Chapter-IV

THE HERO AND THE WORLD: DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND NARAYAN’S UNUSUAL HEROES

I

The hero or protagonist in literature is usually the instrument of the serious mode of writing upon whom falls the responsibility to centralize and legitimize the idealistic aspirations of the author. But in a time of disillusionment and confusion, it is the comic hero, specially the rogue, the clown or the fool, who by parodying the hero’s high language, maliciously distorting it, or by naïve incomprehension of it reveals a different plane of realism. This dialogic reality cancels all claims of universality or centrality. Bakhtin maintains that the rogue is deliberately deceptive; he is inconsistent, alternately brave and cowardly, criminal and honest. Moreover, the masquerading of the rogue mocks at the solemnity of heroes in other genres and opposes the finalized image of the human being they construct. For this very purpose, Narayan chooses to have roguish or at least irreverent characters as the protagonist of his novels. These characters constitute the ‘others’ in society and thereby managing a vantage position in order
to criticize society and expose the dualities or hypocrisies of the society that claims to stand upon a solid perennial ground of ethics and law. About these roguish characters Bakhtin writes: “Essential to these figures is a distinctive feature that is as well a privilege – the right to be ‘other’ in this world, the right not to make common cause with any single one of the existing categories that life makes available; none of these categories quite suits them, they see the underside and falseness of every situation.” (Bakhtin, 1981: 159)

The modern era with all its technological advancement saw the rise of a bourgeoisie that, according to Marx and Engels, put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. The bourgeoisie, they maintained, could not exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments and relations of production, and the whole range of relations in a society. The modern era may be defined by a line from *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), denouncing the bourgeois modernity that all that is solid melts into the air, all that is holy is profaned. With the advent of bourgeoisie during the different stages of capitalism, the process of dispersal started and this liquid uncertain mobility of modernity was watched with apprehension by no other than W.B. Yeats:
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity. (Yeats, 1962: 99-100)

Once the sense of centrality was obliterated, literature had to undergo its share of shuffling. In the past it was always the hero, who centralized not only all actions, but also the pulls of human consciousness towards very solid and universal qualities, thereby creating a relation of awe and reverence towards the hero. But that was a time when the enclosed traditional societies had their own notions of universal truths, which they experienced in their lives, being secured from any alien contact and cultural shock. In the time of Ramayana, it was Ram who was accepted as the universal cultural hero. But with the advent of science the closed feudal societies broke and gave way to Industrial Capitalism that entailed colonization, for it needed a new market everyday. This ruptured the sanctity of a society that was driven by the illusion of enclosed security. The new intercourse with alien cultures and societies resulted in unpremeditated shocks and confusion. The unsettling discovery of multiple other truths forecast plurality, but the modern era anxiously waited for another messiah to be born:
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
(Yeats, 1962: 100)

With a desperate hope of getting recognition of its discourse that was couched in the ‘Project of Enlightenment’ the modern era created various belief systems that battled for universal agreement. As a result, over the layer of the historical flux of man’s materialistic progress, was super imposed a false ideological layer. It thus turned into a domain of paradoxes and ironies, ambivalences and often hypocrisies. However, there was no chance of returning to the solid pre-modern condition; the paradise was lost and the cultural hero could not be created very convincingly anymore.

Mario Praz, in his work on Victorian fiction *The Hero in Eclipse* (1956) discusses how bourgeois influences invited a deliberate process of the hero’s decline, replacing the glamorous and profane Don Juans with a meeker race; they denounced revolution and voted for a reformation. It was a tendency, like the ostrich in the midst of sandstorm, of shutting away the uncertainty and desecration that surrounded them, while seeking to find assurance of stability in the humble arenas of life.
Praz traces this process right from the Romantics. Singing the praise of the simple and the humble was nothing extraordinary since Wordsworth and Coleridge had already turned away from their revolutionary inclinations and settled down to observe more conservative sensibilities: "... a falling back from extreme positions, a slowing down into a quiet conformism, a dissemination of Romantic ideas in such a way as to make them accessible to the middle classes." (Praz, 1956: 39) They were now averse to the new and outrageous and held fast to the security of the known and familiar areas of life:

I travelled among unknown men  
In lands beyond the sea;  
Nor, England! Did I knew till then  
What love I bore to thee. (Wordsworth, 1941: 229)

According to Mario Praz the true soul of Wordsworth was the "Biedermir soul", and he became a sentimental bourgeois poet. Wordsworth chooses to praise and transfigure the grass-root people like the leech gatherer, the reaper or the village idiot; "the result of a deliberate programme to discover the nucleus of a lofty spiritual message in some humble human vicissitude, and in simple, childlike people, to whom Wordsworth attributed primitive virtues ..." (Praz 1956: 49)
The bourgeois inclination in literature continued in the Victorian era where the middleclass ruled the roost, though the mythmaking of the Romantics got obliterated. The immediate example which comes to mind is Charles Dickens whose novels thrive in the crowded atmosphere of the middleclass life of gutters, dark alleys and cramped habitations. It is the same middleclass that inspires Narayan and causes him to be pinioned by critics as a writer with a limited vision. Interestingly, though both Narayan and Dickens use the same materials to create the ambience where their middleclass protagonists live, the two writers stand poles apart in their attitude. Dickens is a bourgeois novelist in the sense that he cannot help moralizing. Instead of a realistic description of the repugnant objects of the London subaltern life, Dickens prefers to stand apart in a position of ‘dainty delicacy’ and use vague terms like ‘polluted air’, ‘dirt’, ‘poisonous’ that emanate from a bourgeois prudence, an unwillingness to speak out freely. On the other hand, Narayan’s descriptions of the bad social condition, which the middleclass face, are enlivened by a human realism. He delivers with humour and his stance is participatory – “Carpenters, tin-smiths, egg sellers and miscellaneous lot of artisans and traders seemed gathered in
this place. The street was littered with all kinds of things – wood shavings, eggshells, tin pieces and drying leaves. Dust was ankle deep.” (Narayan, 1955: 142) And again”: There was every sign that the municipality had forgotten the existence of this part of the town. Yet it seemed to maintain a certain degree of sanitation, mainly with the help of the sun, wind and rain. The sun burned so severely most months that bacteria and infection turned to ashes. The place had a general clean up when the high winds rose before the monsoon set in, and whirled into a column the paper scraps, garbage, egg shells and leaves; the column precipitated itself into the adjoining street, and thence to the next and so on, till, perhaps, it reached a main thoroughfare where the municipal sanitary staff worked, if they worked anywhere at all.” (Narayan, 1955: 142)

It will not be wrong to say that Dickens is a bourgeois writer who, in an author’s role, suffers from the ambiguity innate to the middleclass. The middleclass tends to aspire for the material well-being and a genteel lifestyle that entails selfish acquisitiveness, though they are the strongest patrons of honesty, restraint and sacrifice. In order to undermine the paradoxes, Dickens creates his heroes with monologic
intensions. They are the upholders of sober and sound qualities, standing, as antitheses to the anarchic tirades of the brazen materialistic world constantly growing like the overwhelming baobab. His heroes like Pip, Oliver Twist, Nicholas always came out of the foul world which embarrasses the writer so much, yet they always prove as characters possessing all the bourgeois ideals – love and affection instead of sensuality, a sentimental view of life, honesty that is almost angelic. The lapses on their parts are overlooked as mistakes or temporary deviations. If they commit anything that touches the border of the dark underworld it is just because they are the unfortunate victims of their situations. Mario Paz writes: “With Dickens current moral standards penetrated right into the heart of the novelist: his heroes are figures conceived in accordance with the neo-classicism which, in the bourgeois nineteenth century, inspired sepulchral monuments: they are angels with mild stupid faces.” (Praz, 1956: 136) These angels are highlighted by a conscious technique of contrast; they stand against a crude world that surrounded them, consisting of the deformed, nasty and slimy people like Quilip, Sikes, Magwitch or Uriah Heap.
Narayan is a piquant contrast to Dickens in dealing with his heroes. He never bothers to create them as ideal beings, but lets them struggle in their own ambiguities, which they adopt from the society around them. After all, they live in an anxious world pursuing its material dreams, and are torn between their inherited traditional values and their immediate provocations. How can their nature remain unscathed by the excitement constantly being created with new opportunities and lures beckoning them? But in case of Dickens, though his heroes undergo the pressures of their social conditions, they need not get corrupted. Most of them are blessed with a fairytale fortune – they always find a wealthy relative or well-wisher who await them at their miserable journey’s end. Narayan, on the other hand, is not embarrassed by the shameless clamourings of his protagonists, and as he uses the comic mode of expression it is easier for him to speak out freely without inhibition. He creates heroes who are not heroic but very ordinary average men. He presents them without any sentiment and leaves them to act out their own nature. They are not ashamed of recognizing money as the only means to virtue and well-being. Margayya of *The Financial Expert* is the most vocal: “Money alone is important in this world.
Everything else will come to us naturally if we have money in our purse.” (Narayan, 1958: 21) Margayya accepts the ironies – to achieve respectability one needs money, and acquisition of money may not be of honest means. “It made Margayya reflective. People did anything for money. Money was man’s greatest need, like air or food. People went to horrifying lengths for its sake, like collecting rent on a dead body: yet this didn’t strike Margayya in his present mood as so horrible as something to be marveled at. It left him admiring the power and dynamism of money, its capacity to make people do strange deeds.” (Narayan, 1958: 28) With Narayan’s heroes avarice is subtly infused with a dream. It is the eternal dream of the petit bourgeois; like the metamorphosis of the frog to a stunning prince, he yearns to be metamorphosed into the genteel aristocrat. A nagging feeling of inferiority spurs Margayya into an elaborate daydreaming: “His mind gloated over visions of his son. He would grow into an aristocrat. He would study, not in a Corporation School, but in the Convent, and hobnob with the sons of the District Collector or the Superintendent of Police or Mangal Seth, the biggest mill-owner in the town. He would promise him a car all for himself when he came to the College. He
could go to America and obtain degrees, and then marry perhaps a judge’s daughter. His own wife might demand all the entire dowry she wanted. He would not interfere, leaving it for the women to manage as they liked. He would buy another bungalow in Lawley Road for his son, and then his vision went on to the next generation of aristocrats.”

(Narayan, 1958: 29) Narayan’s heroes are carnivalesque to whom moral and ethical questions fizzle out in the intensity of their craving for money.

Yet the path towards fulfillment is not that of a smooth fairytale. Margayya’s plans for his son are frustrated when his son falls prey to the evil abuses of wealth. The path of prosperity is delicate and an unmended weakness may turn dreams to nightmares. In spite of all Margayya’s intelligent calculations, his son proves incalculable. It is an uncertain world where numerous doors open up and baffle man. The carpenter’s son may turn into a share-broker, the teacher’s son may run away to become a film star. It is certainly not a monologic tale with a premediated ending. The most incalculable is human nature at this stage of social transition because, for economic as well as other valuational reasons families are breaking up into small units, each creating its own
alien world, and sons no longer inherit the tastes, values and sensibilities, not even the dreams of their parents. Jagan the sweet-vendor piles up money in a hidden loft for his son, but his son turns out to be a puzzle for him: “Here he was trying to shape the boy into an aristocrat with a bicycle, college life striped shirts, and everything, and he wanted to be a ‘writer’! strange!” (Narayan, 1967: 28) Unlike the novels of Dickens where in the end some sort of resolution is reached at, Narayan’s novels leave us frustrated, confronting an open road.

It may be conjectured that there is something wrong about the whole process of acquisition. The protagonist’s dependence on tricks and pranks, on his own sudden sparks of genius, that is, the very nature of a wit-conducted life ultimately proves stultifying and self-defeating. It is a life of ambiguity because it sparks an intense delight of control, however short-lived, and then again a sense of failure because, the protagonists, in spite of being infinitely clever, lack depth and easily fall prey to several irrationalities of human nature like vanity, prodigality or even simple carelessness. So the rogue’s tale remains inconclusive, indicating unfinalizability of all phenomenon in the social sphere of life.
The rogue is the perfect instrument to flout the ills of society as well as get entangled in his own shortsightedness and blunders. By transgressing all social codes, the rogue saves the work from stilted banality, incorporating a mischievous liveliness and in the process alerts the readers to new meanings. Since the traditional concept of hero seems ossified in the new social context, the need for a lively substitute who may transmit meaning effectively can be very well felt. Narayan’s use of roguish characters in the role of heroes is quite successful.

