CHAPTER-V

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R K Narayan (1906-2001) spent his childhood, until he entered his teens, in his grandmother's house in Madras. There onwards he shifted to Mysore to live with his parents and to continue his studies. Narayan's father was the head master of a prestigious school. But Narayan was not particularly a good student, as a result of which he took longer number of years than rest of his friends to get a B.A. degree. Being a voracious and didactic reader, he used to walk down the streets of Mysore, sometimes reading, sometimes brooding and yet sometimes writing.

To start with, he wanted to become a school teacher, but he did not have the necessary inclination and fortitude for it. Since he belonged to a large joint family, with most of its members earning in one form or the other, he was not really required to earn a living. He started his writing career as a free-lance reporter for a Madras newspaper. He also used to make certain contributions to various publications. It is during this period that he had written *Swami and Friends*, taking his inspiration from the most popular child fiction writers like Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and Bronte sisters of England. Inspite of his sincere and serious efforts, his manuscript of *Swami and Friends* was rejected by many of the foreign publishers.

In course of time, the manuscript fell into the hands of Graham Greene, one of the living great fiction writers of England. Greene was extremely impressed with the manuscript, and he recommended it to Hamish Hamilton for publication. Because of its theme, being more or less based upon author's own child time experiences, it became immense success in the market, having been impressed by its success, Narayan wrote his
next two novels, *The Bachelor of Arts* and *The Dark Room*. Since Narayan had already become a name in the literary circulars, it was not difficult for him to find publishers for these two novels. All the three books published between 1935-1938 received very good reviews in the British press. But the sales were not as encouraging as the reviews.

There occurred the greatest event of his life during this period. It was in 1933 that he fell in love with Rajam. But his marriage with Rajam could not be solemnised as in accordance with the traditions, and also the astrological predications were against match them both. Inspite of all these oppositions, Narayan married the girl of his choice. It certainly was a happy marriage, and his newly married wife blended well with Narayan’s joint family. Narayan used to surrender whatever he earned, in the capacity of a newspaper columnist towards the domestic expenses. Narayan and Rajam were blessed with a baby girl, but their domestic happiness was quiet shortlived. Narayan’s loving wife, Rajam died of typhoid in 1939. This event shattered Narayan and he used moved around restlessly and aimlessly without paying any serious attention to what all that happened around him. During this traumatic period, it was his three year old daughter, Hema that gave him some sort of solace and comfort. For a chance he joined his sister in Madras and it is there that he had some psychic experiences and this psychic experiences are sincerely reported in the second part of *The English Teacher*.

It is under the spell of these psychic experiences, that he sincerely and seriously started searching for the meaning of life and death. With the publication of his *Swami and Friends*, he discovered for himself a new meaning and engagement of who it feels like being a child in all its innocence, naivety and mischief. He had also found out that a perennial spell of curiosity and a sense of wonder kept the child engaged in all the
moments of his life. Mischief, of course, is also a way of life for children; with this kind of attitude towards children and the presence of his own loving little daughter that he started looking upon the world with the same sense of wonder, surprise, mystery and mischief as children would like to have, anywhere and everywhere in the world. The latter novels and short stories of R.K Narayan were consciously designed to offer reading moments of autistic imagination, almost in the manner of an intelligent child looking at the world of the elders with a mischievous scooping eye and with a serious criticism of life.

It has been often said that the greatness of Charles Dickens is in his art of creating realistic characters with an evocative sense of exploring; more or less the same applies to R.K Narayan also. For Dickens, in addition to the importance of the child in a given society, the very family institution which is supposed to offer to present sufficient protection and love to children is all important. Behavioural patterns of children and enormous polarisation of family constitute the thematic parameters of both, Charles Dickens and R.K Narayan. Charles Dickens actually looked at the world around him with the eye of a child grappling with life in all its pervasive wicked dimensions. The result is abnormal caricatures in the name of characters, who perform themselves as some insensitive and even wicked entities towards children and their well-being in the society. Such grown up characters, psychologically speaking are not mature enough to deal with men and matter around themselves in a decent and honourable manner.

