Chapter-4

Themes and Techniques in R.K. Narayan’s Novels
Rasipuram Krishanswamy Iyer Narayan was born on 10 October 1907. He was the second son of his parents.

He used to live with his grandmother in Madras. His grandmother tried her best to get him the best education with a lot of affection, intense love and care.

"Grandmotherhood was a wrong vocation for her; she ought to have been a school inspectress. She had an absolute passion to teach and mould a young mind. In later years after my uncle was married and had children as they came of a teachable age, she took charge of them one by one."¹

Narayan got his education in Madras. He did not like the present education system. It should be based on free thinking without imposing a lot of prescribed books. So he “instinctively rejected both education and examinations with their unwarranted seriousness and esoteric suggestions.”²

He failed in arithmetic repeatedly. In 1930 when he was twenty four years old he completed his graduation. After becoming a graduate Narayan tried a number of professions. He joined Mysore secretariat but he was not interested in the tedious work involved there. Then he was appointed as a teacher but that profession never suited his temperament. In 1956 Narayan went to the
United State of America on a fellowship. At that time he maintained a diary and later published it as *My Dateless Diary*.

In 1930 he took his B.A. degree. Narayan was appointed as a school teacher of History in Chennapatna. One day in the absence of a Physics teacher he was sent in his drill class. He felt embarrassed. It was not right, he felt, to send a person in when he did not even know what drill was. So he left. Eventually he started writing for a newspaper *Justice* in Madras earned about thirty rupees. He also became the sub editor of *Madras Justice*.

Finally he started his career as a creative writer. He got the material and ideas for writing from day to day happenings.

"I had started writing mostly under influence of events occurring around me and in the style of any writer who was uppermost in my mind at the time. My father had lost a dear friend, which affected him deeply. Moved by his sorrow I wrote ten pages of an outpouring entitled *Friendship*, very nearly echoing the lamentations of *Adonais* but in a flamboyant poetic prose"^3

In his early career Narayan's writings were often rejected. No one was eager to read them. But he decided to go on writing. It is blamed that there is no plot in his writings. No one tried to understand his literary value. One cannot separate Malgudi from his writings.

"The general criticism was that my stories lacked 'plot'. There was no appreciation of my literary values,
and I had nothing else to offer. Malgudi was inescapable as the sky overhead."

His living depended on his writings but it was not enough. In the first year of his writing he earned nine rupees and twelve annas. Next year he sold his stories for 18 rupees and after that he got thirty rupees for a children's tale.

Narayan comments about his first novel, "Years ago when I wrote my first novel, Swami and Friends, and found none to read it, a very young college friend came forward to go through the manuscript; he read and certified it as readable which was very encouraging".5

It was a good news for R.K. Narayan when Swami and Friends was accepted to be published in England and sponsored by Graham Greene.

Graham Greene was very much impressed by his writings. So he wrote the introduction of Bachelor of Arts and The Financial Expert.

In 1933 Narayan went to his elder sister's house where he met a pretty, tall and beautiful girl. He met her when she was drawing water from the street tap. His love was 'love at first sight'.

She was of the same caste Iyer, but the horoscope did not match. The horoscopes were matched by another priest and it was announced that the marriage would be successful.
He was married in 1935. Rajam, his wife, helped him in his writings too. She died in 1939 of typhoid. She left behind a daughter. Narayan wrote the closely autobiographical *The English Teacher* after his wife's death.

and *An Astrologer's Day* and *Lawley Road* appeared in the *Times of India*. *A Tiger of Malgudi* and his latest novel *Talkative Man* were published in 1983 and 1986.

He received a number of literary awards, National Prize of Indian Literary Academy – (1957), Sahitya Academy Award on *Guide* (1960), Padma Bhushan Award (1964), National Association of Independent School Award (1965).

*The Guide* bestowed upon him a broad popularity not only in India but also in New York where it was dramatised in the Broadway theatre in 1968.

