Chapter III

THE IMAGINARY IN NARAYAN’S NOVELS
CHAPTER – III

The Imaginary in Narayan’s Novels

*Man...simply is what he conceives of himself to be, but he is what he wills, and...Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself.*

*Sartre*

In most of the Narayan’s novels, one comes across such characters and protagonists who generally spend a lot of their time in craving and thinking about themselves. They seem to be self-centered developing their own *ego* and trying to win the place that they have been craving for themselves over years in life. Each character has “the self” of his or her own or a ‘*self-identity*’ developed through the interactions and struggle with others. His protagonists and many other characters perform functions that have social and individual significance. There are evident instances in his novels where the critical focus is on the way his protagonists fulfill their obligations to themselves and to others. The process of realizing one’s *self* through
a network of socio-cultural institutions is the staple reality that we find in his fiction.\textsuperscript{1} Narayan himself says:

My main concern is with the human character – a central character from whose point of view the world is seen and who tries to get over a difficult situation or succumbs to it or fights it in his own setting.\textsuperscript{2}

In \textit{The Swami and Friends}, Swami from the childhood starts differentiating between the “Other” and “self”. Most often he is involved in searching for his lost \textit{self (ego)} even through dreams and images. His methods of introspection and behaviour enable him to attain a permanent \textit{identity} in the society and satiate his lost \textit{ego}. For example, he and Mann admire Rajam, the Police Superintendent’s son because they find their Lacanian \textit{Other} in him. Swami voices his ‘inward’ in these assertions:

He was the only boy in the class who wore socks and shoes, fur cap and tie, and a wonderful coat and Knickers. He came to the school in a car.\textsuperscript{3}


\textsuperscript{2} See, Interview with BBC London, Third Programme. 1968.
These children are presented as human beings and not as lifeless representatives of their world. Their joys and sorrows are real, their friendship and quarrels are genuine. In fact, Narayan analyzes and depicts every nook and corner of a child's mind as he presents the world of children with minute and all possible details. All the characters in the novel except Rajam are from the middle class and Rajam who belongs to the higher class and thus Mani and Swaminathan are searching for him in their dreams and find their lost Other.  

Swami, the central figure, is found throughout the novel with his friends viewing his images of "unfractured world" or "Self" in them. Further, while being with them he, views in them his own egoistic roles regarding himself. Even when he is at home, his mind remains occupied with the thoughts of his friends. He feels proud of his friendship with Mani who is 'Mighty Good-for-Nothing' fellow. It is Mani who enables him to gain his lost world. Rajam, a newcomer, becomes Mani's rival and Mani designates him as a

---


Menace to his position' feeling upset when he realizes that Swami appears taking more interest in him. This shows that Narayan artistically highlights a child's innate tendency of possession which in terms of Lacanian perspective is an instance of the imaginary forcing:

Swaminathan [to break] into loud protestations. Did Mani think that Swami could respect anyone but him. Mani the dear old friend and guide? ... Oh, there was no comparison between Rajam and Mani (SF, 15).

According to P.S. Sundaram:

The advent of Rajam marks a crisis in Swami's life. Here is someone from the outside world, carrying with him an aura of affluence and power, intelligent, smartly dressed, connected with the high and mighty ones of the land, the glass of fashion and the mould of form, the observed of all observers. Swami falls in love with the boy... 

Swami inwardly admires Rajam but has no courage to admit it before Mani because Mani hates him to the point of killing him. The struggle of the two is not presented as a class struggle but a competition between two individuals:

This Rajam was a rival to Mani. ... There were such indications that Rajam was the new power in the class. Day by day as Mani looked on:

---

it was becoming increasingly clear that a new menace had appeared in his life (SF, 15).

However, once Rajam extends a hand of friendship to Mani and he accepts it and this way they are reconciled. ‘There was an awkward pause. ‘If this is all the cause of your anger, forget it. I won’t mind being friends. Nor I,’ said Mani (SF, 19).

There is no callous enmity between them. Rajam is intelligent and has inborn qualities of leadership. He acts with tact and firmness and even brings about reconciliation between Swami and his former friends – Shankar, Somu, and the Pea. When Mani and Rajam are united ‘Swaminathan felt at perfect peace with the world’.

Swami is more attached to his granny than to his parents. He talks to her freely, opens his heart before her. He enjoys discussing with his granny the adventures of his friends. He cried ecstatically:

Oh granny!, ‘You don’t know what a great fellow Rajam is.’ He told her the story of the first enmity between Rajam and Mani and the subsequent friendship (SF, 21).

Swami’s granny too, loves him very much and his evenings happily pass with her. ‘He feels secure with his head on her lap and nestles close to her; conceals nothing from her...She recalls the days
when her husband worked as a sub-Magistrate ...". His innocence is his characteristic feature. He acts upon the suggestions made by others. He easily accepts the story of the coachman who says that he can easily turn twelve paisa into six rupees and so procure the hoop for which he yearns. Thus, he is easily befooled and robbed.