The rogue, with all imperfections and grotesqueness reveals human kind as flawed, a statement that requires some amount of humility in order to be accepted. Robert B. Heilman writes: “Within the capacious irony of the rogue’s tale there lies, we may conjecture, humility: partly an oblique confession, partly an assumption of Everyman’s rascality, a discovery of the heart masterfully transfigured into an urbane jest.” (1968: 114) A rogue’s tale cannot encompass experience in its densities because the rogue is always a shallow character, who lives on the crust of life and has no inclination towards finding the depth of meaning or value in his experiences. His unconservative approach to life makes him a participant in the carnival
that literature unfolds. But carnival in Bakhtin’s terms is a counter-value that opposes the monolithic official value-system and this entails both daring and humility.

If not capable of showing depth in character, the rogue in the role of the hero is very well equipped to flaunt the dynamics of human nature, the various oxymoronic combinations to expose man as a complex being. The rogue can at the same time be brave and cowardly, warm and detached, honest and corrupted. The rogue is a person carrying double-consciousness and his life, instead of following a steady journey, loses itself in the whirlpool of ambivalences.

It would be convenient to select certain characters from the novels by R.K. Narayan to show the working of the double-consciousness in relation to the world, which acts as the stimuli. Further, the rogue’s double-consciousness constitutes a world of ambivalences by breaking down the structured values of society and subverting the dominance of superego.

Though most of the characters created by Narayan are participants in the carnival world of his novels, not all of them are
rogues. Two main protagonists, Swami and Savitri, are not rogues, for they possess an earnestness that is lacking in a rogue; moreover, they do not depend on their wits in order to achieve their own selfish goals. From their points of view their intentions are earnest and straightforward. Swami craves for the world of playfulness and the company of his friends above everything else. Savitri, on her part aspires for a certain dignity of life. It is only their paradoxical positions in the novel that turns them ambivalent. Though living at the center of society and their families, they are still the ‘other’. Society, especially the unit of the family is incomplete without the woman and the child, yet the nagging sense that haunt them is of being treated as subalterns. The child is the eternal rebel against the adult world and the woman is ‘the other’ in the world of men; therefore any gesture of self assertion on their part make them seem like potent anarchists. They turn out as beings living on the border of society, as critics of its follies and dogmas. The rogue too is a person, who lives on the fringes of society, but it is his unorthodox nature that leads him to live outside the premises of the ordinary feeling of community; it is his irresponsible and playful attitude that turns him into a lawbreaker.
Chandran of The Bachelor of Arts and Krishna of The English Teacher too do not fall in the category of the rogue. Krishna, by the author's own confession is autobiographical. The character is the writer's attempt to assess himself from a different plane. Krishna too, in a different way, expresses the ambivalence of double-consciousness – the consciousness of Narayan who experiences and Narayan who writes. However, Krishna, with his intense soul-searching is not a rogue.

The creation of Chandran is based on Narayan's indulgent observation of youth. It is a stage of human life when man lives in a serious illusion of such idealisms as love, loyalty, chivalry, etc., yet does not possess the cool control to suppress the erratic drives of youth which leads him elsewhere. Thus it is a stage of bewilderment, fragmentariness; it is as fragile and transparent as the glass, yet a strong natural urge for life turns his wounds into Quixotic glories. Thus the youth, to a mature observer who has long left that lane of life to live on a different plane, is an inexhaustible source of humour. Narayan's treatment of Chandran and his youthful acrobatics unfold the ambivalences lurking behind the so-called values that society teaches us to look upon as serious and undeconstructible. In Chandran's world love
invades the youth on the flimsy path of a green saree, change of hearts take place as unpredictably as the moods of a pregnant woman, or marriages depend on the fluke of chance. Chandran is not a rogue; he represents youth. But Narayan’s Quixotic treatment of the antics of youth and the natural carnal pulls that are happily sanctioned make this novel carnivalesque. Chandran is a carnival character because he is a rebel and a clown, and through him the carnal bodily life is celebrated.

Along with Chandran we may name two other characters representing the starry-eyed and energetic youth – Sriram of Waiting and Raman of The Painter of Signs. Sriram is average and lacks wit, but he has the instinctive desperation of the youth and without a second thought leaves his home to pursue his love. Desperation leads him to deception and finding Gandhism the most convenient garb to hide his longing, wears it without hesitation. There is, no doubt that he sincerely involves himself in Gandhian activities including suffering a jail term, but he succeeds at last to win his ladylove and the consent of Gandhi himself.

Raman of The Painter is an endearing young lover who does not hesitate to express his attractions for Daisy. Unlike Sriram or Chandran,
Raman is independent and talented. He loves his job: “I took it because I loved calligraphy; loved letters, their shape and stance and shade.” (Narayan, 1977: 30) Love turns him bohemian and leaving his home and workshop in Malgudi he follows Daisy, sharing all inconvenience of traveling to remote places. Raman is obsessed with sex and the carnal pulls reveal certain unexpected glimpses of the rogue in him. In spite of himself, he succumbs to lewd thoughts: “Money and sex, he reflected, obsessive thoughts, too much everywhere – literature, magazines, drama, or cinema deal with nothing but sex all the time, but the female figure water-soaked, is enchanting.” (Narayan, 1977: 14) In his yearning for Daisy he turns deceitful and wears coloured glasses to ogle at her without being noticed. While traveling, Raman and Daisy are forced to spend a night together. The enchanting combination of moonlight, stars, the cool breeze bringing the mysterious fragrance of the forest foliage stirs up the primeval instinct hidden deep in his nature and he blindly attempts to ravish her. His immediate realization and repentance save him from perversion. He is the ever confused youth puzzled by incompatible sensations working in himself at the same time – he worships his ladylove as a goddess, pure, and divine, yet he yearns
to violate her – “He was appalled at the potentialities that lay buried within him.” (Narayan, 1977: 96)

A slight difference of shade may be observed in the novels that follow *The English Teacher*. Emerging out of the familiarities of Narayan’s own life, these novels are culminations of the author’s complete exposure to and understanding of ‘otherness’. It is a different reality and has not much to do with his own organized belief-system. The realities of Margayya, Vasu, Raju, Rosie or Daisy are strange new variations. The author conceives them by dissociating the reassuring form of the identical, and by bypassing the whipping superego.

It is, however, specifically the transgressive nature of the rogue that turns him as the perpetual outsider. He is the perfect carnivalesque character in that his creation does not necessitate any form of sentimentality; instead, he is a trickster who thrives on wit. The Rajus, Vasus or Murgayyas are perfect rogues who cannot be eulogized as heroes, nor can they be derogated as villains. They reflect the nature of the ambivalent self of the middleclass in India. Emerging out of a native feudal system this class champions the multifaceted lures of imported capitalism. These middleclass people are the storehouse of all traditional
values; they are soaked in all forms of orthodoxy that had been inculcated in them through folk-tales, myths, and everyday rituals. Again, they are the most anxious lot who long to transgress their mediocrity and taste the new and adventurous; they dream of earning money and more money that would avail them of all the untasted pleasures of life. The full-fledged and unreserved exposure of this double-consciousness may be observed in many of Narayan’s protagonists. These characters thrive on their aspirations for money, glamour and sex. Certain qualities like practical intelligence, a ready appraisal of life and a flair for adventurism lends them a dazzle, a halo, and rescues them from submerging into the humdrum world. R.B. Heilman’s definition of the picaro fits very well in this context; for him the picaro implies flippancy instead of deliberateness of the criminal, harassment rather than serious attacks, the trick-or-treat prankster; seduction rather than rape, the securing of and playing upon the victim’s consent, a relish of the game as such, in Dantean terms, less the perversion of right feeling than a non-function of right feeling. He further adds: “The picaro is the literary equivalent of that familiar abnormal type that must use talents, which are often extraordinary, not
for murder but for masquerade; who must take by trick what he could earn by effort; who must dazzle rather than seek respect; to whom the world is a theatre rather than a school; who by spectacular fakery can get by as a physician or even surgeon, but who would never take a medical degree. Though many variations, degrees of development, and overlapping are possible, the criminal has kinship with Iago, the picaro with Falstaff.” (Heilman, 1968: 104)

An involuntary love for adventure and attraction for the unknown inspire the lives of the roguish heroes of Narayan. After being connected to the rest of India by a new railway line, Malgudi opens up to a new world and all sorts of murky characters start swarming about. These people of alien cultures as well as dubious or unorthodox occupations influence the lives of Malgudi. When Raju of The Guide takes charge of his father’s shop in the station, the constant inflow of tourists affect his life and very soon he leaves his shop to become a tourist guide. He says: “It is written on the brow of some that they shall not be left alone. I am one such, I think. Although I never looked for acquaintances, they somehow come looking for me.” (Narayan, 1958: 49) This may not be the whole truth. Protagonists like Sampath, Raju,
Margayya, The Talkative Man or Nagraj possess a natural warmth, responsiveness and an eager delight in the outer world. They all have an amiable disposition, as self-love turns them into extroverts. Raju’s words in *The Guide* unfold the character of a man of Malgudi: “I never said, ‘I don’t know.’ Not in my nature, I suppose. If I had had the inclination to say ‘I don’t know what you are talking about’, my life would have taken a different turn.” (Narayan, 1958: 49) The inability to say ‘no’ to the outer world entangle them with the lives of strangers or outsiders and they often find themselves in precarious situations. The Talkative Man thus suffers several inconveniences by asking the mysterious Dr. Rann to stay at his place as a guest. Nagraj’s quiet world fills with unwelcome complications and turbulence because he could not say ‘no’. So he takes up the responsibility of his brother Gopu’s son Tim, and Tim starts exploiting his affection.

The fictional world inhabited by strangers affects the consciousness of the protagonists, goading them to expose unusual and hidden tenets of their characters that thwart all givenness of a small-town community by creating new fields of reality. When Raju accidentally meets the strange couple Marco and Rosie, his life starts
taking a strange colour. He feels an instant attraction for Rosie and very soon Raju the small-town shopkeeper turns into a Don Juan – enticing, manipulative, and desperate. He shows a sharp insight into responses that may be played upon advantageously. An instant understanding of the strained husband-wife relation helps him. He flatters Rosie by offering her to show her the cobra and later by praising her dance. Instinctively he plays upon her weakness, thus setting himself as a better alternative to her husband who never cared for her dance. He has so much confidence in his understanding of her responses that he offers to persuade her out of her room when she shuts herself against her husband. "A courageous idea was developing in my head. If it succeeded it would lead to a triumphant end, if it failed the man might kick me out of his sight or call the police. I said, 'I shall go and try on your behalf?'" (Narayan, 1958: 64) It is like gambling and luck favours him. Marco’s response is encouraging – ‘Go ahead, if you are bold enough.’ (Narayan, 1958: 64) If Marco had had any idea of the extent of boldness hidden in Raju’s nature, he would never have conceded. When Raju finds himself in front of Rosie’s closed door, he instantly takes on the lover’s role although he is hardly acquainted with her: “I
repeated, 'It is not him, but me. Don’t you know my voice? Didn’t I come with you yesterday to that cobra-man? All night I didn’t sleep.' I added, lowering my voice, and whispered through a chink in the door, 'the way you danced, your form and figure haunted me all night.'” (Narayan, 1958: 64) All rogues have the instinctive attraction for the dangerous and they love to play upon chance. Each success leads him to play more dangerous games. Raju succeeds in coaxing Rosie to accompany him and Marco to the mountain guesthouse where he uses the opportunity to get closer to her. Again, anticipating Marco’s response, he offers to entertain Rosie while Marco is occupied with his study of cave-paintings. Raju is confident that Marco will be too glad to get rid of his nagging wife. This is how they are thrown together and soon the town starts gossiping. Raju has no inhibitions, nor does he suffer from pricks of conscience. He simply disregards the society that spreads such scandal. Even when Marco comes to know about their intimacy, Raju remains bold and unrepentant. He is not concerned about Rosie’s failing relation with her husband. He is unorthodox in his opinion and sees no reason in her dragging on such a worthless relationship. When Rosie is deserted by her husband he takes her under
his care and gives her all the support so that she could forget her husband and pursue her dream to become a dancer.