"A novel is about an individual living his life in a world imagined by the author, performing a set of actions (up to a limit) contrived by the author. But to take a work of fiction as a sociological reality or a social document could be very misleading. My novel *The Guide* was not about the saints or pseudo-saints of India but about a particular person".6

R. K. Narayan's forte was the narrative art as evidenced in his novels and numerous short stories. It is a fact that novels are a different genre and emerge out of a different perspective than short stories; but one can say that the novels of R.K. Narayan are the extension of his short stories. "There is a same artistic zeal, integrity, craftsmanship and imaginative power in both the genres. But limited in the scope and range, a short story requires deep understanding of characters and motivation".7
Short stories are used as samples of powerful narrative techniques by some novelists like Graham Greene and Ernest Hemingway. Their novels are different from short stories not only in length but in treatment too.

It also requires the art of putting ideas into fewer words with pithy precise effect. The minimalism and brief telling notes are also typical of the short stories. All these qualities are found in Narayan. Narayan's stories are rooted in his own country, the specific locale is Malgudi in the South Indian state of Karnataka, which is his native land and its culture is his own too.

"Simple but fascinating plot, lively characterization, gentle irony coupled with humour, strict economy of narration and beautiful simplicity of language are some of the most distinguishing features of his short stories." The same can be said about his novels easily.

R.K. Narayan represents the typical Indian scenes in his novels as well as in his short stories; but he is quite different from Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao in that his writings avoid the over bearing serious mood in representing these scenes. In all his writings he uses a mixture of gentle irony and humour, warmth and sympathy, quiet realism and fantasy. Narayan never seems to touch the deeper and darker aspects of life. He represents his characters with a touch of humour and irony. Like other Indian writers, Narayan also uses ancient classic lore in both short stories and novels. Inspite of his apparent-bare simplicity, he rises above the risk of
shallowness because of his empathy which may be lightly represented but is deeply felt.

Narayan stresses more on the message to his readers. He hints at hidden human emotions ever while he appears to depict action through direct and simple narrative. His terms of reference are the Indian archetypical narratives. No other Indian writer has used these terms so perfectly and so lucidly. In his own words, “After all, for any short story writer (Indian), the prototype still inevitably remains to be our own epics and the mythological stories”.

Narayan adopted his form and style from the West but his ideas and thoughts are his own. A blending of East and West can be found in his novels.

Venugopal says, “They rather end the O’ Henry way, with a sudden reversal of situation ..... a feature decidedly a strong point of the journalistic tradition”.

Prof. P.S. Sundaram says, “Narayan’s books spring from the mud and rivers of Malgudi. The scene is Malgudi, but the play is a human not merely an Indian drama”.

R.K. Narayan expresses his views through the depiction of the images of India. R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi represents a complex miniature of the variegated panorama of India, throbbing with the varied human samples that dot the typological landscape of India. He combines old and new traditions through the landscape and ethos of Malgudi. In Malgudi lies his greatest strength. The very ordinariness of the Malgudi landscape and its populace proves its claim to a type base. In one of his interviews to the Indian Express, ‘A
Peep into R.K. Narayan’s Mind’ (March 29, 1961) he said, “when art is used as vehicle for political propaganda, the mood of comedy, the sensitivity of atmosphere, the probing psychological factors, the crisis in the individual soul and its resolution and above all the detached observation which constitutes the stuff of fiction is forced into the background”\textsuperscript{12}.

R.K. Narayan’s Magudi is not a place in reality but an experience of the soil and soul of India.

R.K. Narayan closely and clearly observed life with a sense of humour blended with irony and satire. For this quality Raja Rao calls R.K. Narayan a true ‘Upasaka’\textsuperscript{13}. Raja Rao says, “unless the author becomes an ‘Upasaka’ and enjoys himself in himself (which is Rasa) the eternality of the sound (Sabda) will not manifest itself and so you cannot communicate either and the word is nothing but a cacophony”\textsuperscript{14}.

Narayan’s use of the English language is a perfect setting to his themes and techniques. As Iyengar says, “He wields so difficult and ‘alien’ a language like English with masterful ease and conveys the subtlest shades of feeling and thought”\textsuperscript{15}.

He uses simple and pure English avoiding the complicated adjectives and metaphors. So his tone is natural and easy to understand. “His ultimate success is the clever blend of Indian words interspersed with the regular narrative without creating any jarring effect”\textsuperscript{16}.
He uses the English language but represents the feelings, thoughts and ideas of India, especially South India. He uses this language as we use “dhoty manufactured in Lancashire”. Although this dhoty is manufactured in foreign lands even then it still remains Desi.