Mimic tendency springs from innocence and children, according to Lacan and Narayan, like to imitate their elders. When Swami and Mani go to Rajam’s house he keeps them waiting. He had known that his friends were waiting for him, but he liked to keep them waiting for a few minutes, because he had seen his father doing it. So, he stood for a few minutes in the adjoining room, biting his nails. Again in front of his friends he tries to display his authority by scolding the cook. He appears as a case of ‘ego – crisis’ and very evidently a case where the hero constitutes his identity “I”.

These illustrations clearly reveal the operation of Lacanian imaginary in Narayan’s treatment of childhood behaviour and attitude with ‘self’ and ‘society’.

Swami and Mani are impressed

---


very much by Rajam’s big room, the cupboard full of toys and the
timepiece on his table. "Such a young fellow to own a timepiece! His
father seemed to be an extraordinary man" (SF, 26). Narayan
beautifully portrays the simple joys and sorrows of these children.

Not only Swami and Mani but also other boys like Shankar,
Somu and Pea get disturbed by Rajam’s arrival because he seemed
different to them in all respects. These children while teasing Swami
call him ‘Rajam’s tail’ in order to give vent to what Lacan would call
‘jealousy’ and ‘bruised consciousness’, a child inculcates or
develops in the imaginary phase of the development:

We aren’t good enough for you, I believe. But how can everyone be a
son of a Police Superintendent? (SF. 31)

These innocent little ones are not even free from the
fascination for glamour and want to show off just to impress their
friends. When Rajam promises to visit Swami’s house he and entire
family makes grand preparation to receive his high-class friend in a
middle class home. He requests his father to lend him his room for
receiving his friend, as his own room was not worth displaying.
Narayan clearly brings out the difference between the child’s attitude
and the response of a grown up man in the response of the father:

“Who is this Rajam, such a big man? He is the Police Superintendent’s
son. He is – he is not ordinary.” (SF. 38) Swami wants to be very
perfect as Rajam is a big man’s son. He tells mother to prepare something very nice, fine and sweet.

He further says:

Don’t make the sort of coffee that you usually give me. It must be very good and hot (SF, 37).

Swami is not content even with this. He orders his cook to wear a clean, white dhoti and shirt. After the visit is over Swami is happy that everything has gone off smoothly but he is sorry that the cook has not changed his dhoti. Such instances in the novel reveal how Lacanian Imaginary is at work, though unconsciously, in Narayan delineation of characters, particularly children. The two important components in life, fantasy and reality, get mixed or even fused in the child’s mind when the child is at the Imaginary stage. However, for a grown up man, in the symbolic stage, they become quite distinctive as can be inferred and understood by the mature mind’s use of language. In Swami’s world – the Imaginary world – Fantasy becomes mixed with or part of reality. ‘Swami establishes, among other things, the restless truth – searching mind, the conscionability and the satvic temper’; he sincerely invokes Gods to

---

turn ‘two pebbles into two three-pie coins...’ Narayan artistically captures the glimpse of Swami’s mind in his mixed feelings of anger, disappointment and fear – “The indifference of the Gods infuriated him and brought tears to his eyes. He wanted to abuse the Gods but was afraid to” (SF, 71).

The above cited passages reveal clearly that “I” becomes “I” only when it stands in relation to the Other because “self” is perpetually inscribed by the Other and in the discourse of the Other. We know that the field of the Other is the place where a character assumes a sense of identity in relation to others. It comes to see himself in the mirror of others and thus its self-consciousness is constantly constructed by the discourse of language. We are aware about the fact that the cultural features are internalized by Swami only to construct self-identity. Thus, Swami himself is one of the best illustrations who searches for different identities in his society throughout the novel. He seems a clear case of ego- crises.

Narayan’s novels are also supreme instances of psychological quest and his minute psychological observation reminding us of great psychologists like Adler and Freud. In the novel, Mr Sampath, he presents the typical mentality of an ideal

---

housewife, Srinavas’ wife, who prepares nice foodstuffs with all care and expects admiration, like other housewives, from her husband. She serves her preparations to him and wants appreciation which reveals her search for “self” or imaginary that constitutes ego. The wife demands recognition and love that Srinivas hardly understands as a result of which she is hurt. She remarks:

He ate his dinner silently ruminating over it. His wife stooped over his leaf to serve him. She had fried potato chips in ghee for him and some cucumber soaked in curd; she had spent the day in the excitement of preparing these and was now disappointed to see him take so little notice of them.10

Narayan even presents a painful irony of life in the novel revealing that at times blood relations too are evaluated as per status. Srinivas explains how her own daughter breaks her relation because her status is not in keeping with his status:

I have three sons and two daughters; one daughter is in this town, the other daughter is in Karachi; I’m not concerned with her, because her husband is a custom officer, and she thinks it is not thinking with her father and the rest of us. It is over twelve years since she wrote (MS, 56).