Raju’s love for Rosie is a strange combination of altruism and self-interest. His eagerness to help others is as true as his selfish calculations. His quick calculative mind at once sees the promising prospect of using Rosie’s talent for his own ends. Without the boredom of sitting in a shop or the strain of acting as a tourist-guide to moody and stingy tourists he could earn much more just by managing programmes for Rosie. So, without looking back, he launches his new career and soon experiences a meteoric rise. Yet, the rogue is, like the meteor, not destined for stability and permanence, and the seed of disorder lies in his very nature. He soon turns careless and extravagant and his shameless narcissism makes Rosie tired of him. His avarice as well as possessiveness towards Rosie leads him to commit a careless blunder. He forges Rosie’s signature and soon finds himself in jail. Rosie tries her best to save him although there is no love lost between them. Soon they are separated.

Raju’s next contact with another stranger Velan launches him into his final adventure. Velan mistakes Raju for a Swami and soon a crowd
of simple villagers start gathering around him with their offerings of fruit and milk. Though not having any hand in his new found importance, Raju soon starts enjoying his new role, gloating in the illusory glamour of a Swami’s identity and also enjoying the easily earned food and the attention of the people. But soon his role-playing proves to be too good. People start expecting him to bring rain miraculously by fasting. Unable to convince Velan that he is not a saint but rather an ordinary character with a chequered past, Raju has no other option; he has to continue with his role playing. Raju’s death is no final expiation, but retains the same false ring that had pervaded his life – he dies while playing a false role.

Raju is no Swami, though he plays the Swami’s role. Again, he is neither an ordinary person. A fateful and ruinous self-love, a felt superiority makes him hungry for power, and for its realization he binds himself to the rest of mankind, because without them his own identity is impossible. This prevents him from fleeing the scene to save his own life. He could not afford to spoil the whole sport and disgrace himself. Throughout his life he had played the roles of deception with the natural adroitness of a talented artist. Ambivalence is his second self for his
love of ingenuity makes him prone to a fatalistic death wish – he dies to prove the worth of his roguish life. “The doctors appealed, ‘Tell him he should save himself. Please, do your best. He is very weak.’ Velan bent close to the Swami and said, ‘The doctors say …’ in answer Raju asked the man to bend nearer, and whispered, ‘Help me to my feet,’ and clung to his arm and lifted himself. He got up to his feet. He had to be held by Velan and another on each side. In the profoundest silence the crowd followed him down. Everyone followed in a solemn, silent pace. The eastern sky was red.” (Narayan, 1958: 221) Raju has successfully simulated the saint’s final departure.

Like Raju, Margayya, Sampath and Vasu are also affected by their contacts with strangers. Margayya’s life had been smooth and uneventful under the banyan tree but for the peon Arul Doss and the Manager of the Co-operative Bank, he is transformed into money-mania. He grows restless in his longing for more money that would enable him to buy position and respectability in society. While desperately searching for the magic touch that would transform him into a prince he accidentally meets the temple priest and this gives a new turn to his life. Leaving everything behind, he worships the goddess
Laxmi rigorously for forty days. His rigorous routine atleast saves him from sinking into desolation, for his spoilt child Balu had thrown his account-book into the gutter, thus finally closing any possibility of his returning to his old practice.

Another accidental contact with a stranger named Dr. Pal of dubious occupation gives another piquant twist to Margayya’s destiny. Margayya grows rich by selling an adult book on bed-life written by Dr. Pal. With the help of Madan Lal, a North-Indian printer, and under the more harmless name “Domestic Life” the book catches on, and soon Margayya finds a place among the cream of Malgudi society. But Margayya’s prosperity is not permanent. The same Dr. Pal deals the fatal blow on his family and career and Margayya ends his meteoric existence by being thrown into bankruptcy.

Like Margayya, Mr. Sampath too is a versatile and extrovert character who thrives on his association with strangers. The novel starts with the exposition of the philosophic character of Srinivas who continues to exist on his own in the novel, and Mr. Sampath remains as a shadow-like personality who prints Srinivas’ journal from behind a mysterious blue screen. It is after sometime that he is introduced to us
by his name, and only then do we realize that Srinivas is there to bring forth the more dynamic and worldly Mr. Sampath.

Srinivas is warm, sensitive, but philosophically detached. His sensitivity drives him to go out of his way to help others, or write burning editorials against corruption, but his intellectual capacity allows him the space to draw back into himself and thus remain unscathed: “Life and the world and all this is passing – why bother about anything? The perfect and the imperfect are all the same. Why really bother?” (Narayan, 1949: 30) But the worldly Sampath has no high philosophical shock absorber, to save him from the repercussions when he gets entangled into the problems of others. He is a man with open arms. Srinivas is first struck by this colourful man sharing jokes with all and sundry and ordering genially everybody about, as if they were his family. When Srinivas tries to get acquainted, Sampath whisks him away to a special room of the restaurant and showers on him all his hospitality even before knowing his name. Srinivas is puzzled: “I am after all a stranger.” (Narayan, 1949: 67) Thus Sampath involves himself in the life of a stranger, though his nature would not allow any discrimination between the stranger and the familiar because “There are
no strangers for Sampath.” (Narayan, 1949: 67) Without a second thought he takes up the responsibility of printing *The Banner*. It may be noted that Sampath’s first crisis arrives after his association with the ‘stranger’ Srinivas. His natural reverence for the intellectual Srinivas, his characteristic altruism, and sensitivity towards his customer’s feelings lead him to bear much of the financial burden, and one day he is forced to close the press. An incidental glance at his impoverished household, the tired and overworked wife and the burden of many children to feed comes as a shock after the initial idea of affluence when we see him treating Srinivas grandly in the Anand Bhawan or providing him the papers and printing virtually free of cost. How would one assess a character embodying so much ambivalence? He does not possess the philosophical detachment of Srinivas towards money or other worldly matters. Unlike Srinivas, Sampath clings to the felt surfaces of life. The dire need of money and the dream for a better life style is there, for his perfect simulation of a grand personality is a way of his wish-fulfilment. He had been so realistic in his role-playing that when Srinivas visits his house he is shocked: “On the edge of the compound there was an outhouse with a gabled front, a verandah screened with bamboo-trellis,
and two rooms. It was the printer’s house. Srinivas felt rather disappointed at seeing him in his setting now, having always imagined that he lived in great style.” (Narayan, 1949: 83) The “profound enchantment provided by the father and the daughters” (Ibid., 87) when they sing and dance the tale of Krishna In spite of the “drab ill-fitting background” (Ibid., 87) shows the longing in Sampath for the beauty and happiness of life which is denied to the middle-class man. Interestingly, his dire situation and poverty does not make him mean; he is a surprising combination of bohemian generosity and bourgeois cunning and energy. Instead of blaming Srinivas for his unscrupulous management that ruins his press, he plans to include him in his future plan of producing a film. He never disappoints Srinivas and tries his best to keep all his requests, however impractical they may seem to him. Being quick-witted and a man of the world he instinctively detects something wrong in Ravi’s personality – perhaps the mad potentiality of destruction. He accommodates Ravi in his film company as he is generous by nature, but warns Srinivas to keep an eye on Ravi. Srinivas, being an idealist, mistakes Ravi’s disjointed ranting for the overflow of powerful feelings of a genius and decides to pay no
attention to Sampath’s apprehensions. Sampath’s foreboding soon proves to be true because at the end Ravi turns mad and causes unimaginable damage to the film studio.

The ambivalence in Sampath’s character, the incompatible marriage of the bohemian recklessness and the bourgeois materiality, which, for fulfillment demands discipline and perseverance, gives his life a fatal impotency. With his practical intelligence he is quick to take the right step whenever practical decision is needed, but then he submits to all the irrationalities of the flesh. He is capable of taking quick practical decisions. Without consulting the Editor, he puts a slip into the middle page of every copy of the journal, expressing regret for not being able to publish it any more and asking the forgiveness of its readers. He knows when a position should be given up for practical reasons. Instead of wasting time he quickly seeks for another opening. Again his practical foresight tells him that it is Shanti’s face that alone can make the film a hit and bring profit to “Sunrise Pictures”. However, instead of dealing with her with cool calculated professionalism, he develops a spontaneous warmth towards her and gets entangled with her in a passionate relationship. Shanti is another stranger who affects his
life and career. When Shanti leaves him, Sampath is left nowhere. It is his bohemian nature that blinds him to the social sense of right and wrong; in his desperation he had started dreaming of a life where both Shanti and his wife would accept each other and with his money he would make both of them happy. “If I buy Shanti a car my wife shall have another; if I give her a house I will give the other also a house; it will really be a little expensive duplicating everything this way, but I won’t mind it. Later on, when they see how much it is costing me, I’m sure they will bury the hatchet and become friends again ...” (Narayan, 1949: 180)

According to P.S. Sundaram the book ends with a disciplined detachment. This is true from the point of view of Srinivas who bids a final goodbye to Sampath and walks ‘homewards’, while Sampath remains standing alone in the dark. But can one so easily erase Sampath from one’s mind? How can we forget the spontaneous warmth of Sampath’s nature, his eagerness to help all strangers that accidentally crossed his path? While Shanti returns to her son, and Srinivas to the peace and security of his home and family, is not there a corner in their conscience that bears some responsibility for Sampath’s ruin? Sampath
is the solitary rogue with an eager delight in the world. He is a stranger to the society that he considers his own. Sampath, for all these ambivalences, is a lovable rogue and before his exuberance, the high philosophic quietism of Srinivas seems pale. Even after the novel closes with an apparently final note of relief, when the good and God-fearing Srinivas ultimately detaches himself from the so-called misguiding influences of Sampath, a feeling of injustice continues to haunt the reader.

Vasu of The Man-eater is the extreme case of selfish acquisitiveness; he would unhesitatingly exploit every stranger who fascinated him. Unlike the others, who are more or less over-whelmed by the outsiders or somehow influenced by them, Vasu is a cool, calculating type, the prowling man-eater. His first target is a phaelwan whose strength appeals to him. Though he manages all the charity and learns his art, Vasu simply throws him away when his fascination dies out. “Vasu laughed at the recollection of this incident. “I knew his weak spot. I hit him there with the edge of my palm with a chopping movement … and he fell down and squirmed on the floor. I knew he
could perform no more. I left him there and walked out, and gave up the strongman’s life once and for all.” (Narayan, 1961: 18-19)

However, in spite of the dark villainous traits in his nature, Vasu’s attitude towards the taxidermist Suleiman who taught him this art is of pure reverence. It may be noted that he keeps this part of his life to himself as if he considered it too sanctified to be shared in public. It is the only positive aspect in Vasu’s life who otherwise leaves a bloody trail wherever he tramples. “No creature was safe, if it had the misfortune to catch the eye.” (Narayan, 1961: 53) But his chance references to Suleiman are full of praise: “... he was an artist, as good as a sculptor or a surgeon, so delicate and precise!” (Narayan, 1961: 51) Again: “He sighed at the thought of Suleiman, his master. ‘He was a saint. He taught me his art sincerely’.” (Narayan, 1961: 17) Vasu does after all have the ability to appreciate men who are powerful in their skill and sincere in their mission. It appears that he has great aversion for the effete. His depreciating attitude towards Nataraj is because he is a moneyed aristocrat who wastes his time, energy and money in entertaining ‘worthless’ people like Sen and the poet. He keeps on teasing and provoking Nataraj on this subject.
Vasu possesses the energy of the bourgeois; he believes in human agency and shows with his life what man’s activity can bring about. Vasu is one specimen of the modern capitalist society where man has accomplished wonders like the beggar turning into a millionaire through sheer enterprise. Though an M.A. in Economics, Vasu launches a different career that is both adventurous and profitable. He is an artist who challenges the myth of the artist being a man of high spiritual aspirations. Every honoured occupation revered with awe has been stripped of its halo by bourgeoisie. Vasu is the rootless man who has no sentiment for his pedigree. He is proud to be self-made and nowhere do we hear him speak about his family. Throwing away all social conventions and norms, he sees all relationships in the light of its utilitarian value. His opinion on marriage scandalizes Nataraj: “‘Only fools marry, and they deserve all the trouble they get. I really do not know why people marry at all. If you like a woman, have her by all means. You don’t have to own a coffee estate because you like a cup of coffee now and then,’ and he smiled, more and more pleased with his own wit.” (Narayan, 1961: 33-34)
Vasu and Nataraj are the opposites; Nataraj possesses those qualities of his class that Vasu lacks and grudges, yet it is perhaps for those very qualities that Vasu is attracted towards Nataraj. Nataraj’s generosity, sophistication, selfless altruism and the inherited smooth artistry of existence, so piquantly contrasted to his own crude and wild essence somehow draws him towards Nataraj. As he destroys the fascinating and beautiful tiger to recreate it with a challenge to defy and outdo nature, a similar sense of power and control leads him to deride Nataraj and all those subtleties that Nataraj stands for.