William Walsh writes, “The Mysore of his personal life, the Malgudi of his novelist’s life, becomes an intense and brilliant image of India itself. What happens in India happens in Malgudi and whatever happens in Malgudi happens everywhere”.

K.R. Srinivas Iyengar says, “Malgudi and Malgudi humanity are the theme of these various fictional essays and each new novel (or a short story) is a jerk of the Kaleidoscope when a new engaging pattern emerges to hold our attention”.

R.K. Narayan himself called the hero of the novels and short stories ‘a modern unknown warrior’, ‘who is the middle class common man’. He always picked his heroes from the middle class milieu.

His novels and short stories are interconnected. The stories like Regal, A Hero, Father’s Help represent boyhood exploitation and could be fitted into Swami and Friends. The White Flower employs the motive of horoscope as in The Bachelor of Arts. The incidents in the The Seventh House are the same as the incidents in The English Teacher, and the story of Four Rupees was repeated in The Guide on a different level.
Narayan is a natural visionary. His creative vision is assimilated from his native culture, tradition and values of life. The Indian tradition is the frame of reference to which Narayan is constantly drawn for the nourishment of his art. Without such a strong referential base writer cannot make a creative contribution honestly. R.K. Narayan worked as a creative artist for over four decades, drawing his strength from the various sources of Indianness.

Narayan’s view of life and world of values are basically native and essentially Indian.

R.K. Narayan had the capability to keep his vision of life strong over a long period of time. Such a long-term sustainability is not possible for every writer. His writings, which were written over five decades even today, prove themselves true to life. This is perhaps so because his beliefs and opinions are not based on any rigid rules of writing. R.K. Narayan never behaved like a satirist mocking at the society nor did her ever try to moralize and propagandize like a Pope or a bishop. The ‘sensibility composition’ of R.K. Narayan has been remarked upon.

The urban middle class life which was shown by Narayan through Malgudi with a South Indian ambience can be said to be a ‘segment of humanity’, Narayan has kept his focus on the south Indian people and atmosphere with their traditional rites and rituals in almost all his writings. “Malgudi is its fictional externalisation and through it he acquires his perspective of the world”21. Depicting the imaginary town Malgudi Narayan tries his best to give the
right impression of his ideas and feelings. His world of values has its starting point in the world of Malgudi. Projecting Malgudi as an imaginary South Indian town Narayan represented his fictional feelings, ideas and thoughts. Thus, he successfully focused his worldview through Malgudi.

The unsettling impact of materialism on the traditional world of Malgudi is felt in his first major novels *Mr. Sampath* and *The Financial Expert*. The theme of illusion, awareness and disillusionment is first seen in *The Bachelor of Arts*. In this novel as in the others, we see that love and friendship are mere illusions. Margayya, Raju and Jagan represent his view of life in characteristically distinct ways.

Margayya (One who shows the way) loses his own way in the desert of materialism. He thinks physical comforts are more important. The tale takes on emphatic notes of irony as it proceeds to grow with Margayya’s mad pursuit of money and destroys him slowly. Margayya of *The Financial Expert* is a common man whose life-graph illustrates that happiness is possible through money but that this happiness finally turns out to be a mirage or illusion.

Raju the Guide did not know what moral discipline is. So he was unable to guide himself on the right path. Consequent to self-deception he became aware of morals, discipline, love and sacrifice for others. This condition is very much like Conrad’s *Jim* and the realization of Krishna after Susila’s death. At the end of the road the Narayan hero realise that “a profound and unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life.”

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Even in the midst of a vast crowd Raju finds himself lonely. The reason of the loneliness is his inner emptiness. In his inner self he has no spirituality. He wanted to be free from this emptiness and did not consciously aspire for the development of spirituality. Raju's scale of life's value had fallen away "doing a thing in which he was not personally interested"\textsuperscript{23}. The moment of his sacrifice is the moment of his triumph over human fallibility and self centeredness. The tourist guide ends as a "Spiritual Guide"\textsuperscript{24}.