In a child, mischief is a matter of appreciable graceful qualities to some extent. But the same mischief and mischievous incidence, when introduced into grown-up character, they are likely to turn into dangerous and wicked characters. A child perceives these dangerous and wicked characters around him with a great sense of interest. But then such
wicked characters in all probability are 'children of mind' who do not have a balanced vision of life. This lack of balanced vision and decencies of life become all the more horrifying for children. Thus, Charles Dickens has created a few enviable types of children and are called 'children of mind'. Following Charles Dickens, R K Narayan applies the same parameters of measuring life from the same kind of child's eye-view of life. It does not mean that Narayan offers only a fictional world of children.

In addition to the abundant fictional world of children, as provided in *Swami and Friends*, Narayan manipulates the very drama of life as lived by the elders. The most uncomfortable manner in which the elders and the grown-up characters purposelessly contributing for disharmony and rest of the family life, it becomes highly unw withstandable for children, who are required to bear the brunt of mal-adjusted family. The unique manner of R K Narayan in providing a kaleidoscopic view of the ignorant manners of the grown-up characters, performing themselves, is at once unw withstandable and also entertaining. There emerges a delicate sense of humour in the elders misbehaving in the one form or the other, and the misbehaviourial patterns as dramatically narrated by R K Narayan become a perennial source of engagement for children and childlike readers of all ages.

It is a well-established fact that in childhood, as Susmita Bhattarcharya says "everything is acceleration and discovery which the child sees with his unique clarity of vision" (8). Narayan's character, like his plots may appear slightly romantic and sentimental. It is his romantic sentimental tinge that made him invent for himself the imaginary land of Malgudi. While all his novels are supposed to be happening in this Malgudi, most of the episodes and characters share in themselves exactly the same human
fallibility's that are universal. It is the content of these fallibility's that conforms a child's mind with a sense of abundant curiosity and wonder into the affairs of others.

Modern age has prominently developed a sort of abhorrence for romantic sentimentality. Also distrust of emotions is an established fact. These two aspects can be considered as products of a new kind of social malaice. For the generation that rejects romantic imagination outright, Narayan offers a pleasant alternative and a happy sojourn into the land of imagination through his fiction. There is a great fictional necessity of holiday escapement from a world “Where every sensation is made and electrocuted in a second and passes into obliviance” (2), as Stephen Leacock observes in his Charles Dickens: His life and work. Commenting upon R.K.Narayan, V.S.Naipaul once said that he had “invention, warmth, humour, truth, a miraculous lightness of touch” (12).

It is this ‘miraculous lightness of touch’ of R.K.Narayan that ultimately elevates the malignity and evils of our times by way of introducing dramatic and astounding terminations even in the horrid and morbid novel like The Dark Room. The parental atrocities of Ramani, ultimately deviated and marginalised through this unique miraculous lightness of touch. R.K.Narayan’s childlike manner of comprehending a story as a child manipulates the discordance and evil particulars of the mundane world by way of complimenting, compromising the stories and thoughts with this miraculous lightness of touch.

In the novel Painter of Signs, Daisy the heroine arrives at Malgudi with altogether new and unthought of mission of propagating birth-control. Her profession and occupation is certainly a very serious present day social phenomenon. At the same time, as Krishnan comments “She is a splendid example of liberated women” (117). The manner in
which Daisy execute her work, is in itself a matter of surprise, disgust and mystery. As young as she is and as a virgin, she could not have opted for this kind of job. Even if it is understood that she is under a pecuniary necessity, the nature of her birth control propagandist job does not really suit well with her age. The birth control propagandist job imposes upon her certain serious and personal disciplines and restrictions.

At the outset, knowing fully well about the modern hazards of population explosion, she as a birth control expert is not supposed to fall in love or consider matrimonial bliss as a possible course of her life. But as irony would have it, she at the end, falls headlong in love with Raman, a young painter, who comes across her professionally. As a matter of fact, it was Raman who fell in love violently with her. In the initial stages, Daisy was very tough with him, also she makes it clear that she has no time for such nonsense, as love. After some days of wooing by Raman, she quite hesitantly becomes ready to reciprocate his proposals to some extent. It is in this diabolic heavy context of the story that the final termination itself is achieved through that miraculous lightness of touch, which is the naturalistic quality of children, and which they like to have around themselves as a source of escape from the harsh realities of life.

