibility of contact with the after-life.

Krishna loses the essential moorings of his life. He decides to retain the house because Susila has been associated with it. He gets a lot of solace in his daughter Leela and also finds a purpose to live. She takes much of his time and attention. He starts living in a world of his own in which Leela is the centre of his existence. He is so emotionally attached to his wife that he feels nostalgic and decides to leave his house. He is not able to adjust to the changes, is restless and dejected. His attitude towards life completely changes.

Krishna establishes a close contact with his dead wife. The séances he has with the genial peasant who acts as a medium between Krishna and Susila’s spirit. He is feeling her presence without seeing her. Susila undergoes a metamorphosis after her death. The believable and the charming housewife turns into a spirit and undertakes the task of guiding Krishna through his maze of grief and apathy to a higher harmony of the soul beyond life and death. In this she fulfils the classical concept of womanhood. "She takes Krishna’s spiritual development in her hand, teaches him about the psychic medium of existence, enables him to have a spiritual sight and guides him towards the higher knowledge of the soul. In the end, he is back to accept the inevitable dissolution of human ties and the soul beyond the physical realm.

Dr. S.K.Biswal, in his critical study of R.K.Narayan opines that Krishna learns and changes during the course of the novel. He could not predict anything in the beginning. This journey of his life is not satisfactory and he finds it difficult to find a set of values and a way of life that he can believe in wholly. That is that he does not trust life at that juncture.
Krishna’s journey does take place due to a series of unpredictable events followed by recurring themes. These themes might be said to be Krishna’s progress from predictability to unpredictability, from the academic world to the real world of life and death, from adulthood to childhood and from western mentality to an eastern mentality as observed.

He says that he had decided to take the help of his wife for self-development. He meditates and reserves some amount of time where he empties his mind. His main motive for undertaking this development is to reach closer psychic communication with his wife but he also experiences a general improvement in his state of mind.

The following words affirm his state of mind:

*He realizes that he has to do something meaningful in life. He becomes self-reliant and realizes that peace of mind and equanimity comes from within.*

Narayan plumbed the depths of the existential abyss first following the death of his beloved wife Rajam. His regular psychic communions with his wife gradually change him and helps him to be at peace with himself. Even the head-master’s near death experience contributes to a great deal to his present state of mind. His sensibilities improve and he realizes that he has to devote his life for his daughter Leela. Narayan indulges in bringing out the essence of Indian ethos whose role is inevitable in all facets of life not only for the ancient ones, but also for the baffled contemporary youngster, whether he be Indian or alien.

So, bearing in mind that Existentialism in the modern context is an old wine in a new cup, a new name for an ancient method of Buddhism and Upanishads, which insist only on the knowledge of Self. This analysis is based on the fact that Man, being a victim of ignorance of his innate tenderness of morality becomes selfish and self-centered.

Although one is of the opinion that Narayan’s work is free of ‘isms’, and his vision of life has very little to do of the western concepts, one is mistaken.
Some critics too are of the opinion that he is a pure artist and has adopted the theory ‘art’ for ‘art’s sake’. But it does not connote that he is artist without any philosophy of life. When it is minutely understood in depth about what he conveys through his novels, we do realize the artistic blend of irony, Hindu culture, the comic philosophy, the psychological aspect has been very subtly conveyed through his real heroes who have identified their Self only through the existential way.

K.R.S.Iyengar remarks:

Narayan’s is the art of resolved and conscientious exploration….. he would, he could explore the inner countries of the mind, heart and soul and catch the uniqueness in the ordinary, the tragic in the prosaic. xxxvii

His vision and thoughts resemble Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. He is a penetrating commentator and analyst of human motives. He states that in the course of evolution man should bring about changes in himself. That is man must be transformed and transmuted to a higher level of existence. Man's greatness is not in what he is but in what he can be. He should be liberated and this freedom is inherent to human existence. The practice of freedom is man's authentic existence. It is to be lived through responsible decision and action. Both Radhakrishnan and the existentialists emphasize on the immense potentialities of man.