Through Jagan who is the main character of the novel \textit{Vendor of Sweets} Narayan represents the Hindu values of life, which can never be changed with time. He does not only represent the bright aspect of the Hindu way of life but the dark side is also represented minutely. In this novel R.K. Narayan proves that to discover the truth of any person we have to search deeply into his weaknesses and shortcomings as well as his virtues. This is not easily done because truth is hidden behind the mist of daily action.

Narayan's technique is enriched with the world myths of Bhasmasura, Kubera and Midas etc. So his novels become more powerful and the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity becomes evidenced.

For example: The temple elephant and the blue curtain in the Nataraj painting represent both sacredness or purity of life and its value simultaneously. Considering R.K. Narayan's typology of Indian character, the Indian Ideal of disinterestedness may be seen to emerge as the fountainhead for individual action. According to Uma Parmeswaram,
“Jagan is nowhere near completing the picture (of his life). But he has perceived the framework, somewhere within which is the object that ought to be focused upon. And the day is clear and bright”\(^{25}\). Nataraj’s resolution of his personal crisis in relation to Vasu is distinct from Raju’s, Margayya’s, or Jagan’s. In his other important novel *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* R.K. Narayan treats the theme of tradition versus modernity in the most striking form. “Vasu symbolises a total negation of the traditional values of life. The most highly cherished values of the traditional Indian society are mercilessly ridiculed and attacked by this cynical and callous rationalist”\(^{26}\).

“In a sense the Rakshasa represents evil, but this puts too moral a cast on it: he is rather an aspect of creation – the chaotic, the disruptive; his weakness is not that he is bad, but that he is ultimately not real”\(^{27}\). Vasu attempts to destroy both the sacredness of life and his privacy but ends by destroying himself. So his act of self-destruction symbolically represents the triumph of good over evil. “The cosmos prevails over the powers of chaos”\(^{28}\). Natraja’s problem is solved by the inexorable moral laws of nature. Narayan’s writings are impressive because he uses the Malgudi motif to represent real values of life. He presents the people of Malgudi as the role models for the entire world. Narayan is neither a social nor a religious reformer but he communicates his moral vision very skillfully through his novels by accepting life in its totality. He is easily comparable to Shakespeare in his humane and comprehensive world
vision. However Narayan avoids the Shakespearean mould of tragic grandeur in his narrative.

Narayan's greatest charm lies in his endearing style and his enduring worldview. Apart from Vasu one can mention Pal and Marco as characters with negative shades. The 'hard' characters are delineated in lines indicating the involvement of a gently judgmental moral viewpoint. Dark motives and harsh colours are avoided. At the same time, the 'soft' characters of Narayan's novels are no angelic portrayals. They are all weaklings - nothing of the grand Shakespearean tragic mould goes in to his portrayal of the Narayan heroes. On the other hand, the good characters are drawn with a rounded and gently ironic philosophical tone. The flaw is not glorified nor is the central figure allowed to descend the depths of hell in Faustian throes as the curtain falls on his downfall.

In his novels we find men in various vocations: students, teachers, painters, financial experts, vendors, guides, businessmen etc. "The complications and convolutions in their lives, and their struggles to resolve them make for the comedy of life as perceived and projected by him in novel after novel". 29

"Moreover, these novels despite differences of plot and protagonists are all of a piece in that they centre on transcendence and renewal of life, verging on a Wordsworthian tranquil restoration"30. We can say that Narayan's world of values with its composite juxtaposition of tradition and modernity is supported by the central comic
theme, that is the theme of deviance. "Malgudi is seeped in tradition and its inhabitants are men and women with their "roots in family and religion". They cherish a heritage of faith and values, customs and rituals and even superstitions". When they are not doing that, at the worst, they are phlegmatic, idiosyncratic or whimsical deviants. At best they could be the archetypical heroes. However R.K. Narayan shifts both extremes. He does not allow the focus to remain long enough on the deviance to invoke the moral wrath of the reader nor does he glorify the small virtues of these men with feet of clay.

Narayan handled the theme of detachment with a comic touch to give his major novels a solid effect. In each novel, the theme of detachment is handled with a delicate difference. Narayan's heroes struggle according to their own ways and in varying degrees, for achieving a state of detachment after facing the temptations and illusions of life and winning over them. In fact, their striving is for acquiring self knowledge in relation to other people and the world. Using the strategy of comedy Narayan emphasises the great Hindu ideal of the 'Virakta' or 'Sthitaprajna'. Through his understated art Narayan represents the real values of life and traditions of Indian culture.