10 R.K. Narayan. *Mr. Sampath*, Madras: Indian Thought Publication, 1990, p.47. All subsequent references, given in parenthesis (as MS) are from this edition unless otherwise stated.
In *The Financial Expert*, 'a novel full of ironies of life'\textsuperscript{11}, Narayan directly and indirectly delineates Margayya who is involved in diverse situations. For him, reality in the city lies in offices, shops, insurances agencies, newspaper agencies, lawyer’s chambers and hair-cutting saloons, to which hundreds of people come and go every day in order to realize their dreams as the *Other*.

Margayya’s *Other* is a manifestation of money, riches and wealth: he right from the beginning lives in the realm of Lacanian imaginary wearing the different garbs in order to earn an *identity* or egoistic recognition in the society. His actions are tenaciously oriented to the acquisition of money that would make him rich and later place him among the wealthy. But ‘incredible fluctuations of fortune’\textsuperscript{12} play their crucial role and drive home the point that the goddess of wealth is a very vacillating one. In this sense, Narayan’s hero in this novel suffers, while attaining his goal, because he believes that money is everything.

Margayya tells his wife:

\textsuperscript{11} Pramod Kumar. *Five Contemporary Indian Novelists*, Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2001, p.84.

Even you will learn to behave with me when I have money.\(^\text{13}\)

The narrator tells us:

As he went through the town that day he was obsessed with thoughts of money. His mind rang with the words he had said to the villagers: ‘I am only trying to help you to get out of your money worries.’ He began to believe to it himself’ (FE, 27).

It is very remarkable to note that when the priest of the temple tells Margayya to drink a tumbler of milk, he replies:

I don’t like milk … I have never liked it (FE, 35).

The priest turns angry and informs Margayya:

Milk is one of the forms of Goddess Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth. When you reject it or treat it indifferently, it means you reject her. She is a Goddess who always stays on her toes all the time, ever ready to turn and run away. There are ways of wooing and keeping her... (FE, 35).

Soon, “he reverently touched the tumbler and very respectfully drank the milk, taking care not to spill even a drop” (FE, 35). Now tells the priest:

I want to acquire wealth. Can you show me a way? I will do anything you suggest (FE, 36).

Margayya no doubt acquires money, riches, and wealth through the good offices of Dr Pal, the author of *Domestic Harmony*, but paradoxically enough, it brings domestic disharmony into his household. It creates a cleavage between father and his son, between the wife and the husband, between the *self* and society.

In *The Vendor of Sweets*, we come across Jagan whose only son Mali calls his Lacanian *Other*. He wants his son to rise in his life up and come to his expectations but Mali in turn is greatly fascinated by American affluence and culture. He searches for his own lost *‘Other’* in that country and culture, creating more problems for Jagan by bringing from America a young woman about whom Jagan has innumerable doubts. He introduces her to his father thus:

> This is Grace. We are married. Grace, my dad\(^1\)

This brief introduction creates complete confusion in Jagan’s mind. His uncertainty becomes more acute when Mali tells him that he is interested in creating a story-writing machine, which requires large capital, about fifty thousand dollars. Jagan says:

> Fifty thousand dollars! Whatever its equivalent might be, it was a staggering sum. I am a poor man (TVS, 89).

---

\(^1\) R.K. Narayan. *The Vendor of Sweets*. Chennai: Indian Thought Publication, 2004, p. 58. All subsequent references, given in parenthesis (as TVS) are from this edition unless otherwise stated.
Jagan is entrapped in 'a crisis' as he is fully conscious of his efforts of accumulating his wealth laboriously. Though Jagan is aghast yet he helps his son in raising his position and status in the society. Soon, he agrees and the reconciliation of the scene overwhelms him. However, his mental picture of himself — standing like a ragged petitioner in presence of Mali and the girl, being sneered at for his business of a lifetime, a business that had provided the money for Mali to fly to America and do all sorts of things there — itself justifies the existence of the Lacanian 'Other' in Jagan's psyche that oscillates him between 'action' and 'inaction' or dream and reality.

In *The Painter of Signs*, Raman, the hero, 'is determined to establish the Age of Reason in the world.' His idealism sounds Utopian … He declares his faith, saying:

"I want a rational explanation for everything…Otherwise my mind refuses to accept any statement…I am a rationalist, and I don't do anything unless I see some logic in it." 

---


A critical analysis of the context in which these assertions are made reveals that logic is not a monolithic entity but a flexible tool that serves any number of minds to establish the rationality of their schemes and plans and gain their identity or ego.\(^\text{19}\) The lawyer who orders a signboard wants Raman to employ slanting letters in writing the signboard but Raman tells him:

Slanting letters are suitable only for oil-merchants and soap-sellers (PS, 5).