In fact, the whole novel deals with Vasu overriding the genteel Nataraj and exploiting his generosity. He uses Nataraj’s press to print his visiting cards and deliberately forgets to pay the bill. He simply barges into Nataraj’s attic and occupies it. He has no concern for Nataraj’s feelings and starts leading a licentious life with all sorts of ill-reputed women, taking them up freely to his attic. Totally ungrateful, he even files a case against Nataraj, causing him great anxiety. He is so ill mannered and aggressive that he snatches away Nataraj’s ledger, collects money from the people of Malgudi in the poet’s name and squanders it.
Vasu is a rogue, but not a lovable one, because he is not like others who simulate a partial belongingness by their spontaneous warmth of response to society. Vasu is a veritable outsider to society, for he has eliminated from his nature any feeling of community. He is a rogue on the verge of a criminal. However, he is redeemed by certain Faustian characteristics. It is his Faustus-like craving for power over man and nature and the artist’s soul in him questing for perfection and beauty that save him from ultimate degeneration. As a participant in the history, Vasu’s shameless and egotistical demeanour legitimizes the common characteristics of a certain class at a particular time of man’s socio-economic development. His behaviour in the novel accommodates perfectly all the traits of the rising bourgeois as defined by Marx and Engels in The Communist Manifesto (1848): “The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors’, and has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment’. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasms, of philistine sentimentalism, in the
icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, he set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.” (Marx, 1926: 31-53)

The rogue as the hero in Narayan’s novels has to commute between two worlds – the enclosed world of his family where the aroma of tradition stubbornly lingers in every nook and corner, and the outer world in the form of the market and the public square, where each and every aspect of the inherited and traditional credences are constantly interrogated. All that is carefully preserved, fusssed over, cherished with pride, and burdens the hero as the sacred responsibility of inheritance lose much of their sanctity when the hero comes out of his closeted home and family to face the world. It is this outer world that attracts the hero, that lures him like a candle attracting the moth. These encounters with the outer world continue to create and recreate the hero, who is as ever changing as Proteus. Self-love, paradoxically, binds them to the rest of mankind; it makes them extrovert and communicative, as it is
with the help of others that they discover themselves. These characters are invariably dexterous and talented and instinctively know that the outer world holds more possibilities of freedom and opportunity for the realization of their ingenuity. In the ambience of the public square or market place where human community is open to 'otherness' there is always the chance of meeting aliens who ignite their imaginations and change them.

It has already been shown how strangers influence the roguish characters and not their family members. But this is not to say that the hero is apathetic towards his family. On the contrary, these unusual characters, except Vasu, are strongly attached to their families. Narayan gives us only a glimpse of Sampath with his wife and children, but that is enough to prove his affection for them. Though he entangles himself unscrupulously with Shanti and is ultimately deserted by all, there is not a single word to prove that his affection for his family ever died out. His negligence of them is momentary, for he believes that one day he will be able to bring all of them together in a happy family reunion. In the cases of Raju and Raman, it is their unconventional choices of brides that separate them from their beloved elders – Raju from his mother and
Raman from his aunt. These separations are not smooth and cause them much sorrow. When Margayya daydreams, it is the image of his son around whom he weaves all his future hopes and aspirations. His lust for money, surprisingly, is not for the promotion of personal comfort. While he tries to give his son good education, and asks his wife to buy sarees and jewelleries, he does nothing to uplift his personal life-style or to better his external appearance. His money-minting tendencies are self-denying and self-destructive, for he ruins his health in the process. In fact, the weakest spot in the lives of both Margayya and Jagan are their sons. Though they are themselves semi-educated, they dream of sending their sons for higher education that would uplift their social status. Both of them dream of seeing their sons at par with the aristocrats. Thus attractions of the outer world and rebounding ties of family was to make these characters turn ambivalent. They are at once grotesque and tragic. Their clumsy attempts in taking recourse to their wits in order to deal with every situation, their funny unconventional views of life against which the ‘normal’ seems hollow and pretentious, and bloated self-confidence causing them their ‘great fall’ arouse a mixed feeling of amusement and sympathy. They are middle-class but
they are not ordinary, for they are participants in the carnival, which
gives them a special value. They are there to subvert all givenness that
is considered normal by the official world. Being rebels by nature, they
are keen on frustrating the family expectations with regard to everything
– starting from education to their profession. In spite of being endowed
with extraordinary intelligence, all of them except Vasu fare as average
in their formal education. They are eternal dreamers, unable to find any
compatibility between their aspirations and realities. Their dreaming
does not turn them into visionaries or poets; they lack the depth for
insight or the aptitude to grasp the greater realities of life that could
equip them with the power of foresight. They are shortsighted beings
who are prone to committing blunders. Mr. Sampath’s uncritical pursuit
of the capitalist impulse of filmmaking in a self-righteous manner turns
his situation unpredictable and unredeemable. Too much confidence in
his ingenuity and lack of foresight brings the fall of Raju. His
shallowness forestalls his understanding of the emotional depths and
intricacies of human nature. While his practical intelligence helps him
to create a star out of Rosie, he is completely blind to her emotional
needs. His lack of understanding makes her tired of him. His forgery is
also another example of his lack of foresight as well as his over confidence that makes him careless. All these finally launch him in jail and he loses Rosie forever. The intelligence of Margayya and Jagan work on the felt surfaces of life. Their business acumen cannot be challenged and their dealings with people in this field are impeccable. Both of them are mistrusting and always count the money in the cash-box in utter privacy. They are quick-witted, skilled in the art of repartee or persuasion, they can intelligently manipulate ideas to suit themselves and can take advantage of any opportunity they happen to stumble upon. They love their sons, yet they lack the depth or insight to realize the gap in their emotional relations, which turns the fathers and sons veritable strangers to each other. They are bewildered by the behaviours of their sons. The total unpredictability of their relations make the fathers stand in awe of their sons. They are turned into pathetic creatures when they mistakenly try to buy their sons’ affections with money.

In fact, it is the downright materiality of their nature that makes them what they are. The transformation of Raju to ‘Railway Raju’ has the potentiality to grow into a story of self-realization. It could well have been the story of an ordinary person suddenly awakening to his
own hidden talent for rhetoric, like the life of Noti Binodini – the socially downtrodden woman taking the theatre-world by storm by the realization of her own hidden talent for histrionic performance. There are several lines scattered here and there in the novel indicating the sense of wonder in the discovery of lurking potentiality. While teaching the children of the rustics Raju “was hypnotized by his own voice; he felt himself growing in stature as he saw the upturned faces of the children shining in the half-light when he spoke. No one was more impressed with the grandeur of the whole thing than Raju himself.” (Narayan, 1958: 42) A little reflection on this matter tells him that it was a tendency in him from the beginning because throughout his life his mind had been open to all sorts of information, either through scraps of papers, reading materials or through the small-talk with strangers he enjoyed so much: “It seems to me that we generally do not have a correct measure of our own wisdom.” (Narayan, 1958: 42) This very knack lures him out of his shop for he enjoyed talking nonsense with tourists, bemused by his own power of words. This skill reaches its height of perfection when Raju is forced to act as a Swami. When he spoke to the people: “He was surprised at the amount of wisdom welling
from the depths of his being.” (Narayan, 1958: 41) His words work wonders that surpass his expectations and soon the whole situation goes beyond his own control. Raju’s own power, which he exerted on the people, now haunts him and he starts fearing its potentiality – “He was afraid to open his lips.” (Narayan, 1958: 27) But Narayan, who will never let his creation walk on the abstract airy field of philosophical investigation or pursuit, instead of letting the story dwell or focus on the mystery of the innate powers of the human mind, weighs it down with an undercurrent of more palpable and materialistic drive. All of Raju’s flair for verbal articulation boils down to the urge to earn money and more money, and to be raised from his dull humdrum life, along with Rosie, to the breathtaking world of glamour. In fact, the thirst for glamour is the key to the understanding of Raju’s inspirations and aspirations. It may be noticed that from the beginning Raju has been an extrovert character who flourishes when at the centre of people’s attention. He has been a loquacious tourist-guide, a smooth-tongued lover, and successfully simulates an enlightened teacher in the jail and in the role of a Swami. Glamour means the charisma of personality that would enchant and hypnotize the public. Raju uses this tool of his to
hoodwink the public for his own materialistic ends, his pursuit of sensual love, power and prosperity. In the jail he uses it to befriend the hard-bitten convicts and to impress the jailor in order to win certain facilities. It is his strong survival instinct – even within the restricted boundaries and minimum resources of the jail he creates for himself a smooth social life and a sort of luxurious living: “I got my food, I had my social life with the other inmates and the staff, I moved about freely within an area of fifty acres.” (Narayan, 1958: 204) When in the role of a Swami, he uses his charisma to hoodwink the susceptible crowd. Raju is not driven by any divine inspiration; he is a conscious actor with a purpose of mesmerizing the credulous and gullible: “Ever since the moment this man had come and sat before him, gazing on his face, he had experienced a feeling of importance. He felt like an actor, who was always expected to utter the right sentence.” (Narayan, 1958: 14) He is clever and calculated in his move: “The essence of sainthood seemed to lie in one’s ability to utter mystifying statements.” (Narayan, 1958: 46) Raju enjoys his own power of control with great rhetorical dexterity as he drags the innocent men: “deeper and deeper into the bog of unclear thought.” (Narayan, 1958: 46) Raju achieves his sainthood and enjoys
the power of glamour, but it is not an end in itself. The purpose behind his histrionics is more materialistic and down-to-earth. Narayan will never mislead his readers to think that a saint survives on abstract wisdom and there is no need to bring the thought of food in fear of spoiling the saintly image. In Narayan's world, the most important point to be taken into account is the inability of the characters to transcend and overcome their material bodily drives. Narayan negotiates with a truth that lurks in the grotesque sphere of the world. The essential principle of this grotesque form of realism is degradation, lowering of all that is ideal and spiritual. As against the upward movement of the official value system, grotesque realism moves downwards, respecting earth's gravity. By way of degradation the grotesque world brings all its subjects down to earth, materializes them and turns them into flesh. Throughout his career of sainthood, Raju is paradoxically haunted by the thought of food. "He anticipated their arrival with a certain excitement. He composed his features and pose to receive them. The sun was setting. Its tint touched the wall with pink. The tops of the coconut trees around were aflame. The bird cries went by in a crescendo before dying down for the night. Darkness fell. Still there was no sign of
Velan or anyone. They did not come that night. He was left foodless; that was not the main worry, he still had a few bananas over. Suppose they never came again? What was to happen? He became panicky. All night he lay worrying. All his old fears returned.” (Narayan, 1958: 31) What are Raju’s fears? It is the rogue’s fear that the shortcut way of earning food by beguiling others being forestalled and returning to the more dull and routine path of the ordinary people where nothing can be achieved without a serious struggle: “If he returned to the town he would have to get his house back from the man to whom he had mortgaged it. He would have to fight for a living space in his own home or find the cash to redeem it.” (Narayan, 1958: 31) As R.B. Heilman has rightly described, for a rogue the world is a theatre and not a school. The fear of starving to death haunts him, but instead of taking recourse to some normal ways to earn his living he prefers to gamble – he offers his last piece of banana as a bribe to a shepherd boy and sends him to call Velan.