The center of Narayan's fiction is family through which he represents the values of life and this world. In his novels we see that family relations are treated by him with a profound understanding of the Indian social ethos - viz., that of son and parents, and brother and brother in the Bachelor
of Arts; of husband and wife and father and daughter in *The English Teacher*, of father and son in *The Financial Expert*, and of grandmother and grandson in *Waiting for Mahatma*.

The traditional Indian family is the central part of the Indian social structure. R.K. Narayan presents these norms with an insider’s understanding.

Margayya is a money maniac, but he is still an anxious father who cannot bear the sight of his son’s debauchery. In the moment of righteous fury he overcomes his fear of Dr. Pal, the instrument of sin. Marco in *The Guide* has no interest in anything living or breathing, but as Rosie’s husband, he is still not dead enough to his duties as husband and to the moral code which attaches itself to a marital relationship. When he comes to know of his wife’s disloyalty, he disowns her “you are not my wife, you are a woman who will go to bed with anyone that flatters your antics”.33 Inspite of being a deserted wife, according to Indian cultural view Rosie is more a sinner than sinned against. She is unpardonable in the eyes of Raju’s mother who believes in traditional values. So she cannot bear to accommodate a spoiled woman. According to her, Rosie “is a real snake woman”34, who hisses sinful whispers into Raju’s ear.

In India, where marriage is a religious ceremony, a man and a woman living together out of wedlock is taboo. The self-respecting sweetmeat vendor seeped in the moral codes of his traditions, is mentally disturbed “that Mali, his ‘Americanised’ son and Grace are guilty of extreme violation of the moral sexual codes of his faith and culture. “He stood
looking at the girl. She looked so good and virtuous; he had relied on her so much and yet here she was living in sin and talking casually about it all 'What breed of creatures are these?' He wondered. They had tainted his ancient home"

Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya had all lived through the period of Gandhi, an atmosphere of social and political change in India. They not only got inspiration but absorbed it also into their system, during the 1930s & 40s, the two decades which demonstrated both the astounding success and also tragic failures of Gandhi. These four novelists record both the strains of Gandhian thought and the intellectual response of artists to the realities of life. R.K. Narayan’s first novel *Swami and Friends* and the first novel of Mulk Raj Anand *Untouchable* were both landmarks in Indian Literature in English. Anand and Narayan were more prolific than Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya. All their novels were published around 1949 and all of them were discussed in detail but Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* and Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers* were discussed profusely and received critical acclaim.

A clear distinction between the other Anglo Indian writers and R.K.Narayan can be seen easily. He became more successful due to his rare and distinct quality of providing the readers aesthetic satisfaction. He interpreted the pure Indian life in his novels only for “art for art’s sake” R.K. Narayan never uses corrosive satire. He had no personal biases.
The novels of Narayan are not only significant for their plot construction but also for the characterization. "R.K. Narayan’s genius also revels in discerning the oddities and peculiarities of man’s character. His characters are therefore, generally portrayed as individuals and only very rarely as types."37

Krishna’s father in The English Teacher writes letters using "his own home made ink, memo pad and a steel pen with a fat green wooden handle”38 with which he has written for years. The most attractive feature of his art is the style of characterization. His characters are usually quirky and idiosyncratic. The Dickensian predilection for the quirky in human nature makes R.K. Narayan’s art attractive and readable while the personal aspects and qualities of characters adds to the human appeal.

The unambitious and gentle head master of the private school for children is the most remarkable of all the characters in the novel The English Teacher. "He is shown as a slight man who looks scraggy and is indifferent to his dress and comforts".39 After taking a look at the small children he realizes a definite purpose in his life to work for the welfare of the new generations. Inspired by this purpose the hero is so overwhelmed that he resigns his own job in the college and joins this selfless and philanthropic project. The caricatures of Krishna’s colleagues in the Albert Mission College achieve a high degree of success in character portrayals on a small scale. The short accounts of characters “Gopal who is sharp as a knife edge where Mathematical problems are concerned
but dumb and stupid in other matters; Gajapathi, a grumbling, bullying and mechanical teacher of English; and Principal Brown who feels his “thirty years in India had not been ill spent if they had opened the eyes of Indians to the need for speaking and writing correct English”. The portrait of Singaram who is a hostel servant, a shrunken old fellow who has “angry wrinkles” on his face is a slice from real life.