Jean Paul Sartre also asserts about man:

that- it-is-what-it-is-not and that it is not what-it-is." Man exists and makes himself develop into what he wants to be.xxxvii

As detailed reading shows, Narayan is steeped in Hindu philosophy, and though he discards many of its notions, he assimilates the basic truths. As he says in The English Teacher:

My knowledge of past, present and future strictly pertain to this life. Beyond that I have nothing to say, because I believe I shall once again be resolved into the five elements of which I am composed: and my
intelligence and memory may not be more than what we see in air and water. (TET p.164)

Our deeds in this life will have repercussions in this life only, and through the realisation of our follies and delusions comes wisdom. He believes in making our faculties and experiences useful in this life, rather than accumulating them for an after-life. Narayan's view is that wisdom is not gained through meditation, or by spiritual contemplation, but by going through the experiences that life has to offer.

His daughter Leela is taken care by his parents and is happy to see the headmaster alive. The prediction has been weighing heavily on the headmaster all these years about his death and it has been a terrible agony stretching over years and he is glad that it is now over. He wants to dedicate his life for the school and plans to never go back to his family.

He visits his parents and Leela. When he returns home, the loneliness oppresses him. His quest for meaning and purpose is resolved. He consoles himself with the thought that there is no escape from loneliness and separation.

"Wife, child, brothers, parents, friends..... We come together only to go apart again. It is one continuous movement. They move away from us as we move away from them. The law of life can't be avoided. The law of life comes in to operation the moment we detach ourselves from our mother's womb. All struggle and misery of life is due to our attempt to arrest this law or 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." (TET p. )

Thus, Narayan's personal encounter with the tragic event has brought about meaninglessness in his life which he overcomes by identifying three values of meaningful living as proposed by Viktor Frankl in 1986. Creative value, Experiential value and Attitudinal value. We give ourselves to the world with our creative efforts; we receive something from the world like beauty and love
and we adopt a positive attitude towards negative situations beyond our control.

The following words do reveal his change of attitude towards life:

*My mind was made up. I was in search of a harmonious existence and everything that disturbed that harmony was to be rigorously excluded.*

*(TET p.178)*

He decides that he cannot continue his mechanical job in the college anymore. He decides to withdraw himself from the adult world and adult work into the world of children. He is at peace with himself and starts working with the school run by the headmaster.

Krishna’s attempt to establish a communication with the spirit of his wife indicates man’s attempts to fathom the mystery of death. He finally learns to experience at the psychic level and discusses with his friend about his experience:

*Do you know I don’t believe in death myself. My wife has communicated with me so often, and has given me directions for self-development* *(TET p.163)*

In this context I would like to mention Dr. Paul Wong’s Meaning Management Theoretical concept that Life and Death are the two sides of the same coin. There is no life without death and there is no death without life. By integrating the negative experiences with the positive ones, it emphasizes human beings for a positive change and growth.

Narayan concludes his autobiographical narrative:

*The boundaries of our personalities are suddenly dissolved. It was a moment of rare, immutable joy - a moment for which one feels grateful to life and death.* *(TET p.184)*
Plots, action and Narayan’s technique changes in the novels after independence. The level of maturity is very evident in the writings during the post independence period.

THE POST-INDEPENDENT NOVELS:

Some of his post-independence novels are:

- The Guide (1958)
- The Vendor of Sweets (1967)

**The Guide** – “From death anxiety to the quest for death acceptance and self-transcendence”

The novel *The Guide*, the fifth novel is one of the finest and the best of Narayan’s novels. The novel was written in the USA when the author was thinking of a subject for a novel: a novel about someone suffering enforced sainthood. A situation in Mysore offered a setting for such a story and the idea crystallized in his mind centering in and around Narayan’s fictional town of Malgudi located in South India. One can easily notice the change in his writings over different periods. His modest initial experiences bloomed into maturity and achieved perfection in his novels after independence. His novels of 1950’s and 1960’s threw light on the characters’ fascination for money, power and sex. His novels depicted the existential dilemmas of the characters in this hostile world.