He also adds:

The letters on a lawyer's board must always stand up proudly (PS, 5).

He thinks that logic justifies his assertion and consequently it takes him more time to realize it. He passes through a number of dramatic situations before realizing the significance of reality in his routine life. Like Margayya's world, Raman's world is that of hotel managers, businessmen, bangle sellers, lawyers, doctors, and others, whose minds are always preoccupied with cash. He too like

\(^{18}\) See, R. K. Narayan. The Painter of Signs. Mysore: Indian Thought Publication, 1993. p.5. All subsequent references, given in parenthesis (as PS), are from this edition unless otherwise stated.

Margayya is searching for his “lost Other” or “Self” and prostrates before the image of the goddess mumbling:

May Daisy be mine without further delay? I can't live without her (PS, 77).

Raman’s Other is Daisy as it is obvious from his travel to Malgudi in a bullock cart with her. The cart man thinks that they are wife and husband but while Raman keeps quiet, Daisy says:

Make no mistake. We are not married (PS, 99).

When they meet again, Daisy tells him that she comes from a joint family where the household is like a hostel, consisting of innumerable children and adults. When a prospective bridegroom came to see her, she refused to appear before him. Though she yielded to the pressures of her family, she behaved in an erratic fashion before the groom. When the members of her family scolded her for her behaviour, she escaped from the village in order to search for her own recognition, identity or ego.

In the novel, The Painter of Signs, we also come to know about Raman’s experiences ‘to paint a signboard’ and his efforts to find an “Objective – Correlative” for self-realization through the process of naming seldom find their appropriate objective correlatives. We have seen that sometimes illusion may take the form of a staple object for which there may be a signboard but signboards are
not significatory of what is real. What is real is not easy to define or explicate; it is boardless.\footnote{See, Dany Nobus. \textit{Jacques Lacan and the Freudian Practice of Psychoanalysis}. London: Routledge. 2000, pp.92.}

Just as to Daisy spreading the message of family planning among people who are indifferent to it, is a means and not an end in itself, to Rosie dancing is only a means to achieve the poise of the \textit{self}. However, unlike Rosie, Daisy is a descent on Malgudi and she searches her ‘lost Other’ in a life which believes ‘in the principle of forget-and-forgive’\footnote{Neeraj Kumar. \textit{Women in the Novels of R. K. Narayan}. Delhi: Indian Publishers’ Distributors, 2004, p. 121.}. She wants to serve the poor and illiterate people which allow her to give priority to ‘work’ over ‘home’\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}: “A home, in Daisy’s view is only a retreat from sun and rain and for sleeping, washing, and depositing one’s trunk” (PS, 167). Daisy believes that ‘her individuality’ is ‘lost in the mass existence’\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 121-122.}; she in no way wants to limit her freedom and advises Raman “to let her seek life’s pattern as she likes” (PS, 156). She confesses:

Married life is not for me. I have thought it over. It frightens me. I am not cut for the life ... It won’t work(PS, 178-179).
Daisy is undoubtedly an unusual girl who informs Raman that she did not choose the ordinary satisfactions of life and resented the great psychological demands made on her as daughter. She ran away at thirteen, as she was wiser, maturer than her own poor mother who was the usual humble cog in the wheels of family life.

We find Daisy’s ‘ego’ gaining ground in ‘bridal inspection scene’ when the thirteen-year-old girl, who hated so much common living, yearned for privacy and individuality amidst a mass existence, is called aside and asked to prepare herself for inspection by a prospective groom and his parents. She feels her “individuality was lost” (PS, 130) and reacts sharply saying:

If it is not done, it is better that someone starts doing it now’. What is the matter with you, my dear, why do you want to spoil your chance of settling down in life? I had to explain that I would like to work, rather than be a wife” (PS, 130).

Though her parents get angry, her uncle persuades her to go through the ceremony of being viewed and assessed. Daisy’s own words give a description of the scene:

They decked me in all the jewelry pieces borrowed from my sister-in-law in the house, diamond and gold all over my ears, neck, nose and wrist and clad me in a heavy sari crackling with gold lace. I felt suffocated with all that stuff over me. I felt sick and felt that I was loosing my identity. I hated the whole scene. I was seized with a
feeling that I was in a wrong world, and that I was a stranger in their midst. I saw my mother's face beaming with satisfaction and I was irritated at her simplicity. Although I was only thirteen, I had my own notions of what was good for look into the mirror myself. And then they seated me like a doll, and I had to wait for the arrival of the eminent personage with his parents... (PS. 131).