However, constant role-playing sometimes makes Raju tired. One day he hides behind a hibiscus bush until the visitors leave. But Raju does not forget to look for his food: “He waited till they vanished
altogether from sight. He went in and lit a lamp. He was hungry. They had left his food wrapped in a banana leaf on the pedestal of the old stone image. Raju was filled with gratitude and prayed that Velan might never come to the stage of thinking that he was too good for food and that he subsisted on atoms from the air.” (Narayan, 1958: 30)

Narayan’s characters are not created in the scheme of epic-values where the chaos of bodily life is churned and united towards certain static official values and norms that one considered immutable. If Narayan had followed it, he would have helped Raju to transcend his trivial material drives to achieve the sense of stability and peace in some moral or spiritual revelation. Raju’s story could have become like the story of Ratnakar the social offender, who, after a divine revelation turns into ‘Rishi Valmiki’ with all the appropriate penance and repentance to legitimize the sainthood. But Raju’s mind is blissfully innocent of any dark repentance or the suffering of conscience. His sainthood is accidental, a result of Velan’s misunderstanding. Fasting too is enforced on him by a misrepresentation of his words and Raju has to give up his food-thoughts because he loses all privacy and has no chance to look for food anymore. “He felt enraged at the persistence of food-thoughts.
With a sort of vindictive resolution he tells himself, 'I’ll chase away all thought of food. For the next ten days, I shall eradicate all thoughts of tongue and stomach from my mind'.” (Narayan, 1958: 213) Paradoxically, desperation brings an enforced peace and calm and like a true saint he finds himself uttering: “If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?” (Narayan, 1958: 213) These are unresolved ambiguities; a desperate need to beguile the public to save his self-created image blur into an intensely qualitative moment for himself. Words are strange things. Raju’s own words often mesmerize him into honest and sincere feelings: “For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested.” (Narayan, 1958: 213)

Raju is no saint or magician. His helpless resignation when he has his back to the wall is pathetically human. Burdening him with a sainthood would rob Raju of his true beauty. Even when at the end he utters: “Velan, it’s raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs”, (Narayan, 1958: 221) it sounds more like the coldness
of death creating hallucination to the semi-conscious brain of the dying Raju than a conscious and confident forecast of a saint. The pathetic beauty of Raju's ordinariness is more true because the memory of him stealing the last bit of stale food to appease his hunger still lingers in the reader's memory. "In the inner sanctum, he briskly thrust his hand into a niche and pulled out his aluminium pot. He sat down behind the pedestal, swallowed his food in three or four large mouthfuls making as little noise as possible. It was stale rice, dry and stiff and two days old; it tasted awful, but it appeased his hunger. He washed it down with water. He went to the backyard and rinsed his mouth noiselessly - he didn't want to smell of food when he went back to the mat." (Narayan, 1958:211)

It is truly impossible for a saint with his necessary philosophic detachment to invoke a scene of such moving poignance; only a man who is innately earthly in all his encounters with life may come out to be as ambivalent and unredeemable as Raju.

The characters in Narayan's novels are not conscious of their strengths and weaknesses. Even the author seems unpredisposed and unprepared. Only the daily accidental encounters with the life surround
them bring out their flairs and foibles. Raju’s life has been a series of accidents that never cease to surprise him as well as the readers. The Railway Raju is a loquacious guide, but there has been no indication of the lascivious and calculating lover that he later turns out to be when he meets Rosie. Again, when on the height of prosperity, he displays the pomp, prodigality and damn-care attitude unimaginable in the Raju who once inspired and supported Rosie, even at the cost of his own mother. And immediately after this display of haughtiness, Raju does not experience any discomfort in his jail-life, and the servility that he adopts to please the jailor is a far cry from the Swami who demonstrates nothing but dignity, wisdom and self-effacement.

In the case of the sweet vendor Jagan, the most throbbing and weakest sides of his nature are buried under the burden of his Gandhian philosophy and his daily rituals of life so carefully and proudly undertaken to give his life a well-defined pattern. Jagan’s character is neatly laid out to the reader with apparently no paradox to imply a double-decked existence of meaning. Jagan leads a neat and disciplined life. His Gandhism is no pretension like Sriram’s; his charkha and non-violence are not stained with hypocrisy, though certain human touches
are there, like compromising his own industrious attempt to tan the dead cow’s leather to make his own shoes. The pollution it created and the revolt of his family enforces him to give it up and depend on a cobbler’s words of trust: “Afterwards he just trusted the cobbler at the Albert Mission to supply his rather complicated footwear.” (Narayan 1967: 10) Jagan believes in naturopathy and submits his own body to the benevolence of fresh vegetables in his diet and to the medical potentialities of herbs and leaves, specially the margosa. Jagan has great faith in the potency of margosa for he believes that it is the ambrosia that kept the Gods alive. The stark simplicity of his diet of a little stone-ground wheat cooked with honey and greens is not an excuse for miserliness like the landlord in Mr. Sampath who is too eager to consume the delicacies that he gets free. Sitting all day long surrounded by the mouth-watering aroma of sweetmeats fried in pure ghee has no effect on him; rather, he is a bit philosophical, believing that all sweetmeats are after all the same. Jagan’s obsession for purity stands him apart from other businessmen. While others cheat their customers by using vegetable oil, Jagan tries his best to procure the pure and aromatic ghee made from cow’s milk: “I had sent one of the cooks to
collect cow’s butter from Koppal, he came back at five in the morning and I came straight in before eight in order to melt it right. A fortune had been spent on it, and I didn’t want to risk over boiling it.” (Narayan, 1967: 90)

His honesty in this matter earns him the confidence of his customers and he thrives well as a businessman. Being an astute Gandhian he is sincerely keen on neatly fitting his life in the uncomplicated philosophy of the Mahatma – the philosophy of simple living and high thinking. He gets up at five in the morning and brushes his teeth with a margosa twig. He spins everyday for an hour and wears a simple loose jibha over his dhoti made from the crude materials spun with his own hands. He lives in a simple house and foregoes any renovation to equip it with modern facilities: “Everything in this house had the sanctity of usage, which was the reason why no improvement was possible.” (Narayan, 1967: 19) He reads the Gita regularly and his mind often wanders in the luxurious habit of philosophizing: “He stood for a moment gazing at the stars, entranced at the spectacle of the firmament. ‘One still wonders,’ he told himself, ‘but the problem remains. Who lives in those? We are probably glimpsing the real
Heaven and don’t know it. Probably all our ancient sages are looking down at us. What are those constellations?’ He couldn’t be clear about them. His astronomy was limited to the location of the Polestar from Orion’s Belt or Sword or some such point, for which knowledge he had been awarded a second-class badge many years ago when he was a Boy Scout. For all the million stellar bodies sparkling, as far as Jagan was concerned, they might not be more than the two he had been taught to identify. In addition to Orion and the Polestar he often noticed an extraordinary lively firework in the sky, which sometimes stood poised over the earth in the westerly direction. He called it sometimes Venus, sometimes Jupiter, never being sure, but admiring it unreservedly and feeling proud that he was also a part of the same creation.” (Narayan, 1967: 18) Jagan loves to contemplate – either on some abstract philosophy that often visits the simplest of minds as a vague and beautiful mist, or to walk down memory lane to his childhood or youthful days, when his home was too crowded to offer any privacy to its inmates. Here, he is slightly different from Margayya. Margayya considers such activities as useless and consciously subverts this tendency whenever they threaten to overwhelm him. He too, possesses
an imaginative mind, and even the smooth surface of his wooden desk sends him day-dreaming: "Margayya loved to gaze on its smooth, rippled grains – remnants of gorgeous designs that it had acquired as a tree trunk – hieroglyphics containing the history of the tree. Whenever he gazed on it, he felt as if he were looking at a sea and a sky in some dream world. ‘But what is the use of gazing on these and day-dreaming?’ he tells himself, sharply pulling his mind back." (Narayan, 1952: 149)

These characters are surprising combinations of ambiguous traits that turn them into beings with a double-consciousness. Margayya is enchanted by the vision of blue mountains, forest, and green fields, but unlike the poet he sees them as the potential source of wealth. Because of his worldly shallowness he refuses to consider anything abstract as having any value. For him, money is the only "reality which he could touch and calculate and increase." (Narayan, 1952: 150) Jagan too is trapped within his limited vision. He has ample control over his own life-style, for here his activities speak for him, which is a far more simple way of expressing oneself than in words. Words are abstractions and these characters are at a loss when facing questions that are not
tangible or concrete. Though the saint-like rigour and self-control in his daily life often inspires him to utter certain philosophic banalities, Jagan is unable to explain them when questioned. In fact, Narayan opens the novel by warning his readers directly not to take Jagan as a person of great spiritual wisdom. In spite of his sincere Gandhism: “‘Conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self,’ said Jagan to his listener, who asked, ‘Why conquer the self?’ Jagan said, ‘I do not know, but all our sages advise us so’.”(Narayan, 1967: 7) Jagan is the mediocre person who is all admiration for the great sages, and in his attempt to supersede his mediocrity by following the uncomprehended foggy path of their philosophical utterances he muddles his life, turning it grotesque.

Jagan is unaware that the most throbbing and sensitive point in his life is money. This becomes apparent in his funny and self-deceptive activities like stealing his own money to avoid tax payment: “This cash was in an independent category; he viewed it as free cash, whatever that might mean, a sort of immaculate conception, self-generated, arising out of itself and entitled to survive without reference to any tax.” (Narayan, 1967: 14) On this subject, he is free of any prick of conscience since
the Mahatma has not set any dictat on this matter. Jagan, we find, is very much secretive on the subject of his daily earnings and does not trust even his son. He keeps his savings hidden in the loft. He counts his daily income only when his staff has left. He keeps his drawer padded with a folded towel in order to muffle the sound of coins being emptied from the bronze jug. It is money that creates a gaping void between the father and the son. While for Jagan, earning money is the only means of his wish fulfillment, Mali takes the affluence for granted. Economic opulence gives Mali the confidence and boldness to defy his father and even society. He gives up his studies, steals his father’s money to fly to America, returns with a girl of foreign birth whom he introduces as his wife. He continues to blackmail his father emotionally with a purpose to fleece a huge amount of money from him in the name of a strange project of manufacturing stories. Jagan ultimately realizes the evil effect of money when he discovers that Mali’s marriage is fake and finds him leading an immoral life in the company for some other spoilt children of the rich society of Malgudi.

Now, how would one expect Jagan to handle the murky situation? Jagan and the likes of him have a narrow focus of life. This implies that
only certain faculties in their nature function, like a quick wit, a power
to handle only the practical and material aspects of life, etc. Their
natures lack the various emotional traits that usually bring depth of
perception and the power to grasp the enormities and densities of human
life, a power to realize the psychological complexities which work to
transform the most beloved person into a veritable stranger. These
characters, thus, never develop or show signs of growth. They remain
confused and muddle-headed, groping to solve the confusion of their
situation and failing squarely. They became unpredictable and
unfinished beings full of loopholes. They lack the integrated givenness
of their personality while moving beyond the dialectical closures. Thus
their reactions to difficult situations are very unexpected and often on
the verge of dangerous adventurism. When Sampath faces the
breakdown of his press, he immediately switches to the more
adventurous project of filmmaking. Raju’s whole life has been a series
of misadventures. Dr. Rann of The Talkative Man (1983) as a youth
faces the bitterness and feud that turn his love life sour. His sensitive
and young mind cannot overcome the shock of his beloved’s sworn
statement against him in the court. His reaction is peculiar and
desperate. Instead of suffering the normal period of depression and gradually recovering to outgrow it, as is the way of normal people, he suddenly disappears from his wife’s life. When he leaves her, he is an unredeemable misogynist. Wandering through countries, he entraps pretty women, lives a conjugal life for a brief period and abandons them right and left. He is erratic and elusive in his ways and the police or the girls have a hard time to pursue this global philanderer. According to his wife, “he had unsuspected depths of duplicity.” (Narayan, 1967: 118) The myopic perception of the rogue conceives life as a muddled continuum and he tries to manage it with wit and cunning. With his/her impulse to shun the persuasion of the long and exacting unity in life the rogue prefers, according to R.B. Heilman, to live by breaks and shifts, dividing his life in small episodes which is manageable by wit and does not need the foresight of the more subtle mind.