The three major characters Raju, Rosie and Marco form relationships that are characterized by the domination of one over the other. The dominated characters use various ways to overcome their handicap. The struggle to be free from dominance also results in a search for individual identity. We also find a sense of loneliness and alienation in the relationship between Marco and Rosie as well as Raju and Rosie, the main characters in this novel. R.K.Narayan projects such existential predicaments as natural agents whose role is devastating the formation of the human relationship. He has
encapsulated the postmodern condition in an existential perspective in a very subtle but powerful way.

This novel has all the features of the postmodern literature. It explores the external reality to examine the inner state of consciousness of the characters and employ fragmentation in narrative and character construction. The ideas of disorder and fragmentation, the common themes usually are irony, playfulness, pastiche, paradox, open-endedness, ambiguity, etc. The writer never reaches a conclusion; rather leaves the conclusion to be formulated by the readers themselves. xxxix

One can easily notice the change in his writings over different periods. His modest initial experiences bloomed in to maturity and achieved perfection in his novels after independence. The concluding sentence of the novel is a fine example of the effective use of ambiguity.

V.Y.Kantak rightly observes:

These Malgudi men and women within their circumscribed lives yet manage to express, the irrepressible joie-de-vivre which distinguish them. They think and live differently, once they attain their synthesis of flesh and spirit.xi

The consequences of every decision or action and an ability to shoulder this responsibility remain the cornerstone of existential awareness in the Postmodern era. In The Guide, Narayan’s protagonist faces different predicaments in all four phases of his life. The narrative strategies employed by Narayan in the novel are commendable. The hero Raju in the story plays the role of a guide but they are four different roles of a guide. The story portrays gradual shaping in to a tourist-guide. He knows the secrets of his profession. His story moves through a cycle. His role is narrated in two series. One by the author and the other by the Swami. The ‘flash on’ and ‘flash back technique’ describes alternately the incidents of Raju’s life. This technique is a characteristic feature of the postmodern genre.
In the first phase of his life, Raju faces an identity crisis where he takes up odd jobs at the railway. He runs his father’s stall, he would often induce a sort of melancholia in his customer remarking about a particular place of visit that should be enjoyed by the whole family and the man would swear that he would be back with the entire brand the coming season. This is marvellous, the Railway Raju gradually becomes a popular tourist guide and then a Swami and finally he is transformed into a human being who practices penance for the welfare of other people. The truth about Narayan’s story is that it contains many other stories within a single story. For initiating the quest for authenticity, some amount of discomfort is necessary. The pathway to it entails risks, setbacks and sufferings.

After his father’s death, he takes up the responsibility of running the stall at the Malgudi railway station. He pretends to be well-versed with the town. When visitors ask him about the places of interest, he describes lyrically the beauty and importance of the spots the tourist is interested in. He has the gift of the gab and he uses it skillfully. As a result he emerges as a successful tourist guide. The following narration reveals his joy for the work. He convinces his mother in the following words:

I am seeing a lot of places and getting paid for it; I go with them in their car or bus, talk to them I am treated to their food sometimes and I get paid for it. Do you know how well-known I am? (TG p.58)

In the second phase of his life, as a guide, he meets Marco and Rosie. Marco and Rosie’s arrival to Malgudi marks a turning point in Raju’s life. One realizes that Raju is destined to do service to this pair as he becomes an expert in guiding the visitors who come to Malgudi. He is appreciated by one and all very soon becomes very popular. Marco is impressed by Raju’s knowledge and appoints him to escort him for sightseeing. His wife Rosie later joins him. Raju is enchanted by her. He vows to attend to her needs at the first sight itself.

Marco and Rosie do not have any common interest. Their interest totally differ and the bridge between them gradually widens. Marco’s appearance
itself is not soothing. His dress and manners are disgusting. His sole interest lie in epigraphy. He goes to remote places looking for the inscriptions on stones. He is also interested in cave paintings and mural decorations. Rosie’s ambition in life is to become a model or a top class dancer; but her husband hardly notices her talents. He detests her for liking Bharatnatyam, which for him is no better than monkey tricks. Rosie is fatigued in the company of an unreal husband who is completely absorbed in his own wanderings in to the stone-walls discarding a live real woman and neglecting her natural passions.