Daisy does not succumb to traditional practice and, unlike other heroines, refuses to yield societal pressure. She emerges as a trendsetter and acts courageously by taking her life in her own hands confronting reality. She does not act as a coy young girl inspects rather than be inspected:

They all looked a little shaken at the very style of my walk. His father seemed so taken aback he ceased to speak of his son's achievements, my mother said, 'Make your obeisance, prostrate yourself on the ground.' I shook my head. I have always hated the notion of one human being prostrating at the feet of another (PS, 132).

She believes in the independence of the 'self', the spirit or the ego. She considers love as a voluntary action, not an act of necessity and the ceremony ends on a note of anti-climax:

Before I could do further damage, they hustled me back to an inner room and a hundred eyes scowled at me. I thought they'd all strangle me. But they left me alone. For days no one spoke to me. I had brought disgrace on the family by my unseemly behaviour... It was going to be difficult to find a bridegroom for me any more or for the other girls in the family as well. I had damaged the family reputation (PS, 133).
Daisy emerges as an image of social revolt. “She fights, manages, endures but never sulks”\textsuperscript{24}. Her revolt and reaction against convention, tradition and society is in fact a proper instance of Lacanian Imaginary where a subject searches for the different lost roles and aspirations. The strength of her own “self” or “ego” enables her to determine her own method of revolt. She does not hesitate to use self-protective dissimulation and cunning to get along making use of her strengths in a male dominated world. Soon we see her climbing on to a tamarind tree quietly at night to escape in search of an independent world. Even when she decides to marry she puts forward the following conditions:

One, that they should have no children and two, if by mischance, one was born, she would give the child away and keep herself free to pursue her social work. Raman was not to object or modify this in any manner. She explained, long ago I broke away from the routine of a woman’s life. There are millions of women who go through it happily. I am not one of them. I have planned for myself a different kind of life. I have a well-defined purpose from which I will not swerve. I gave my word to the Reverend that I would not change my ideas If you want to marry me, you must leave me to my own plans even when I am a wife. On any day you question why or how, I will leave you. It will be an unhappy thing for me, but I will leave you...(PS, 158 - 159).

Daisy does not succumb to love, that curious combination of passion, romance, custom and convenience but struggles to earn

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, p. 124.
autonomy and attain her goals in life. In her R. K. Narayan goes to the farthest to delineate with the idea of the *Self*, the *ego*, an important component of Lacanian imaginary. He artistically presents the dilemma of a modern woman who doesn’t accept the tradition, convention and stringent society notions but search for her lost ‘*Other* or *ego*’.\(^{25}\)

It is important to state that R. K. Narayan at times appears purely like a practicing psychoanalyst while dealing with the different egoistic problems of his characters especially women. He probes deep into their psyche and everyday incidents only to expose the societal restrictions or conventions that harm, and restrict the aspirations, freedom, and Lacanian ‘*Other*’ of these characters. These features prominently become evident in *The Dark Room*, where Narayan portrays helpless sufferings of a woman having small loveable children. Savitri has hardly had taste of freedom as a housewife because she is fully immersed in the darkness of the cheerless routine of her life. In the eyes of her

husband, she counts for nothing, and is not even able to prevent her sick son from being sent to his school for a day:

How important she was. she thought: she had not the slightest power to do anything at home, and that after fifteen years of married life.²⁶

She feels that she is in no way important. In fact, it appears that Savitri has nothing else to do but to attend to the “miserable business for the stomach” throughout the day. She according to H.M. Williams is a “Woman of strong and deep characters”²⁷. Her desires and potentialities remain unexpressed in the beginning but ironically enough she expresses her resentment by sulking in a dark room for a day or two, doing nothing and communicating with none. This is actually the rumbling of a more active revolt that bursts with the appearance of Shanta Bai on the scene and the signs of his sexual attraction towards her. She shows terrific force as a woman as is clear from her liberating her hands (when he tried to hold her) saying: “I am a human being,” she said, through her heavy breathing:

²⁶ R.K. Narayan. The Dark Room, Chennai: Indian Thought Publication, 2004, p.5. All subsequent references, given in parenthesis (as DR) are from this edition unless otherwise stated.

You men will never grant that. For you we are playthings when you feel like hugging and slave at other times. Don't think that you can fondle us when you like and kick us when you choose (DR, 85).

She is determined not to stay any longer in his house, nor take with her anything which is not strictly her own, not even what her father had given her for “they are also a man's gift” (DR, 88). She feels that nothing is hers and virtually even her children are her husband’s and not her own. She believes that women don't possess anything in the world:

What possession can a woman call her own ... that she has is her father’s, husband’s or her son’s. (DR, 88).