Jagan’s life is no exception. His joining Gandhi’s Satyagraha is an attempt on his part to give a certain meaning to his life. Most of his life has been passed under the discomforting impression of himself as an imbecile. In spite of the innocent revelry of childhood, Jagan’s fate had allotted him a secondary role of acting as a shadow of his elder
brother, who, by virtue of his age and the confidence of a 'born diplomat' dictated him. While hunting grasshoppers, Jagan is on no account permitted to catch one himself. Instead, "He could only stand behind his brother and wait for his luck, with his own little tin in hand." (Narayan, 1967: 141) The mildness of his nature beside his more dashing siblings could command neither love nor any respect. On reflection Jagan realizes that they never had liked him. After his marriage his happiness is marred by the family pressure for a child, the twisted remarks on his wife's barrenness and his own sense of ineptitude: "Despite all his bragging there was no outside proof of his manhood." (Narayan, 1967: 164) Jagan's desperate adventurism is surely an unconscious reaction to all the pent up feelings of inadequacy. "He remembered how as a volunteer over twenty years ago he had rushed into the British Collector's bungalow and climbed the roof in order to bring down the Union Jack and plant the Indian flag in its place. Helmeted police were standing guard in the compound but the speed of his action completely took them by surprise and they had to clamber after him to the roof, but not before he had seized the Union Jack in a crocodile grip and hugged the flag post while attempting to
plant his own flag. They had to beat him and crack open his skull in order to make him let go his hold.” (Narayan, 1967: 132) It is almost a death wish, an answer for Jagan’s feeling of ineptitude, as if the very deadly step could provide his life with some dignity. Later on, the emotional domination of Mali over his life disturbs the tranquility he wishes to gain in his simple mode of living. It all begins when, on the day his wife dies, he loses his nerve and catching hold of Mali’s hands he wails like a woman. Mali’s reaction is far from sympathetic: “Mali had shaken himself off and watched his father from a distance with a look of dismay and puzzlement.” (Narayan, 1967: 37) Jagan’s feminine vulnerability, his eagerness to mother the motherless boy distances Mali further away from him. Jagan is not mentally equipped to find its root, and his son’s behaviour never ceases to puzzle him: “Secretly his mind was bothered as to why there was always an invisible barrier between them. He had never been harsh to the boy; so long as he could remember, he had always got him whatever he wanted these twenty-odd years; during the last ten particularly he had become excessively considerate, after the boy lost his mother.” (Narayan, 1967: 36) All attempts of Jagan to take care of his son and his motherly personal
touches are met with indifference and cynicism: “I do not want you to cook for me hereafter. We have our college canteen. I can look after myself.” (Narayan, 1967: 24) Jagan mistakenly tries to earn his son’s love with his hardly earned money and this proves disastrous. His son continues to ignore him and instead starts hunting him for money. Again, Jagan’s reaction is quick and surprising; he disturbs the steady profit of his sweetshop by cheapening the price. This is another desperate adventurism that surprises everybody. It is a sort of death instinct that visits him, an impulse for self-destruction and degradation when he faces a situation that he is too ordinary to grasp and comprehend. While facing the problem of his son he tries to find an individual order of feeling that would give him some clue. He is incompetent to dwell on abstraction and has no other way but to go back to the solid evidences of the past that had already happened. His own life stands as a shocking contrast to Mali’s. The gap with his son does not open him to the complexities of modern life, nor does it make him realize the inevitability of a generation gap that has characterized the modern era. Being glued to his own prejudices he takes over a very ordinary pattern of feeling in his bewilderment and incomprehension:
His uncharacteristic peep into his inner self leads to a foamy sentimentalism. He finds money as the root of all problems and decides to distribute his sweets in half price. But his charity brings unusual complications, as it affects other businessmen who come to threaten him. It is true that he gets a chance to palliate his conscience by allowing the children to indulge in sweets, whose wistful, longing looks had haunted him everyday. But the hypertrophy of practical intelligence has never allowed a full emotional development in his character. So in spite of having potentialities of greatness, characters like Jagan can never turn into a saint, for his mind is submerged in materiality. Jagan’s outburst of charity is short-lived and he soon resumes his usual course in business. However, Mali’s problem continues to persist and his home turns into a hell for Jagan. A chance meeting with a stranger gives him the break; he immediately leaves his home for a different life.

It is quite noticeable how, when faced with a crisis Jagan wastes no time in shifting his path to a different direction. He has no qualms in reducing the price of his sweets and suffering loss, or leaving his son Mali to taste his ‘dose of prison life’. (Narayan, 1967: 184) Jagan and the likes of him are beings who never grow but manage their life in
breaks and shifts. Their shallowness forestalls the prolonged process of maturing. Jagan’s ‘banaprastha’ is not the final ripening of growth; in fact it is far from voluntary. Like Raju’s sainthood it is an act of desperation. When the bearded sculptor tells him that at one stage of life one should retreat to ‘banaprastha’, Jagan cannot but agree: “Jagan felt so heartily in agreement that he wanted to explain why he needed an escape – his wife’s death, son’s growth and strange later development, and how his ancient home behind the Lawley Statue was beginning to resemble hell on earth – but he held his tongue.” (Narayan, 1967: 120)

If Mali had shown the slightest respect for his father’s sentiments, Jagan could hardly have estranged himself from the home he loved so much. Like Raju’s death, Jagan’s segregation is also a forced one. A normal ‘banaprastha’ is undertaken with a matured understanding and hence renunciation of life, but in Jagan’s case it is a stark reality like death: “He’d breathe, watch, and occasionally keep in touch, but the withdrawal would not be different from death.” (Narayan, 1967: 177)

Like all his previous adventurism that he pursued in the name of some idealism, he escapes, from the hell of his home in the name of installing the Goddess Gayatri. Some critics have made much of this
hint of an ideal. Som P. Sharma writes: “R.K. Narayan’s novel *The Vendor of Sweets* is a quest novel in which the protagonist Jagan, now nearing his sixties, is searching for the feminine. Beginning as a lean ascetic when the novel opens his quest culminates with the prospect of having a new orientation to the archetype of the feminine concretized as the Indian goddess Gayatri Devi.” (Ram, 1981: 160) This depicts Jagan following a linear quest in life and in such a project a character cannot be ambivalent. But a closer look at the text will show how Jagan is eternally caught up in his ambivalences – the Gandhian ascetic piling up lakhs of money in his loft and dreaming of his son wearing striped shirts and riding bicycles to vie with the aristocrats. Jagan’s aspiration for the feminine is unquestionable for he is found regretting the absence of his mother or his wife who had made his home so bright and happy. This felt vacuum instigates him to accept Grace and wait anxiously to hear her footsteps. But the creation of the Goddess is not the culmination of Jagan’s life-long quest. Jagan is not a uni-dimensional character but in him is perceived the confusion of different pulls. In fact, when the sculptor asks him to buy the land and help him to install the Goddess, Jagan is resistant. But when the sculptor hints about a possible retreat
for Jagan, his disturbed mind immediately sees a way of escaping from
the galling chains of paternal love. He sees the sculptor as his saviour:
“The man had said that he needed help for installing the image of the
Goddess, while he himself thought that he was being helped.”
(Narayan, 1967: 122) It is true that the sculptor’s powerful imagination
of the Goddess’ beauty mesmerizes him, but it does not turn into an
inspiration for him. Instead, his practical mind starts weighing the pros
and cons of the project: “the man had really communicated a thrilling
vision when he described the Goddess with five heads. Should he help
him or not to complete his task? He knew nothing about him. How
could he trust him? On what basis? After he finished the image, what
then? …” (Narayan, 1967: 122) Jagan tries for the last time to stay back
and cleanse his home of any taint that was made by Mali and Grace. He
tries to persuade Mali to marry Grace, but fails. It is only when he loses
his last straw that Jagan decides to follow the sculptor’s advice. The
final chapter, it may be noted, is filled with all sorts of practical
settlements and mental preparation on the part of Jagan, and nowhere in
the confused corners of Jagan’s mind do we perceive the illuminating
presence of the Goddess. Like Raju’s death, Jagan’s renunciation too is
situational. Raju, while playing the role of a saint to earn his food is trapped in his own role-playing. When hungry, he could not convince the stupid and fanatic villagers that he was not a Swami. Thus he could not break his fast and resolves to die. Jagan too is entrapped in an irreconcilable situation. His love for his son is not reciprocated and the lack of any satisfaction continues to keep him thirsting for it, even at the cost of his own dignity. Jagan’s renunciation is stark and inevitable for him thought it comes as a surprise to others.

Though Jagan should not be viewed in the light of any ideal, he is a lovable character. He is not equipped to show much greatness but he has a sense of ultimate values. When a schoolgirl stands longingly in front of the display of sweets in his shop, Jagan is torn between his conscience and his business instinct. He is warm by nature and immediately accepts Grace, as the angel of his lonely existence. He is able to rise beyond his prejudices to perceive her goodness. He is a conscientious person and acknowledges his obligation to her. He asks his cousin on the last moment of his departure to tell Grace “that if she ever wants to go back to her country, I will buy her a ticket. It’s a duty we owe her. She was a good girl.” (Narayan, 1967: 185)
The prominence of Jagan's vivid and excruciating consciousness misleads us to analyse Jagan's story as a spiritual quest, for we as readers are trained to appreciate only the higher aspect of human life that we expect a literary text to project. As social beings, we are institutionalized and tend to appreciate literature as the medium of expressing the higher values created by the official world. But the novel is a unique genre having an inherent ability to dialogize anything abstracted as higher value or sacred. So it needs a different orientation of mind to perceive how the apparent psychologisation of Jagan is dialogized by an ineffaceable materiality. It is his innate habit to embrace with a solid faith all that is material – the daily exchanges with other human beings, the solid equipments that help us to run our life on easier wheels – like a room with sufficient light, a bathroom, a floor of cool clay that makes the hot days tolerable, a writing-desk cherished by all, a backdoor that helps a convenient escape if the house turns into a hell. And over all these is an imperishable dependence on the security of money. In the entire tantrum created by Jagan's psychologisation we as readers tend to forget a solid fact – when Jagan leaves for his
'hanaprastha', his eyes brimming with tears and his heart anxious for his son in jail, Jagan is careful to take his passbook with him!

Narayan's grotesque characters are permeated with ambivalence for they are dominated by the carnal. As the earth is both the grave and the womb, carnality entails the ambivalent existence of heaven and hell, creation and destruction, a warmth for life and at the same time an inclination towards death. These characters, like Icarus dare to fly but are eternal victims of earth's gravitation. Raju is neither a hero nor a villain, but both the characteristics of the hero and villain are the ambivalent reality in Raju's nature. His love for Rosie drives him to leave his dear mother but at the same time he uses Rosie's talent to mint money. It is difficult to thrust a final comment on the characters. How would one define, for example, the financial expert? Margayya is a financial wizard and piles up money with feverish zeal. To achieve his success, he religiously undertakes the rituals to please goddess Laxshmi for forty days. Yet, on the other hand, he does not hesitate to take all advantages of the war situation to suit his purpose. He does not hesitate to publish 'Domestic Harmony', yet when his son turns lecherous he is full of concern and anxiety for his daughter-in-law.
Narayan’s heroes are not made to wear a halo or stand out as extraordinary. They are flawed beings and their weaknesses are not like the tragic flaw, which glorifies the doom of a tragic hero. They are ordinary people who commit blunders or cannot resist their carnal attractions. Though they love to thrive amongst the crowd, in a way they are lonely creatures because they are the ‘others’. The implication is that these characters who depend on society for their existence and some of whom are social parasites are rudderless floaters. While the ordinary people restrict their lives to a certain pattern of existence following the social norms with a sense of purpose, the floaters may launch themselves anywhere, irrespective of time and space constraints. For this very reason they can best expose the social life denuded of its artificial pattern. These are heroes in a reversed or inverted sense: instead of upholding certain humanitarian values, some noble causes or philanthropic sentiments they remind us that there is always a hidden underbelly, that though the moon may look like a flat silver plate it is actually round and there is a darker side of it hidden from our view. While heroes of serious monologic writings achieve certain identities of invariant structures to be used as parameters against which we justify
their actions, their identities are metamorphic or series dependent. While heroes of monologic novels depend on time and memory to ripen and culminate, these characters have no sense of memory; hence their path is ridden with the repeated history of blunders.