What is your interest? Raju asked. Anything except cold old stone walls,’ she said?(TG p.83)

Raju discovers Rosie’s potential as a dancer. Her meeting Raju is an opportunity because she discovers in him a means of freedom. She loves dance and if she can shape an identity and destiny for herself through her art, she will be able to reduce her object dependence on her husband to some extent at least. They both are in quest for an identity. Marco seeks the fulfillment of professional ambition while Rosie desperately wants to see a cobra dance but it was also a path to escape from the suffocating world.

The couple gets estranged. Both get alienated. Raju takes them to the Peak house, the forest bungalow at Mempi Hill, an ideal place for their stay. Marco’s eccentric pursuits and her love for art did not match. Her art and her husband could not find a place in her thought at the same time, one drove the other out ! She sulks in loneliness. Raju exploits the misunderstanding between the husband and wife and dethrones Marco from her heart. Thus, the indifference of Marco to Rosie’s aspirations in the field of art drives her closer to Raju. To keep her close to him he is ready to pretend that he is interest in art. He poses as a lover of art.

Rosie gets her first chance to give a dance performance at Albert Mission College and become famous overnight. Raju jumps at this opportunity and takes up a role of an impresario and starts playing his part to perfection. He takes care of that aspect and helps her attain name and fame. He indulges in
drinking and gambling and starts splurging on them. He feels that he is indispens­able. The following words of Raju reveal:

*That was enough for her. My guidance was enough. She accepted it in absolutely unquestioning faith and ignored everything else completely. (TGp167)*

For want of money, he indulges in malpractices and is soon arrested for forgery. Nobody comes to his rescue. The gulf between them is widened. Greed and jealousy turns his world upside down. He is imprisoned for two years. He has to bear the brunt of his actions. Too much of freedom without responsibility leads to chaos opines Dr. Viktor Frankl.

Thus Jean Paul Sartre's existential philosophy that it is the actions that make man who they are and they are determined by their own choices hold true.

In the next phase of life, he plays the role of a convict. Due to his misdeed and greed, he is taken to prison. Even in prison, Raju realizes his potential and the ability to live in harmony by making his own choice and bring about changes.

As a convict, with his ir­repressible urge to please people, he befriends all the other prisoners and becomes a much­sought­for helper to the warders and the Superintendent. Again, he plays his role to perfection.

The man who was guilty of all offences in the outside world becomes the model to the prisoners in jail.

It is even said that he was sorry to leave the prison. He would say to the newcomers who became moody and sullen, *Forget the walls and you will be happy*(TG p.228)

When Mani, the accountant visited him in prison he told him,

*This is not a bad place. You should come here, if you can.*(TG p.230)
He looked horrified and never saw him again. But here one can comment on Narayan’s positive attitude. It is evident that Narayan throws light on the positive side of every situation. Raju goes through the existential crisis of discontent to the quest of happiness.

Thus, Victor Frankl’s logotherapy, a therapy to cope with existential uncertainties in life through ‘meaning’ is appropriate. Frankl believes:

\[
\text{Even under the most difficult circumstances, people have choices and should make their lives meaningful.}^{xii}
\]

The final role thrust upon him in the last phase of his life is that of the Swami in the temple on the riverbank. After his release from the prison, Raju takes shelter in the old dilapidated temple situated on the other side of the river Sarayu. He has no money and no home to return to, he spends his time at the river bank. Velan, a native of Mangala village comes as a god send to the ex-convict and mistakes him for a Swami. Raju has a habit of solving other people’s problems and the guide in him reasserts itself. He decides to solve Velan’s problem. His stubborn sister is brought in front of Raju and he reels off some high-sounding aphorisms that have no relevance to the case. On hearing his talk and advice, Velan’s sister changes her mind and gives her consent for marriage. Velan takes it to be an evidence of Raju’s divine powers and soon the whole village comes to know of his miraculous powers. Raju says:

\[
\text{What must happen must happen. He gazes at the river and adds that no power on earth or in heaven can change the course of the river.}(TG\text{ p.22})
\]