Her ego gets repeatedly hurt in the novel and she says: “Didn’t I say that woman owns nothing” (DR, 88). She reacts and revolts in order to assert her individuality. She goes to the extent of saying: “I'm a human being ... You men will never grant that. For we are playthings when you feel like hugging...” (DR, 85). Soon, we find her fed up with the environment around her and she realizes that the main cause of women’s miserable plight is fear – “fear, from the cradle to the funeral pyre ... afraid of one’s father ... one’s husband, children and neighbours in later life” (DR, 91) – which they have to forgo in order to uplift themselves and gain identities which are otherwise deeply etched upon their souls.
Instead of trying to live independently and earn the Lacanian lost *Other* or *ego*, Savitri tries to commit suicide, but is saved by a kind-hearted locksmith Mari whose wife Ponni, a foil to Savitri in her dominant attitude towards her husband, persuades, almost forces, Savitri to live with them. Then begins the second phase of Savitri's life—her effort to live independently away from her husband and children. With the same dignity and self-respect which had made her leave her husband, she refuses to live on charity of any kind, preferring to it the humble work of cleaning a temple on nominal wages. It shows her becoming a victim of Lacanian *Other*, an independent life, which makes her happy. She says:

This is nobody’s rice, my own; and I am not obliged to anyone for this. This is nobody’s charity. She felt triumphant ... sense of victory (DR, 142 - 143).

Ultimately, as the novel reveals, Savitri discovers that three facts about herself that she is too weak to stand by herself: “I am like a bamboo pole which cannot stand without a wall to support it” (DR, 146); that she feels homesick, pining for the comfortable life of her home: “When she shut the door and put out the lights, how comfortable in bed she felt and how well one could sleep! Not this
terrible sleep” (DR, 146); and that she is worried about her children whom she cannot cease to love.

H. M. William comments:

Savitri gets over her petulance and finds that she cannot easily abandon her obligations, however, odious her husband's behavior. The claims of her children, the necessity to preside over the household — these duties are more important than the assertion of individual pride.28

All this compels Savitri to return back and plunge into her old routine. Though different forces pull her in opposite directions, she continues living with her husband in spite of realizing that her marriage has failed. She does not call into her house the locksmith Mari who had saved her life and had been of so much help to her. She also does not go to open the gate for her husband as she used to do earlier. It is only for the love of her small children, dependent on her, and also perhaps for the unconscious impact of the traditional culture that she stays in her husband's house. But for how long? Ramani is not likely to change and, as the children grow and become independent, Savitri's desire to lead a life away from her adulterous husband again becomes prominent. In the concluding lines of the novel, R.K. Narayan, with his character-

istics understatement, suggests that Savitri is not to be identified with her home in which she feels that nothing belongs to her, and even after she has allowed Mari to pass the street without calling him to express her obligation to him, the pain of it lingers on:

She sat by the window, haunted by his shining hungry face long after he was gone, and by his "Locks repaired," long after his cry had faded out in the distance (DR, 162).

This ending of the novel may perhaps have a sequel entirely different. Savitri had returned to fulfil her obligations towards her small children. But in the conceivable future when they are grown up and settled, the members of Savitri's resentment might consciously break into another revolt and then she might think of leaving her husband for good, or, if it is not possible, might think of suicide. Critics dub Savitri as a weak entity, an object of pity who is in search of Lacanian Other or lost ego or identity and thus is caught in the imaginary realm where she is not able to take a definite stand.

It is important to mention here that R. K. Narayan remarks in My Days:

I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of a woman as opposed to man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament of women's lib movement. Man assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning that she herself began to lose
all notion of her independence, her individuality, stature and strength.
A wife in orthodox milieu of Indian society was a victim of such circumstances.29

In *The Guide*, the most popular of Narayan’s novels, the
Lacanian Imaginary is obvious at the outset when Marco ignores
the Lacanian *Other* of his young and beautiful wife and forces her
to lead her own life, search for her lost *Other* and gradually fall in
love with her only companion, Raju, ‘a romantic’30. She realizes
her lost *Other* in Raju from whom ‘she receives’ all that, ‘what she
does not receive from Marco’31. In fact, it is Marco himself who
prompts Rosie to lead a life of uninhibited self-assertion, in which,
with the help of Raju, she becomes a professional dancer earning
huge wealth, most of which Raju largely appropriates. The novelist
makes her both a lover of Raju and one having a deep love and a
soft corner for her husband Marco, the awareness of which leads to
Raju's deception and to ultimate imprisonment. Rosie's dilemma is
best expressed in her spending money for fighting Raju's case and
in her desire to enter into a joint suicide pact with Raju, though not
sure that he would keep his part of the pact:

---

We could sit and talk one night, and sip our glass of milk, and may be we should awake in a trouble-free world. I'd propose it this very minute if I were sure you would keep the pact, but I fear that I may go ahead and you may change your mind at the last second.  