The question normally arises as to how a blundering, law-breaking, flippant trickster can achieve the amount of sympathy and admiration to claim a hero’s status in a novel. Though a loner in his psychological orientation, he is certainly not a creature of necessity. Rather, society often becomes a victim of his thoughtless pranks or even deliberate selfish schemes. But quite paradoxically, these characters are charismatic, warm, responsive and often show flickers of very lovable qualities. Their actions are often undecipherable, ambivalent; a subtle mix of some noble intension caught within the limited premises of a selfish project. Mr. Sampath’s self-appointed guardianship of Srinivas is good-natured and the inclusion of Srinivas in the film-making project is an extension of this good-will and responsibility. Yet, at the same time Sampath makes use of Srinivas’ penmanship and shrewdly coaxes out of him a good script for the film. Thus, ambivalence turns these characters into interesting studies of human nature.
It is also true that had the author, by his technique evoked pathos around the victims of these erring heroes, the rogue character would have found it difficult to secure the hero’s status. But Narayan as a writer is impartial and somewhat stoical, and he projects the victims as equally imperfect beings. The method is, as Heilman puts it: “giving no place, or atleast no prominence, to other characters who, by being larger or nobler people and thus having a stronger claim on our ‘right feelings’, might usurp the sympathy due the picaro.” (Heilman, 1968: 104) Even the good people in Narayan’s novels possess certain disagreeable personal traits, while the rogue seems more just in claiming our sympathy. We find that before Sampath’s exuberance Srinivas is too philosophical; before Raman, Daisy is too sterile, and before Vasu the good Nataraj is too effete. In fact, it would have been hard for Narayan to procure for the ‘rakshasa’ Vasu the legality of a person of wisdom in the novel, had he wanted to crowd his works with flawless characters. But when the novel ends with Vasu’s mysterious death we perceive how characters who had previously enjoyed a camaraderie fall out from each other’s company as they are all infected by the virus of a secret suspicion. These characters begin to mistrust
each other and behind each other's back they point at their friends as murderers. It is interesting how Sen's high-sounding rhetoric against Nehru or the poet's emotional rendering of love and beauty boil down to such petty gossip mongering. Instantly are forgotten Nataraj's altruistic deeds, his enthusiasm to publish the poet's work with aplomb or to save the temple elephant – at first from sickness and then from the bloody claws of Vasu. At the end when he stands alone, abandoned by all, how right, we feel were the deriding words of the sniggering Vasu regarding Nataraja's friends, though at the time of congenial friendship his words had sounded mean. Vasu outshines the good Nataraj because beside his zealous and active pursuit of his art or his cool professionalism, the lazy and passive world of Nataraj and his circle seems meaningless and hollow. Beside the tyranny and open enmity of Vasu, the chameleon like friends of Nataraj looks sick and languid. Narayan's rendering of his heroes is made in the spirit of the carnival in literature. He never lets them grow above the human, neither as supermen, nor as demons. Though throughout the novel Vasu inflicts terror in everybody's heart and achieves the stature of a 'rakshasa', the whole image crumbles down like the sandcastle when it is found how a puny unsuspecting
mosquito was the cause of his fall. Narayan, in a single pull brings him
down to the level of the human, and around him the pathos is created
that is always due to the fallible human race.

Narayan’s impartiality and motiveless presentation of characters
is obvious, for he never imparts any special treatment to the female
characters in order to highlight the cause of feminism. Though many of
his female characters like Savitri, Rosie or Daisy pursue their soul’s
aspiration or yearning for dignity and a distinct identity in society, these
characters undergo the expected trials for walking against the tide,
Narayan never tries to secure for them the reader’s sympathy. In a way
they are victims, however, they do not stand out as flawless on this
count, Rosie is the finest of Narayan’s creations as her naïve beauty, her
feminine vulnerability is subtly and imperceptively diluted with an
obstinate spirit selfishly making way towards a goal. Rosie is a natural
artist, but her feelings and thoughts are not elaborately dwelt upon by
the author. This makes her seem more automatic and less human. Even
Raju does not have access to the working of her soul. Her differences
with her husband are known by her sulky moods. Her attempts to love
her husband are not strong enough and her married life is a failure.
Raju, instinctively finds her weakness and praises her dance. He gives her much attention, and everything that her husband failed to provide, and she is at once drawn to him. But, it should be noted; there is no mention of her falling in love with Raju. She starts depending on his ingenuity. It is true that she tries hard to make up with her husband, but she fails. Somehow Marco, who is absorbed in the past through his research on cave paintings, denotes a sort of withdrawal from the present flux of life; in spite of being an intellectual, his views on the art of dancing is prejudiced and backdated. Raju, on the other hand, exudes the spirit of life’s forward movement, a throbbing life force that Rosie instinctively grabs at for her own survival. When her husband rejects her, she surrenders herself completely to Raju. She lives with him and turns a deaf ear to all insults flung at her by Raju’s mother and uncle. She is not the self-effacing girl who would walk away from Raju’s life to save him from social derision. Unlike Savitri, who foolishly tries to live alone without realizing how a middleclass housewife economically depends on the male, Rosie is more cautious and proceeds to strengthen her economic freedom.
After her husband’s desertion of her, Rosie craftily makes the best use of Raju’s infatuation for her. She does not regret or suffer any prick of conscience when Raju’s poor mother leaves her home for Rosie’s sake. Rosie goes on practicing her dance and acting as a housewife to Raju. She is the artist whose emotive life is lived only within the sphere of art. She has no feeling or sentiment outside this sphere. She is sometimes ingratiated towards her husband for being a gentleman and towards Raju for protecting her, but any sign of emotional attachment on her part is hardly pronounced. Her husband’s success brings tears to her eyes and for a moment she becomes nostalgic, but the overwhelming force that motivates her life is the fulfillment of her own goal. Her only love is the image of herself performing on the stage. Even the audience does not count. She confesses that for her the audience is nothing but a blank space. She has no care for money or glamour. When Raju is sent to jail she tries her best to help him, though in her mind she remains stoical: “This is Karma. What can we do?” (Narayan, 1958: 193) Nothing is said about her feelings. She does not go back to her husband, which Raju had needlessly feared. She does not wait for Raju to come out of the jail.
Her life has gained a momentum. She has risen in society through her husband, and in her profession with the support of Raju. After this she never looks back. Her emancipation is unlike Nora's. There is no attempt by Narayan to analyse her feelings or to idealize her. She is like a bird – all physical and instinctive in its existence, leaving its nest, the fledglings, and rising up in the blue sky for the sheer pleasure of it.

The polyphonic style of presentation and the carnival spirit of materialization of the ideal provide a different angle to the question of emancipation. No movement is ideal, for to achieve a practical goal, very practical questions have to be dealt with, and in the material life the path towards freedom is neither bedecked with flowers, nor are the treads of the path flawless angels. Thus the movement always creates its own history of power, subordination and selfishness. Though women suffer in the male dominated world, consciously or unconsciously her helplessness often achieves a dangerous potential for subordinating or browbeating the male. Women are not above the human, and not above their own share of solipsism. Narayan never attempts to idealize them as selfless angels. The Savitries, Rosies and Daisies are not educated in the history of the feminist movement initiated in the West, but as human
beings and women of their society they react against their own predicaments in their own ways, along with their flaws and drawbacks. This realistic presentation of them and their reactions bring to surface certain questions — is the freedom from subordination achieved by counter domination? Which is the right path — Savitri’s silent darkrooms or Daisy’s vocal protest on behalf of her mission, excluding everything else from life? Which is the right choice — Savitri’s surrender or Daisy’s escape from the bonds of marriage: “Married life is not for me. I have thought it over. It frightens me. I am not cut out for the life you imagine. I can’t live except alone. It won’t work.” (Narayan, 1977: 178-79) If Rosie has achieved her ideal condition of a meaningful existence, is it not achieved by using the support of her husband and her lover? Is it possible for both the male and the female in society to achieve anything without the support of each other? Narayan never ventures towards any conclusion on this, his task seems to end in presenting the dialogics on women’s position, her predicaments and her reactions. In Tagore’s musical play Chitrangada the plain looking princess demands to be accepted as what she is. Neither does she crave to be valorized, nor treated as ordinary. She would like to be Chitrangada and only herself
beside Arjuna. Ideally, Chitrangada seems to be the epitome of feminism, but if we try to fit her perspective into Narayan’s world, it turns out as inadequate and superfluous. Deep within her soul every woman may crave to be a Chitrangada but not every woman is fortunate to be a born princess, plain or beautiful. Narayan’s carnival world would never allow us to ride the clouds, as the compulsions of life cannot be avoided or overlooked. The princess Chitrangada’s life had been devoid of complications until Arjuna displays his indifference to her love. This causes her to realize her plainness. Savitri too looks at the mirror to find the trace of beauty, which she thinks, would bring back her husband from the other woman. But she faces a truth starker than her husband’s atrocities, when she ventures out of her sheltered existence. It is her economic dependence on her husband that turns out to be her ‘heel of Achilles’. It is this economic subordination that makes her subservient. Her eagerness to please and suppress her voice from uttering her preferences makes her husband take her for granted. Chitrangada the princes would never face the problem of an ordinary Savitri. While Chitrangada wins the respect of Arjuna by her brave deeds and altruism, the Savitries have to waste most part of their lives
struggling to achieve a certain amount of dignity in their limited existence. Rosie's achievement, beside Savitri's, is more positive, though, ironically, a certain amount of selfishness was required.

Though Rosie shows no sign of avarice, it cannot be denied that her money, combined with Raju's ingenuity has done much of the magic. It is her money that buys her a spacious room, ideal for a dancer to practice her dance. With her money she is able to own a group of musicians who could accompany her rehearsals day and night. She has a dancing teacher permanently residing within the premises of her house. Money and fame bring actors and dancers flocking round Rosie and her days are passed happily in their company — "Nalini enjoyed their company immensely, and I often saw them in her hall, some lying on carpets, some sitting up, all talking and laughing, while coffee and food were being carried to them." (Narayan, 1958: 169) Relieved from the household chores, she now enjoys more spare time and the ideal ambiance to improve her God-gifted talent. Although Raju is pompous and funny when he congratulates himself for creating a star, he is of course right in many aspects. Raju deftly adopts various promotional ploys to heighten the image of Rosie as a danseuse, while mystifying
her personality to the general public by creating a barrier between them. This aura of mystery heightens Rosie to a cult-level. Raju may be pompous, but the public too is subservient, for they worship not only Rosie’s dance, but are awestruck by the aura created around her by her fame and prosperity. The more she is alienated from them by residing in her upper apartments while they wait for her below, the more they revere. It is true that Raju’s avarice goes too far and becomes the cause of a strained relation between himself and Rosie.

Narayan obliquely throws up the debate between nature and culture. Rosie is an icon now. She has the economic independence and also choices that are taken by herself: In spite of all these, the question that seeks an answer is, is nature changeable? Is culture predominant over nature? Narayan may not bring the postmodernist argument that culture is everything; similarly he may not fully subscribe to the innate aspect of human nature. In spite of the roguish nature of most of his protagonists, one finds that culture has some impact on them. Rosie’s transformation helped her to rediscover herself; however she never discloses her feelings, if any, towards her husband and even for Raju, because it is in her materialistic and utilitarian nature not to be
sentimental. Similarly, Raju after his jail term is no more sanguine and sentimental about Rosie. He is only adapting to a new situation. In this argument we may find a similarity between the two. Therefore Narayan’s world is multifaceted and open to various strands of articulation.

II

In Narayan’s polyphonic and carnival world the tiniest of voices, if taken notice of, is capable of overturning any established and sanctified pattern of meaning. As in a household the most insignificant material turns out to be the most important – like the cup to hold the tea or the nail to hang a picture, Narayan’s world too turns meaningful with the support of such apparently insignificant factors. It is a totally material existence, where even the inanimate objects have their own language or message and become signs that regulate the meaning of the work. It has already been observed how the unique non-violent footwear, the margosa or the pure ghee made of cow’s milk contribute to the meaning of Jagan’s Gandhism; Sriram’s easeful indolence is signified by a
special chair, the dark suffering of Savitri’s mind by the darkroom or Margayya’s surprising flair for numbers by his ragged notebook.

In *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983) the accepted theme is of a tiger achieving true enlightenment with the help of a guru. This theme has the timeless quality of a fable, or in Bakhtin’s words, a monologic linearity of pattern. But this is achieved only when the insignificant materials that are scattered everywhere in the novel are overlooked. These ordinary unobtrusive factors question the apparently idealistic theme of the novel and have the potentiality to polemicize the whole project. Even if Narayan had this monologic project in mind, his habit of depending on the materiality of human life or the polyphonic system of placing each character against the other, or placing ideas on the same platform with other ideas bring out unexpected nuances that can embarrass the project. The first question that faces us is – is the story a fable or not?

Critics have often deciphered that in *A Tiger*, Narayan has used the traditional Indian experience of the fable as a means of expressing some age-old moral, religious or philosophical beliefs. This has occurred to the critics precisely because Narayan has introduced a tiger and not a human being as the hero of the novel.
When a writer in his narrative replaces the human hero with some animal, it may turn fabulous, but not unusual. Fables are designed, according to L.T. Lemon, to make a point quickly, clearly and sharply. In fables animals often act out human roles. In one of Aesop’s fables about a lion and a goat, the two animals resolve to be polite to each other instead of fighting when they see the vultures hovering to pounce upon whichever should fall in defeat. The instant moral served to us by this story is – it is better to drink second at the spring than to furnish food for vultures. This realization of this moral is due to the age-old human experiences that work behind our cognizance. It is nothing new but recognition of the inevitable patterns of human struggle for existence. Thus in fables lions and goats are actually human beings wearing the appearances of these animals. The reason that works behind such adaptations of animal identities is not because the writer wishes to understand the animal consciousness but because these animals are ready-made signs; they are human creations and stand for universal qualities. In a fable the lion is almost always strong-headed, the vulture greedy and pouncing, the fox cunning, the wolf deceiving, the owl old
and wise and the sheep mild and foolish. These signs help the author to manage a quick or immediate transmission of his message.