His knowledge of human nature, the failures and triumphs which enables him to handle satisfactorily makes him rise steadily in the esteem of the simple people. He can get a train reservation at a moment’s notice, reinstate a dismissed official, nominate a committee member, get a boy admitted in a school and procure a vote for a co-operative election. People start attributing divine powers and miracles to him. Raju decides to stay there and bask in his
new found glory. There is starvation and the prices of the essential commodities rise leading to a clash between Velan and some traders. Raju sends a word through a half-wit that unless the villagers remain good, he will not take any food. The half-wit misinterprets and tells the villagers that the Swami will not eat because there are no rains. The villagers are overwhelmed and hail Raju as a Mahatma.

Ironically, Raju has waxed an eloquent speech to the villagers about the rains when a sage undertakes fasts. They misunderstand and conclude that Mahatma will fast till it rains. Raju calls Velan and confesses that he is no Mahatma but it falls on deaf ears. The twelve-day fast begins to bring the much-needed rain. Raju realizes this meaningless life. His meaninglessness anxiety to the quest for meaning and purpose is triggered. He feels that he has never really lived. Now he feels that he has to do something significant and make a difference.

When things have taken an unexpected turn, Raju has to resign himself to the situation and goes through the twelve-day ordeal with great solemnity. He is forced to undertake the fast. He decides to take it up because it is the first time that without vested interests, he is undertaking the fast for the villagers. Spiritual powers are attributed to him and people from far and wide come to seek his blessings. At the end he was claiming that he could hear the raining on the hills. The anti-climax of the story is that it transforms 'A Saint out of a Sinner.'

Thus Raju is caught in the web of his own making from which there is no escape. His sainthood is superficial. Though he has told the whole story to Velan there is no sincere repentance for his past sins. He only takes on another role of a saint and sets out to enjoy it as he has enjoyed his previous roles of a guide, lover, and manager and of an ascetic. The novel ends with a note of an ambiguity. Raju attains martyrdom and the state of apotheosis. At this juncture, Raju decides to face death rather than abandon his unique experience of selflessness. Thus in this existential crisis, he chooses Death. The existential quest for acceptance of death one of the anxieties faced
mentioned by Dr. Paul Wong comes to the fore. Raju prefers considering death as a better alternative to painful existence. From the beginning of his career, Raju has been an accommodator. William Walsh observes:

So extreme a degree of accommodation means that Raju’s sincerity consists is being false, and his positive existence is being a vacancy filled by others.\textsuperscript{xli}

What Walsh ignores however is that Raju’s attempt to accommodate, actually prepares him for the transcendent life he eventually achieves. Although he is no saint, he cannot perform any exotic feats. He never misguides these simple folks. On the contrary, he works towards their unity and their well-being.

Sr. Mary Beatina Rayen thoroughly analyses every character including Raju in the novel. She observes:

The earnestness with which the villagers express their sentiment and faith ‘brought tears to Raju’s eyes.’ He feels deeply that ‘after all the time had come for him to be serious—to attach value to his own words.’\textsuperscript{xlii}

There is a reversal role here. While the villagers treated Raju as their guru, Raju is actually now their disciple. Their faith, love and piety bring about a transformation in Raju.

Narayan comments:

For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full supplication, outside money, and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested\textsuperscript{(TG p.213)}

Narayan’s existentialistic view of Raju turning in to a spiritual guide colours the tone of narration and he allows the metamorphosis to take shape.

As observed by Meenakshi Mukherjee:
Raju loses the feeling of an actor, performing an act; the act becomes a reality, the mask becomes the man and Raju, the guide turns into a Guru.\textsuperscript{xlv}

When the doctor offers the glucose and saline when he is on the verge of collapsing, Raju declines the offer and his advice. This is an ample evidence of his readiness to sacrifice himself. This seems to be symbolically indicating his awareness of ‘sainthood’ happening to him. His total preparedness to suffer for them lifts him out of his limited self to a higher and transcendental plane of existence.