After Raju's imprisonment, Rosie left to herself, undergoes a process of self-discovery, realizing the hidden facets of her personality and becoming a famous dancer in her own right. Raju comments: "Neither Marco nor I had any place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she had underestimated all along" (TG, 223). Her freedom enables her to win her 'self' or even 'ego'. In fact, her intimacy and freedom irritates Raju's mother who leaves him to his fate. Living like a married couple to all appearances, we understand that Rosie gains her 'lost Other' in Raju, the Railway guide, who does everything for giving recognition to Rosie's demands. It is undoubtedly 'Raju's obsession with the dancing girl' which enables Raju to remain caught in Lacanian imaginary and the search for 'Other'. He forgets everything in order to make Rosie realise that he is her lost 'Other' – a replacement for her husband. She asks him point blank:


“Can you show me a cobra — a king cobra it must be — which can
dance to the music of a flute?” (TG, 64). He replied: “I can show
you a cobra … She looked delighted” (TG, 66). Soon Raju took her
to the man who had a king cobra and he got ready to show Rosie
the Cobra dance. Here, Raju confesses that

The whole thing repelled me, but it seemed to fascinate the girl. She
watched it swaying with the raptist attention. She stretched out her arm
slightly and swayed it in imitation of the movement; she swayed her
whole body to rhythm — for just a second, but that was sufficient to tell
me what she was, the greatest dancer of the century (TG, 68).

After sometime she wanted to know from Raju:

Are you also like him...Do you also hate to see me dance? (TG, 121)

Raju replied:

Not at all. What makes you think so? (TG, 121)

She further says:

At one time you spoke like a big lover of art, but now you never give it
a thought... It was true. I said something in excuse, clasped her hands
in mine, and swore earnestly, ‘I will do anything for you. I will give
my life to see you dance. Tell me what to do. I will do it for you’ (TG,
121-122).

Raju acted wisely because he had seen Rosie imitating the
cobra dance and for Raju, “that was sufficient to tell me what she
was, the greatest dancer of the century” (TG, 68). She ‘craves dance
and longs to express herself through dancing. Her husband makes it clear to Rosie: “Don’t expect me to go with you. I can’t stand the sight of a snake; your interests are morbid” (TG, 64). But far from encouragement, Marco compels her to give up dancing for a respectable life. This way she suffers from a bruised inward life and becomes a pure victim of her husband’s indifference, suffering psychologically from mental anguish. Raju understands this fully and enables Rosie to reach the heights of her career. With his assistance and concern, her life becomes meaningful. We find that her fascinating dance performances turn her soon into celebrity and she basks in the glory of popularity. He makes her to dance and thus realise her long cherished goal and lost Other. This fixes him tightly to Rosie who too in return continues firmly with Raju, her own Other (of Lacanian brand) and acquires long cherished recognition or status in the society. Thus, ‘Rosie successfully wriggles out of her psychological trauma, attains her cherished ambition of becoming an accomplished dancer, ending up triumphant.


35 Ibid.

36 Ibid, p.29.
From the above analysis, it becomes clear that, like Raman in *The Painter of Signs*, Raju is a poor guide of his *self*, 'the archetypal drive of realizing the true nature of *self'*[^37]. As the fame and name of Rosie spread far and wide, and her talent finds good market, Raju feels that he has acquired some status in society. Apart from this illusion he entertains, he says, "I resented anyone's wanting to make a direct approach to her. She was my property. This idea was beginning to take root in my mind" (TG, 189).

Coupled with this passion to possess everything, he seems to suffer from an inexplicable over-confidence in his capacity to guide others. Raju wonders why she calls herself Rosie, as she is not a foreigner but an Indian in Indian dress. Raju has enough shrewdness to tickle her vanity by saying that as an orthodox dancer, she fosters the Indian cultural tradition. Not only does he assess the weakness in Rosie's character but sees through the vulnerable personality of her husband, whom he calls Marco, without bothering to know his name. He says:

...This girl herself was a dreamer if ever there was one. She would have greatly benefited by a husband who could care for her career; it was here that a handy man like me proved invaluable. I nearly gave up nearly all my routine jobs in order to be of service to them (TG, 113).

The above passage reveals Raju’s preoccupations. He is searching for his *other* in Rosie, who becomes his sole professional activity:

> The only reality in my life and consciousness was Rosie. All my mental powers were now turned to keep her within my reach, and keep her smiling all the time (TG, 118).

However, he finds it difficult to understand the girl: “She allowed me to make love to her, of course, but she was also beginning to show excessive consideration for her husband on the hill. In the midst she would suddenly free herself and say, ‘Tell Gaffur to bring the car. I want to go and see him” (TG, 119).

Though at various stages Rosie narrates her story to Raju, this helps her clarify to the *self* what it is and what it seeks. She realizes that acquiring name, fame, and wealth as an artist is not an end in itself; the *self* has not only aspirations but duties as well. It is in the process of actualizing her aspirations as an artist that she discovers her obligations and duties. Raju helps her master the illusion, and, in the course of mastering it, discover the *self*. Raju himself discovers the *self* by passing through the illusion that he is serving in the first instance a family and in the last instance society at large.