Right from the beginning, the absurdity of Daisy is in extrogenously compounding in her that all child births are required to be deliberately stopped in the world. That is the purpose of her as a birth control propagandist. Needless to say that this act of Daisy is not only discordant, but also worth denounceable, particularly by children, who are possessed forbidden to be born, and the child like temperamental readers for whom Daisy's performance is altogether indecent and resentful. R.K. Narayan, with the tongue in cheek humour, goes to suggest in this story that nature and natural instincts are always potential...
and powerful than all the modernist methods of fighting with nature, with the mission of conquering nature. The story itself, with its topsy-turvy reversal at the end, offers a sense of great relief and joy, when it is seen that Daisy too is as much human as everybody else.

R K Narayan looks at the world of men and matters around him from the vantage point of view of a child visualising for himself a unique world of his own, coupled with wonders, surprises, difficulties, doubts and mysteries. At the outset, it is necessary to clarify, that the ‘child’s eye-view of life’ of Narayan should not be misconstrued as a mere fictional world of children, as created by him. It actually means to imply that all his fiction, including his short stories, is a kaleidoscopic in-camera landscape of people, flora, and fauna of an imaginary habitation called Malgudi. This Malgudi of R K Narayan is a unique world of people, which in all its purpose and felicity, commenceurate to the real world, as comprehended by a child, through his autistic imagination and dialectic thinking, anywhere and everywhere in the world. In a way, by way of clarifying his Malgudi, Narayan himself has to say as follows, in his My Days:

‘Where is Malgudi?’ All I can say is that it is imaginary and not to be found on any map (although the University of Chicago Press has published a literary atlas with a map of India indicating the location of Malgudi). If I explain that Malgudi is a small town in South India, I shall only be expressing a half-truth, for the characteristics of Malgudi seem to me universal” (viii)

In a typical primieval manner, R K Narayan’s Malgudi is initially devoid of all the modern cultural advancements, by way of acquiring for itself purely an imaginary status of a primitive suburb, constantly and continually struggling to raise and establish itself as a moderate modern township, with all its progressive element. Referring to this marked
advancement of Malgudi towards a modern civilized status, lynegar, Srinivas, K. R. has to say as follows

“It would be interesting to advance the theory that Malgudi is the real ‘hero’ of the ten novels and the many short stories, that underneath the seeming change and the human drama there is something the ‘soul’ of the place? that defies, or embraces, all change: men and woman try to live, and even as they are living they are called upon to die: names change, fashions change, but the old landmarks—the Sarayu, the Hills, the Jungles, the Grove remain “The one remains, the many change and pass” (363).

It is a matter of highest aesthetic concern to put a critical gaze into this so-called Malgudi, which was created from a ‘child’s eye-point of view’, just like the whole world of ours is created from the ‘God’s eye point of view’. It is this ‘child’s eye’ topography and landscape that admantbrates Narayan’s fictional world with a rare felicity.

R K Narayan’s Swami and Friends is a pure world of children, with all its fun, frolic, doubts, difficulties and mysteries of life, as experienced by the chief protagonist, Swami is closely in tune with Romantic images of child in Rousseau, Vaughan, Blake and Wordsworth, and in the works of Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, of the Victorian Age. Earlier to the Romantic Age, child was never considered as important by the creative writers in English. Chaucer talks about one or two child characters, in the tales, The Litel Clergeon and the children of Erl Hugelyn.

Even Shakespeare did not create any full-fledged child characters of human stature. His Puck (The Mid Summer Nights Dream), Ariel and Caliber (The Tempest) are supernatural child characters enacting their roles in order to modify and enhance the
meaning of life of the central protagonists of the dramas, and other children in
Shakespeare are an insignificant company and can be counted on finger tips-Arthur,
Mamillius, little Princess and little Macduff

Infact, it was Rousseau that had first introduced a full-fledged child fictional
character in the whole of Europe. His Emily had a powerful impact and contributed for
epoch making changes and discoveries of the world of children by the Romantics and the
Victorian. Vaughan, Blake and Wordsworth categorically followed the footsteps of
Rousseau and created a thought provoking Romantic world of children. Charles Dickens,
George Eliot and Bronte sisters of the Victorian Era created the real social characters of
children.