The following lines reveal his state of transcendence to Velan:

\textit{Raju opened his eyes looked about and said “Velan, it’s raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs…” He sagged down(TG p.27)}

Self-realization, happiness and pleasure are the after effects of self-transcendence and discovery to meaning. It helps one to confront such existential anxieties in order to live meaningfully and vitally. Raju is thoroughly human in his desires and passions. And yet he is capable of a remarkable capacity for detachment which enables him to go through all the existential predicaments with positive pleasure. Here Raju is finally worried about the welfare of the village community who has been hopelessly witnessing the menace of drought and famine. He is now indeed transformed in to a guide of the suffering humanity.

\textit{The Guide} should be read as an affirmation of human possibilities for self-discovery and self-transcendence rather than a story of enforced sainthood. The last sentence in the novel epitomizes the non-closure and shift of perspective—two devices employed in an Indian English novel in the 1950’s.

His novels depicts the existential dilemma of its characters in a hostile world, which is a conglomerate of individuals and can be said to represent the whole humanity.
Each character faces existential crisis and overcomes them in their own way. Only one of the characters, the protagonist Raju in The Guide, is discussed. His predicament, how he overcomes the obstacles in the different phases of his life and the realization of ‘Self’ has been dealt elaborately.

**THE VENDOR OF SWEETS - “From identity crisis to the quest for authenticity”**

The Vendor of Sweets published in 1967 by the Bodley Head Ltd London and simultaneously in India by his own publication. All the post-independent novels portray human life in complex circumstances. The hero of this novel is not an intellectual nor has he read the ten principals of Upanishads. The Gita provides him with all the wisdom he needs. Yet, he is fully conscious of the traditional goals prescribed for human life by the Hindu religious thinkers and the traditional ordering of life in terms of the four Ashramas.

One can perceive that most of his novels also touch upon the psychological and the philosophical aspects of the protagonist. The novel focuses on the father-son relationship and theme of existential issues like the loneliness, alienation, man’s quest for identity, self renewal and self realization dealt by Narayan. The protagonist Jagan is a sweet vendor by profession and a widower, aged sixty is torn between the worldly interest of running a sweetshop and caring about a spoiled child. He believes in following the Bhagvad Gita and Mahatma Gandhi. His values are mixed up. He is the follower of The Gita in thinking and speaker of Gandhian principles but cheats the sales- tax authorities and the money is misused. His irony and humour induced in the novel by Narayan is remarkable. However, he is quite concerned with the quality of the sweets sold in his shop and quotes the advice of the sages not to succumb to the pleasure of the tongue. Then novel revolves around the issues arising the generation gap between the father and son.

*Conquer taste and you will have conquered the Self.* (VOS p.7)
He is sincere in quoting the above lines as he himself abstains from sugar and salt. He is strict with his diet and lives like an ascetic and has ‘conquered taste.’ But what Jagan has failed to conquer is his attachment to his only son and his sweet shop. He finds himself confronted by his estranged son Mali, who has returned to Malgudi with Grace, his American-Korean wife, and a grand plan for selling story-writing machines. What follows is a classic cross-generational battle between father and son. Mali shows no interest in his father’s profession nor has any respect for his father’s values and morals he preaches. A man of Gandhian principles, Jagan cannot reconcile himself of Mali’s modern ways, but develops a fondness for Grace. Unable to find a place in the new world, Jagan decides to retire, only to learn that Mali has been arrested by the police and has deserted his wife.

The experiences and the events in the life of both the father and the son occupy an equal importance in the novel. Narayan, however, focalises the story from the point of view of the father. All the events and happenings in the novel are described as seen through the eyes and mind of Jagan. To provide the full view of Jagan’s life and character, Narayan uses “flash on” and flash back techniques. The existential anxiety faced by the characters is the identity crisis and their quest for authenticity.

Narayan, through his novels, manifests that success and happiness in life lie in submission to and acceptance of the Shastra-approved traditional values. Human life is a journey in quest of self-identity or emancipation from the miseries of life. But influenced by man’s modern outlook, ego and karma and governed by fate and chance. Jagan, too in quest for authenticity goes through an identity crisis. From an existential perspective, authentic happiness flows from the authentic mode of living. Quoting existentialist Albert Camus’s rhetorical question:

What is happiness except the simple harmony between a man and the life he leads? 