According to G.S. Aamur:
The Guide is an embodiment of both the forms of affirmation – self-recovery and self-transcendence in a single fictional movement.38

Both Raju and Rosie are evident victims of Lacanian Other and pre-eminently engrossed in the search for self, other and identity – the main components of Lacanian Imaginary – in the sense that the self has to pass through a process of learning and unlearning, and self-evaluation has its own pain and its own sweetness and light. Like Savitri of The Dark Room, Rosie too realizes her 'self' after becoming independent and goes on to cast off her old mantle of a frustrated young girl just trying to find herself, first through love and later through her art, and finally carves out a career of a highly celebrated dancer — completely cut off from both Marco and Raju.

A Tiger for Malgudi explicates how 'the tiger realizes that the deep within him is not different from human beings'39. It dramatizes the harmony that is possible and the self-awareness that could be visualized when the human and the animal worlds are viewed as a simultaneous order. In his introduction to the novel, Narayan says:


39 Ibid.
Man in his smugness never imagines for a moment that other creatures may also possess ego, values, outlook, and the ability to communicate, though they may be incapable of audible speech.\(^\text{40}\)

Exposing the limited vision or ‘smugness’, the novel attempts to present a broader perspective by fusing together fact and fiction. As a fictional character, the tiger makes his consciousness so transparent that the reader not only sees the working of his consciousness, but also participates in the working of that consciousness. It is clear from the following passage:

... I am different from the tiger next door... I lack only the faculty of speech... if you could read my thoughts, you would be welcome to come in and listen to the story of my life. At least, you could slip your arm through the bars and touch me and I will hold out my forepaw to greet you...I don’t blame you. I don’t know why God has chosen to give us this fierce make-up, the same God who has created the parrot, the peacock, and the deer, which inspire poets and painters. I would not blame you for keeping your distance—I myself shuddered at my own reflection on the still surface of a pond while crouching for a drink of water. not when I was really a wild beast, but after I came under the influence of my Master and learnt to question. “Who am I?” Don’t laugh within yourself to hear me speak thus. I’ll tell you about my Master presently” (TM, 11-12).

Here, the self seems to converge on the second person. He says: “I don’t blame you. I don’t know why God has chosen to give us this fierce make up” (TM, 12). One can notice a slight allegory in the predicament of the tiger because if the ‘self’ could see an image of itself even without experiencing the kind of awakening that a master can generate, the image might be as horrifying as the image of a tiger. When the master intervenes and guides the self the realizing automatically comes. The narrative voice remarks:

Every creature in the jungle trembled when it sensed my approach. ‘Let them tremble and understand who is the Master, Lord of this world.’ I thought with pride (TM, 13).

The word “Master” acquires significance as the narrative creates a thematic base that steadily evolves into an articulation of the voice of the Master. The weaker sections of the animals exhibit their humility before the tiger, crying:

Here comes our Lord and Master. Keep his path clear (TM, 14) or

Among our jungle community, we had an understanding, which was an acknowledgement of my superiority, unquestioned, undisputed. My Master, when I mentioned it, explained that it was also true of human beings in various degrees and versions (TM, 14).
These illustrations suggest that the jungle community is not entirely different from the human community at the sub-conscious level at least because even human beings often claim like tiger:

There is nothing wrong in it, and advises me not to curb it—it being also a part of my own life, indispensable and unshakable although I have come a long way from it (TM, 15).

Words like “explain,” “read,” “advice,” and their analogues that punctuate the narrative indicate the various ways in which a Master can guide the self through the vicissitudes of life. The jungle and the world are given metaphoric orientation, in the sense that they symbolize unobtrusively the various ordeals that the self may face before it earns an awareness of itself.

From the above analysis it is clear that according to Narayan the self is ever fragile, ever changing, ever deconstructing and ever elusive entity in the sense that in Indian perspective man can’t be identified with a particular individual ‘identity’, ‘self’ or ‘other’. All these seem to be illusions, delusions and obstructions constructed by society for restraining a human being from attaining what he /she desires. Consequently, every human being attempts to overcome these restrictions, the other in Lacanian terminology, in order to attain freedom or identity. Be it a male like Jagon,
Margayya or Raju or female characters such as Rosie, Daisy or Savitri, the only ambition of these characters is to resist the social obstructions in whatever form they come. Some of these characters may appear initially successful in achieving their mission but most of them — go through a delusion where in they fail to distinguish between ‘dream’ and ‘reality’ or ‘fact’ or ‘fiction’. In the process, they face a dilemma wherein they are not able to decide between either / or and even when they take a decision it remains a private one, devoid of objectivity, and authenticity. This going through some kind of private and either / or delusion is what Lacan calls the imaginary.