The women characters that are depicted in the novel, Krishna’s mother, and his wife are all types of housewives. Krishna’s mother is an old lady who has a lot of experience and is an expert in housekeeping and completely dedicated to domestic duties. She is religious, superstitious and a follower of all the Indian customs and ritual and rites.

Krishna’s wife Susila has no experience as a housewife. Being the last child of her parents, and greatly pampered in her parental house, she would spend most of her time reading, knitting, embroidering or looking after the garden. The Head Master’s wife is shown as the quarrelsome bitter tongued and petty minded wife of the good-natured man. She disturbs her husband’s peace of mind so much that he is ultimately led to leave his house for good.

A very remarkable feature of the English Teacher is the criticism of the system of education prevailing in India. The author contrasts the method of cramming the minds of young men with unnecessary knowledge followed in the institutions in general with “The Leave Alone System” adopted by the gentle and sympathetic head master who opines that here children will learn things for themselves. It helps them in
retaining their original vision and enjoying a joyous and balanced condition of life. He feels that children can turn into wholesome human beings if they are taught while they are playing. Because, “children have taught me to speak plainly without the varnish of the adult world. I don’t care if it strikes anyone as odd”.

Childhood is the stage of innocent, eager, sensitive and carefree nature. Children learn a lot in childhood without force. Adults also can learn from them even through the way they quarrel.

“The most enchanting thing about children is their quarrels. How they carry it on for its own sake, without the slightest bitterness or any memory of it later. This is how we were once, God help us; this too is what we have turned out to be!”

“The main business of an educational institution is to shape the mind and character, and of course games have their value. Why worship sports, and the eleven stalwart idiots who bring in a shield or a cup? It is all a curse, copying; copying; copying. We could as well have been born monkeys to justify our power of imitation.”

With *The English Teacher* the first phase of Narayan’s career as a novelist closes. The novels evolve in to deeper complexity of thought, theme and technique. An autobiographical note can also be seen in his novels at this stage. He was married in 1935 and the same year he completed his graduation. After five years his wife died leaving a two year old daughter. *The English Teacher* almost
directly records the author’s own predicaments and predilections.

The novel describes how the sweet and happy life of a lecturer comes to a tragic end with the sudden and premature death of his wife upsetting his life completely. At the opening of the novel we can see the mechanical routine of the life of Krishna. He is hardly thirty years old and works as a lecturer in English at Albert Mission College in Malgudi. Susila falls a victim to typhoid and dies after a prolonged and tiring illness of several days.

In his novels R.K. Narayan also draws a very amusing picture of a child’s progress from obstinate and innocent childhood to spoilt frustrated manhood. The use of the child figure by R.K. Narayan is unique. In The Financial Expert the author has drawn a brilliant portrait of Balu as a pampered child. The focus on Balu’s characterization is of course tempered by a consideration of Margayya’s failure in his ambition as a father. With great irony R.K. Narayan describes the little sad and wistful spectacle of the failure of fatherhood. Margayya gloating over the bright vision of his son entering a college and becoming a great man, and that unworthy son never passing even the S.S.L.C. His expectations were high of his son turning a doctor. The irreverent and cheeky son snatches the S.S.L.C. register from his father’s hand, tears it into pieces and runs away from the house. R.K. Narayan is an expert in arousing laughter by epigrams and paradoxes. He is much like George Bernard Shaw who utters the serious and universal truths in a non-
serious manner, which arouses laughter. “Half the trouble in this world is due to women who cannot tolerate each other”45.

R.K. Narayan’s humour is always very gentle and kind hearted. Even when he employs the dangerous weapon of satire, he never makes it bitter or biting. Narayan’s creation of Margayya as a tragicomic and ambitious financial expert is remarkable in Indo-Anglian fiction. Graham Greene has correctly described the comic character Margayya as “Perhaps the most engaging of Mr. Narayan’s characters”46. Narayan created a truly human figure through the characterization of Margayya who wants more and more money. “A character like Margayya is very likely to melt into airy nothing like the mythological figure of Midas”47.