One has the power to align one’s inner self and if it is done; one can restore harmony and bring happiness to one’s life.
Jagan, a staunch follower of nature cure and natural diet, has written a book on it and has given it to print. But unfortunately his son Mali does not believe in his cure and blames his father for his mother’s early death. He loses his wife Ambika at an early life. He does not include his father in his daily life, which becomes a source of concern for Jagan. He also wants him to keep a maid to cook for him, as he does not like the father’s cooking. Jagan is aghast when Mali announces that he does not want to study any further and wants to become a writer. He wants to participate in a novel writing competition and win twenty-five thousand rupees.

It is an ongoing struggle for Jagan and faces the upheavals at every level. It was a bolt from the blue when Mali announces that he is leaving for America to learn the techniques of story writing without informing him or taking permission from him. He had booked his tickets and the passport and was ready to fly to the USA. The only communication between Jagan and Mali is the connection between them being the five-rupee note that Jagan leaves for his son on the table every morning. But Jagan’s love for his son is inexplicable. He doesn’t want his son to go to a country, where people eat beef, pork, drink liquor instead of water or milk and sunbathing in nude. It is a culture shock for Jagan, who has already condoned his son’s thievery of his unaccounted wealth.

Narayan very convincingly portrays the bottled up conflicts and tussles the writer must be going through and his alienation from his only son. He is relieved that Mali likes the ‘new experience’ and the good food and he is also happy to get letters from him. Mali is unusually communicative from across the seas. Jagan is also horrified on knowing that his son has also taken to beef and is planning to come to India after three years with ‘another person’. Mali returns back westernized with a half-American half-Korean girl, Grace. Mali never informs Jagan that they are not married. He is disgruntled at his son marrying a foreign wife but after initial discomfort, he makes peace with Grace and tries to bridge the gap between himself and his son with Grace as a common link.
Mali expresses his desire to start a business. He wanted Jagan to have a telephone in the house too. Mali wants to start a factory for story writing machines and wants financial assistance from Jagan. Grace too explains the virtues and utility of the machine. Also she adds that such machines are used in America extensively to churn out stories for mass consumption. Mali wants fifty thousand dollars in Indian currency to invest in that project. Mali and Grace are depending on him. He starts avoiding them as he does not wish to invest that amount on story writing machines.

Jagan is in a dilemma. He has been trying to seek his own identity. The word identity subsumes within itself both internal and external aspects – consisting of the ‘Self’ The quintessential search for identity is embedded in two kinds of narratives. One with the East-West encounter and other the generation gap of two individuals. These narratives juxtapose this search against debilitating feelings of alienation and self-estrangement.

According to Meenakshi Mukherjee:

Confrontation with the West for discovery of one’s own country and of one’s own self…..is not an infrequent motif of contemporary Indo-Anglian novels and the tension between two cultures and value systems is seen to provide a creative challenge to many writers. xlvi

Jagan is disturbed at the home front but he recovers his equanimity when he reaches his shop and the cook stands before him taking instructions for the day. It is natural for his son Mali and daughter-in-law to get his support financially. The city is soon flooded with the prospectuses of Mali’s company. Jagan notices his name on the top as the principal promoter of the company. He decides to resort to Gandhian method of passive resistance as he distrusts his son’s scheme totally. He decides to ignore the whole business a sort of non-violent co-operation.

Here Dr. Paul Wong’s perspectives come to the fore:
Jagan’s domestic life has become irksome and he is aware of the tension growing between him on one hand and Grace and Mali on the other. Mali questions him of the investment Jagan jumps at the opportunity to get out of this humdrum existence and not to give in to the demands of his son.

He has been really hurt by Mali’s attitude and this provided him an escape route. This will help him overcome the turmoil in his mind and he feels that his identity is undergoing a change ‘an internal transformation’ has taken place. Jagan wants to see Grace. He feels that she is avoiding him. He is not able to concentrate on the Bhagvad Gita and he refuses to invest in the project. He wants Mali to take care of his sweetmeat shop. Mali refuses and Jagan notices that Grace is nowhere.