Childhood as such became a major theme in the Victorian fiction. The works of
Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Charlotte and Emily Bronte gave new inclusiveness
and depth to the portrayal of childhood. The world of children, particularly as created by
Charles Dickens, is especially important for R.K. Narayan. As a matter of fact,
R.K. Narayan modelled some of his characters on Dickens's David Copperfield, Oliver
Twist, Little Nell, Amy Dorry and Helen. Narayan had also included resentful and petulant
characteristic features of Jane Eyre's Maggie and Tattycarion, the central characters of
Charlotte Bronte. Emily Bronte's Heath Cliff does not find any direct impact on the child
characters of R.K Narayan. But, however, his children of mind like Raju and Rajam share
in themselves the same kind of wicked passion and love towards their feminist
counterparts as compounded in the character of Heath Cliff. Only Heath Cliff's
preternatural antics do not find any place in the characters of Raju or Rajam. As a matter
of fact, R.K Narayan's 'child's eye-view' totally comprehends in a meticulous manner the
working of the world around children by way of critically exposing the lacunas and shortcomings in the so called progressing world of ours.

The very idea of progress, coupled with ultimate perfectibility of humanity, is born of the Western historicism. Mechanization, urbanization, industrialization, technocractication and civilization are prominent landmarks in the Western Historicism and its phenomenon. All these developments are invariably attended by certain unadjustiable psychological and sociological constrains for the humans all over the world.

The pre-Victorian and the Victorian treatment of child in fiction is born of these sociological and psychological constrains. R.K. Narayan considers these developments in child literature quite seriously. He makes a unique experiment of inducting these ideas about children and of children in his fictional writings.

The very novelty of his approach towards child and the world of children in his fiction, lies in the manner in which he visualizes the Indian social context before and after independence. The India’s independence movement, before 1947, getting of independence on August 15th, 1947, and the latter socio-cultural development had a great influence on the progress and development of India as a new nation, conceived with all humanistic complexities. As such, R K Narayan’s fictional contribution has a great message in molding the new nation into a progressive entity. In the imaginary land of Malgudi, he gradually introduces almost all the socio-cultural alterations and changes. When these alterations and changes are categorically visualized from the innocent and naive angle of a child trying to comprehend the world around him, ultimately create a rare thrill of discovery, which is the hallmark of child’s imagination.
We aimed at comprehending as to how children and child's eye-view have become major points of interest in the literal compositions of R.K.Narayan. In this context, the influencing forces on R.K. Narayan are very important. While he remains true to the Eastern traditions of folklore, fairytales and granny's stories, he takes the prominent literal traits of the English fiction of the pre-Victorian and the Victorian authors seriously. It is important to make a mention here about the influence of Mark Twain on R.K. Narayan. Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, put a very important influence on R.K. Narayan in arriving at a kind of innocent and innocuous visualization of the world around him, along with its formative influences, both, good and bad on a child’s mind. Twain's ultimate interest in creating his child characters lies in the fact that he wanted to create a pragmatically heroic child struggling to achieve for himself 'the necessary courage to be' in a world that does not hold a fair, felicitous and comfortable place of honor for him. R.K. Narayan takes his lesson from Charles Dickens and Mark Twain and evolves a fictional world which is at once coupled with 'doubts, difficulties and mysteries'. In an ultimate analysis R.K. Narayan quite unfailingly evolves a world of fiction, which in all probability stands as a testing ground of the newly emerging human values, morals, ethics and all such sociological properties that are assumed to be emerging as certain sociological alternations in the Indian context.

Emergence of the sociological and the Leftist studies of the nineteenth century had their prominent influence in moulding the fictional attitudes and dispositions of R.K. Narayan to a large extent. Sigmund Freud and Carl Mark of the nineteenth century Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead and their progressive ideas too influenced R.K. Narayan to a great extent. The Indian intellectuals like Vivekanand, Mahatma Gandhi,
Jawaharlal Nehru, Anne Besant and J. Krishnamurthy, also had influenced R.K.Narayan to a great extent, particularly in evolving for himself a kind of innocent child's eye-view of life. As a result, R.K Narayan had written about ten novels and innumerable short stories which are prominently endowed with the manner of a child grappling and discovering for himself a world of his own.