In Guide R. K. Narayan experiments with a new technique of telling a story. He uses both current narrative and flashback technique in juxtaposition by alternatively describing the incidents of the present life of Raju as they actually take place and the incidents of his early life as they are being related by him to Velan. This method provokes the curiosity of the reader.

R.K. Narayan has a rare psychological insight into the human mind and character. The portraits are many and varied: the picture of a woman who shows extra interest in her husband after committing adultery, the mind of an aggrieved lover who has no interest in life being separated from his beloved, and a lover who takes extra care of his clothes when appearing before his beloved. These are very
natural descriptions. The vignettes are many and all are artistic and realistic.

R.K. Narayan describes pathetic scenes with a restraint of manner and skill. The scene when Raju's mother leaves her son due to his wrong doings is very moving.

"Don't fail to light the lamps in the God's niche', said my mother, going down the steps. 'Be careful with your health'. Uncle carried the trunks and she carried the basket. Soon they were at the end of the street and turned the corner I stood on the step watching. At the threshold stood Rosie. I was afraid to turn round and face her, because I was crying"48.

"R.K. Narayan's artistic restraint often checks him from diving very deep into the recesses of the human heart. It appears that he is more interested in the obvious and the little ironies of life than in the passions of conflicts in the human heart"49.

Rosie's portrayal is artistically complex. R.K. Narayan salvages the character of Rosie from the traditional branding as a loose woman, a sinner and adulteress. Her liaison with Raju was her way of finding artistic freedom and also regaining her dignity and spirit that had been bruised by an indifferent and cold husband. Her rejection of Raju is on moral grounds. She is shocked at his moral turpitude and his money minded nature. Due to her inner passionate feelings she leaves her husband and also finally rejects Raju because of her principles and her detachment from a desire for money.
She says -

"What is one to do with so much? All day long and all through the week you are collecting cheques, and more and more often. But when is the time coming when we can enjoy the use of those cheques"^50.

Narayan often shifted his subject matter from actual to pure fantasy. In this also he was quite different from the other contemporary novelists. Narayan’s art of dealing with reality or fantasy is quite different from that of the other novelists.

In *The Financial Expert* Narayan describes Margayya’s quest for materialistic happiness and his attachments by mixing reality with fantasy.

In *The English Teacher* “the un-relatedness of much of the detail that Narayan works into the particular Indian milieu”^51 appears quite ridden with unrealistic features.

But when the novel ends there can be seen a note of fulfillment and a serenity. Krishna starts with the case that this death is not an end. It is possible to reestablish contact with what had been lost. It is not a subject of worry on grounds of rational thoughts. It is a perfect definition of yogic self-control. So at the end of the novel Krishna is very much different as he was at the beginning remindful of Keats; description of poetry as “might half slumbering on its own right arm”^52.

A man who used to think himself secure, says Walter Raleigh, “has been surprised by love and death”^53.
Chandran commenting on the way he was knocked down by Malati, makes the discovery that “no one can explain the attraction between two human beings. It happens”. 54

As P.S. Sundaram says of Margayya, “Like Ravana, Hiranayakasipu, Oedipus and Pantheus, he must pay for his hubris”. 55

Ravana, Hiranayakasipu, Oedipus and Pantheus all have the feeling of pride and security. In the same way Margayya getting the help of an astrologer asks questions about his future and gets ready to fight with God’s will. It is not the area of man.

The lines:

“Oh Goddess, who affordest shelter to all figitive worlds! Thy feet, by themselves, are proficient in affording Immunity from fear and bestowing boons” 56

are from Sankaracharya’s”. *Saundarya Lahari*. 57

What the stanza says is this: Other Gods (with four or more arms) indicate with (two of) their hands their willingness to grant boons and to offer shelter from fear. But all four hands of this goddess are occupied with things she is carrying. But that need not matter. Her two feet will accomplish what the hands of other divine beings do.

Another important aspect of the Narayan’s art of fiction is the manner in which places, location and natural features acquire a continuity and a status. Malgudi achieves a locational completeness as it finds itself described in novel
after novel. The sanctity and the significant relationship between location and event bring to mind the Indian sub genre of narrative style: the Sthala Purana. Like Shakespeare’s Arden and Hardy’s Wessex Malgudi acquires a metaphoric status.