He calls for her and when she tells him that Mali wants her to go back to America because there is no work for her in India. She has exhausted all the money she has brought with her and thanks her stars that she has no child from her liaison with Mali because they are not actually married. Mali had planned to marry her according to the Indian customs because she too wanted it.

The earthshaking disclosure shatters Jagan. Shocked beyond measure at the immorality of Mali and Grace, he keeps away from them and is not able to bear the isolation and humiliation. He recollects the scene between him and Mali and is almost depressed:

\begin{quote}
He had a mental picture of himself standing like a ragged petitioner in the presence of Mali and the Chinese girl, being sneered at for his business that had provided the money for Mali to fly to America and do all sort of things there, Vendor of sweetmeats indeed(VOS p.92.)
\end{quote}
As he barricades himself and insulates his part of the house from the one in which the tainted couple live in. Jagan realizes that he has been a loner all his life. First his brother and sister had kept away from him because of his involvement in the Gandhian agitation and now Mali and Grace had turned him an outcast from the traditional society. He recollected his own younger days, his marriage to Ambika and his nostalgic memories about the lack of child and Mali’s birth after ten years of marriage.

He reminisces about his past and unable to solemnize the marriage of Mali with Grace, Jagan decides to renounce the world at sixty as he feels he is fit only for retirement and the only way out of the mess he finds himself in.

He is informed about Mali’s arrest but decides not to help him first. He wants him to learn the lessons of life. He has been arrested for violating the laws. He is not going to buy the land on offer but merely going to watch a Goddess come out of stone nor help his son. The difference in their outlook causes tension. He strives hard to understand him. He understands the truth that he is responsible for himself. He experiences a new birth with his self-realisation:  

\[I \text{am a free man, I have never felt more determined in life, I'm happy to have met you now. But I'd have gone away in any case. Everything can go on without me. The world doesn’t collapse even when a great figure is assassinated or dies of heart failure. Think that my heart has failed, that’s all.}\]

(VOS p.184)

He hands over the bunch of keys to the cousin asking him to run the sweet shop till his son takes charge of it. But he is carrying his bankbook with him to meet his day to day expenses. Though it is a strange withdrawal from the world, these gestures signify that Jagan is still attached to his business and would temporarily renounce to suit his purposes and exigencies.

Thus, Jagan’s quest for authenticity from an existential perspective is fulfilled. Authentic happiness is derived when it equates with harmony of living. Viktor Frankl opines:
It is the discovery of an inner vision of one’s uniqueness and endows life with a deeper meaning.

John Thieme observes:

Narayan operates in a different manner from such Western normative irony and although its origin may not be exclusively Hindu, it seems to embody a set of assumptions that transcend satire.

Critics take pride in comparing Narayan with Jane Austen, Chekov, Charles Dickens and that his approach towards his work has been through Western critical concepts.

Edwin Gerow argues that Narayan has an unflinching traditional outlook and that he can only be understood in relation to a traditional philosophical and metaphysical universe of discourse.

V.S. Naipaul remarks caustically:

What has seemed speculative and comic, aimless and Russian” about Narayan’s novel had turned out to be something else, the expression of an almost hermetic philosophical system. The novel I read as a novel was also a fable, a classic exposition of the Hindu equilibrium, surviving the shock of an alien culture, an alien literary form, an alien language and making harmless even those new concepts it appeared to welcome.

I do not accept Naipaul's interpretation or Hinduism and do not subscribe to his view that Narayan’s novels are fables and not novels (after all novels are fables) but his uneasiness over the form and content of Narayan’s novel is highly significant. It should set us thinking.

Writers like John Updike and Naipaul later on recognized the fundamental truth about Narayan’s writings and opined that he is a writer ‘immersed in his material’ and that ‘he operates from deep within his society and deep within his culture.'


Maugham, Somerset (1938): Interview. The Hindu


Pamela Hansford (1937): Irish Times, 22nd May.


Simone de Beauvoir (1972): The Second Sex.


Ibid, p. 69.


Wikipedia, *Postmodern literature*.