The railway station, which is described in the novel Guide, attracted Narayan very much because in his interview with Ved Mehta, he said.

“Malgudi was an earthshaking discovery for me, because I had no mind for facts and things like that. I first pictured not my town but just the railway station, which was a small platform with a banyan tree, a station master, and two trains a day, one coming and one going. On Vijayadasami day, I sat down and wrote the first sentence about my town: “The train just arrived at Malgudi station”.

Malgudi which starts as a mere fictional backdrop ends as the culmination of a philosophic viewpoint- that while places are spaces that men clear to create settlements for themselves and their own, places also have a symbolic significance in that they play a role in the lives of the people.

Narayan’s heroes are universal and completely matched to real life. Laughter is aroused by the projection of his heroes’ selfishness which is wrong according to ‘the Upnishadic way of illumination’.

“R.K. Narayan’s heroes make us laugh at the selfishness of man, show us how civilization has tempered human folly, and illustrate the importance of the Upanishadic way of illumination.”
Another interesting facet of the R.K. Narayan style is the peculiar, puritanic and holistic Indian approach to sex. Sex was not treated as an exciting and valuable commodity for sensationalising his writings. Rather, sexual indulgence is associated with aberrant behaviour. At a positive dimension, it is seen as something too private and holy, so that even art cannot justify a public discussion on sex.

In the novel *The Guide* Raju realizes his mistake in the end and is granted an opportunity to make amends as he chooses the way of a Mahatama in the real sense. On the other hand Chandran frees himself from illusion and hysteria and changes internally. He plans not to go.

*The Painter of Signs* does treat the theme of sexual passion, but in a mocking manner. There is no place for sexual passion in Narayan's restrained art. One can say that his attitude reflects the general attitude of the Indian ethos on the issue of permissiveness.

Through some memorable minor characters, such as the headmaster in *English teacher* as seen through the eyes of Krishna, Narayan expresses his ideas on educators. Narayan's observations on education may not be regarded as only incidental. *The Bachelor of Arts* and *Swami and Friends* present the humor and strangeness of the hero's behaviour especially in confrontationist situations when pitted against the spirit of 'English' education. *The English Teacher* exposes the snobbery, vapidity, faithlessness, hypocrisy and compromise.
Krishna thinks that the way teaching is being imparted, and the type of school education and the mode of education being followed are wrong. To Krishna's self-questioning of 'what should be the mode of education?' R. K. Narayan gives the answer in a peculiar way through Leela’s Head Master

"A time at which the colours of things are different, their depths greater, their magnitude greater, a most balanced and joyous condition of life; there was a natural state of joy over nothing in particular. And then our own schooling which put blinkers on us; which persistently ruined this vision of things and made us into adults. It has always seemed to me that our teachers helped us to take a wrong turn. And I have always felt that for the future of mankind we should retain the original vision, and I am trying a system of children’s education .......... The Leave Alone System which will make them wholesome human beings........."61.

R.K. Narayan’s vision is an ironic vision of life. He accepts the reality of life and presents the things as they appear to him. Due to this quality he has a balanced view of life and situations.

The flavour of ironic humor is given full support by his objectivity, detachment of vision and discipline of narration. Through his ironic treatment he projects various paradoxes of life as ‘appearance and reality’, ‘free will and determinism’, ‘individual and society’, ‘virtue and vice’, ‘reason and passion’, ‘beauty and ugliness’,
'hope and despair', 'tears and smiles'. No loose threads can be seen anywhere. The paradoxes are mingled and perfectly interwoven.

In the Financial Expert we see how the protagonist Margayya satisfies his longing for a life successful in the materialistic sense.

The secret of R.K. Narayan's great success and high distinction lies in the complete aesthetic satisfaction which he provides to the readers. He interprets Indian life purely from the 'art for art's sake' point of view, maintaining complete objectivity and perfect impartiality. He represents the people as they are without any personal bias. There also we can see consequent changes in the Indian life patterns as depicted in the novels with the passage of time. R.K. Narayan's work maintains its artistic value and wide appeal over the long span of his literary career.

One can see that the evocative prose and descriptive techniques support the narrative creating an insulation against harshness of thought word or action.
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