Narayan's story about the tiger Raja may be taken as a fable if one recognizes the broader outline of the story that shows a wild and ferocious tiger that, under the influence of a yogi explores through philosophical discourse the pathway to enlightenment. In that case, as in a fable, the tiger may easily be replaced by a human being, like, for example Vasu of *The Man-Eater*, who has those villainous qualities we usually attribute to a man-eater. Thus it can easily be a story of a villain whose life is spiritually enlightened by a yogi.

But Narayan's stories do not thrive on the broader outlines, which are often found to be deceptive. To understand Narayan, one has to notice the puny unnoticeable details, materials as insignificant as a chair, a whip or a pot of milk. Narayan depends on the solidity of material to create his world that is axiomatic, and not upon any preconceived idea according to which pattern as story is usually moulded. In that case a fable character would have been appropriate. That Narayan is not using a fable character but a tiger fresh from the jungle who's mind is still innocent of human society and its complicated
paraphernalia is inevitable when we notice how Narayan carefully brings in the small details of human life — a chair, a torch or a whip and shows the reaction of the tiger when it encounters these objects. A fabled tiger imbibes the human consciousness and so is never surprised by these insignificant details that characterize human existence. But bringing a true tiger is a successful way of introducing a hero, whose ‘otherness’ to human society is unquestionable. Though the rogue is the ‘other’, but he is after all a human being, but bringing a wild tiger from the jungle and measuring human society through his innocent consciousness is a unique experiment of Narayan.

As we have already discussed, in order to break any predetermined inevitability and to show a world more generative and dynamic, Narayan has often used a rogue character as the hero. A rogue who cannot be pronounced as good or rejected as evil enjoys a more flexible position in society, a freedom to explore life without any inhibition. The rogue often treads upon the darker and hidden paths of life, a life that is carefully covered up by man’s sense of civilization. In spite of his secretiveness, this underworld is the most throbbing and living part of human existence as it exposes him in his raw. The rogue
being mischievous but warm by nature draws out the sensitive and sensuous emotions like passion, anger, gluttony, lust, etc. Wherever the rogue treads, all the scrupulousness for propriety and social codes are exposed in a different light and a new angle is given to the conception of mankind.

What strikes as so interesting about Narayan is that he is always on the lookout for a pretext that would enable him to observe the pranks of mankind and enjoy himself. While he writes about Gandhi, he is not interested in the great man but in the reactions of the average man when thrown into the magnetic vicinity of the legend. He chooses the middleclass because, as William Walsh observes, it is “the most conscious and anxious part of the population. Its members are neither too well off not to know the rub of financial worry nor too indigent to be brutalized by want and hunger.” (Walsh, 1990: 74) These people are neither satiated to be complacent, nor too hungry to forget the rational or mental acumen specially gifted to man. They are active consciousnesses, who, though not much educated or sophisticated, nevertheless, with all limitations live a critical existence. It is this dwindling position of the average man that provides for Narayan an
inexhaustible source of humour along with tenderness. The average man’s pretensions and hypocrisies are brought out by the rogue and the profound ambivalence haunting the social man’s existence is revealed.

In order to expose this world in an unbiased light Narayan chooses the rogue because the rogue is an onlooker, one who shuns the normal path of society and therefore is in an objective position to criticize it. Yet, the rogue too is a human being, born and brought up in the normal social ambience and cannot escape the racial unconscious he is bound to inherit psychologically. These complex psychic predispositions inherited by the character regulate his reflexes and as Jung has ascertained – it is impossible to find among human beings a mind as clean as a slate. The single human being who bore this innocence had been Adam, and since then another Adam is an impossibility. So Narayan, who never ceases to enjoy the pranks of the ordinary people, and uses all possible means to bring out the humour and pathos that enfold them, tries yet for another angle of observation. Leaving human gazers, he now finds a creature whose mind, with regard to human society, is as clean as a slate. It is a tiger fresh from the jungle and not a monkey or other tamer variety that are often brought to
human contact, because the tiger is a mystery to man who evokes in him various contradictory feelings like awe, reverence and fear. Even a lion, so grand and ferocious has been stereotyped by man as the king of the jungle and thus connotes everything grand and majestic. But the tiger has somehow escaped such canonization and man is still undecided whether to hate it or fall in the trap of its fearsome beauty. Narayan brings in a tiger, one of the most richly endowed with physical beauty by nature (Raja is eleven feet and has a bright and shining coat) to act as the unusual hero of his novel. Raja is appraised of human life through the reactions of men around him as he walks into their society.

Raja is unusual because he is not a fable character to provide merely an animal appearance to represent human quality. Narayan, instead, takes a bolder step and ventures to try the impossible. He enters the tiger’s consciousness to experience the paradisal state of innocence and then returns to himself to authorize the human world from the tiger’s point of view. It is a complicated venture because the author is himself placed in a peculiar position, for in order to express the tiger’s uncorrupted state he has to use a language that is beyond pre-lapsarian innocence. The experiences of the tiger turn ambivalent. The very act of
expressing the innocence of the tiger through language entails constant
destruction of innocence. Narayan’s intention to articulate the tiger’s
point of view is clear from all the trouble he takes to follow the tiger’s
supposed mental exercises. To achieve this end, Narayan, as usual falls
back upon the solidity of objects that are co-relatively tied to the first
step towards consciousness. Raja’s introduction to the human race is a
sad affair – he sees the solid evidence of human atrocity in the carcasses
of his wife and children laid out on a cart. For the first time Raja’s
confidence as the autocrat of the jungle is shaken. Being still an
“unmitigated animal” (Narayan, 1983: 24) he is innocent of grief, and
his only negative emotion is fury. He follows the procession with a
determination to destroy, but is ultimately prevented from such action
by the arrival of a “strange vehicle” which later when he is educated in
human language finds to be a jeep. The strangeness of human gadgets
bewilders him and gradually he starts suffering from the pangs of fear.
This, for him, is another step towards degradation and degeneration. He
leaves his natural abode in the jungle and digresses into human society.
Desperate and vengeful, he turns into a scheming animal, surprising the
villagers with his attacks and succeeds in remaining as elusive as a
mirage: “I had perfected my system of snatching cattle at night. I became quite familiar with their movements and timings and weak points in the enclosures that the creatures were penned in.” (Narayan, 1983: 31) Once when he becomes too confident he is almost captured. This encounter brings another revelation for him – he sees man using fire. “More than their weapons, the sight of their flaming torches, red-coloured and smoking viciously, was completely unnerving.” (Narayan, 1983: 27) For him it is like visiting the devil. It is only by sheer luck that he escapes. The villagers are confused at Raja’s retreat and when they report to the Collector they fail to convince him.

However, by now Raja’s contact with human beings has corrupted his pristine chastity and he is now fatally bound to the destiny of man. His next exposure is to human deception in the form of a bait used to trap him; it is a fat and well-fed goat. Raja is captured and carried away in a cage. Experiencing locomotion for the first time Raja feels “strangely uncomfortable” (Narayan, 1983: 43) to be moving without the use of his legs. It is an unnatural feeling for it is man’s challenge to nature and defiance of the natural law. Nature has created the limbs for the purpose of movement, but the discovery of locomotion
has stolen away much of this purposiveness. Man, with his gadgets has created a world of leisure around him – a striking contrast with the world of the jungle where rest is not languorous but is taken for the purpose of revitalization. Raja is now forced into this world of meaningless activities. His feeling of emptiness comes while living inside the cage where he has no chance of hunting his food. His life loses all-purpose: “I ran round and round in circles in pursuit of nothing – and that seemed a very foolish senseless act. At least a hare running ahead would have provided a show of reason for running.” (Narayan, 1983: 51) Unhindered by any obstacle throughout his life in the jungle, Raja is puzzled by the resistance created by the metal bar: “I had had no contact with any sort of metal in my life; now this combination of man and metal subdued me – metal which in various forms served the evil ends of man as prison bars, traps, and weapons.” (Narayan, 1983: 47) His efforts to dash out through the metal barriers seem foolish to Captain. He remarks: “All these stupid creatures are alike! They all expect the bars of the cage to be made of butter. No harm if he learns the facts of life in his own way!” (Narayan, 1983: 47) An atmosphere of relativity is created. Raja finds all human activities meaningless and
foolish. On the other hand, Raja bred in the wild, draws a blank with gadgets and Captain gets exasperated with Raja’s stupid ignorance. Seen from the animal’s point of view man is revealed as an interfering creature, all the time poking his nose in the lives of others. Bloated with self-employed mission, they barge in to tame and train other creatures. The ape enjoys more freedom than other animals and is often accepted in human company, but he too has no illusion about Captain: “He is a damned fool, but doesn’t know it; thinks that he is the Lord of the Universe.” (Narayan, 1983: 51) Animals find men living in an endless illusion of holding power over the world with the help of all their contraptions. In fact, Raja’s life in the circus may be assessed by the numerous mention of human devices like the whip, the endless rows of cages, the electric rod, the chains, enclosures of different sizes for different purposes, floodlights, trapezes and galleries, exposing human vanity and the feigned world of meaningless motions that man creates around himself in the name of civilization. Raja is innocent of this sham world, and of all the strange objects he has to encounter, it is the harmless chair that strikes terror in him and enslaves him to Captain. Later he recalls: “Now I know a chair is a worthless, harmless piece of
furniture but at that time, I dreaded the sight of it. It appeared to me a mighty engine of destruction. How captain and men like him could ever have realized how a chair would look to a tiger is really a wonder.” (Narayan, 1983: 53) Raja’s predicaments turn endless as Captain continues to teach him new tricks for the circus. The most incongruous situation is created when Raja is forced to drink milk which he finds strange and tasteless, and that too with a goat sharing from the same bowl! Raja would have preferred to taste the goat instead of the bland milk. He is kept hungry for the show and finding Captain’s expectations of the tiger’s self-restraint going too far, he disobeys and in the middle of the show nips off the goat’s head as neatly and deftly as a great surgeon. Captain, however, takes kindly of the matter and overlooks it as a slight mischief: “Don’t take too harsh a view of Raja for it … . He didn’t do it out of malevolence, but a sudden impulse of mischief. That’s a way of life in their jungle society.” (Narayan, 1983: 79) He misinterprets Raja’s intolerable hunger as a silly prank and nonchalantly generalizes on jungle society. However, the incident brings into relief the hollowness of man’s complacent assumption that he is capable of understanding the dumb world around him. He legitimizes his bullying
and meddling with the garb of love and understanding. If he has to be strict and punishing it is not his fault but the sheer stupidity of the others who fail to learn and obey.

Raja’s freedom from the circus cages comes with Captain’s degeneration under the influence of the film world. Raja recalls: “Although he was indifferent generally in money matters, now a certain degree of greed was overcoming him, a gradual corruption through contact with the film world.” (Narayan, 1983: 109) Until now he had retained certain principles of his own, and his relation to his animals, though utilitarian, had the warmth that comes from mutual appreciation and dependence. Madhusudan, the Cine-Director and Producer corrupts the circus-world with a promise of quick-money and more new gadgets, the most vicious of them being the electric rod. At first Captain rejects the rod, but his greed turns him desperate and he starts using it on Raja, turning a deaf ear to Raja’s warnings. Raja unintentionally kills Captain when in desperation he uses his forepaw to knock out the rod from Captain’s hand. This sudden discovery of his own strength and the comparative fragility of the human body is a revelation to Raja: “It was surprising that such a flimsy creature, no better than a membrane
stretched over some thin framework, with so little stuff inside, should have held me in fear so long.” ((Narayan, 1983: 114-15)

The understanding that man’s power is illusory and fragile is driven home effectively and meaningfully because it comes after Raja’s experience in the circus as well as with the film-people. These are the two make-belief worlds where costumes, make-ups, floodlights and human skill ally together to present the ordinary human being as dazzling and glamorous. In the circus the ringmaster’s performance simulates the myth of Androcles – the kind, powerful and the brave whose personality influences the lions who bow and obey him. These dazzling performances hide the back-stage story of whips and chains and unending days of starvation. However, the circus is still better than the film-world because the circus people earn money with the help of skilful performances, tricks and a bit of eyewash, but certainly not through hypocrisy. Madan makes a virtue out of necessity – he exploits Gandhi’s non-violence as a sensational theme for his film, that would, he declares – educate his audience, though his secret ambition is to fleece money out of the sentimental viewers. This bloated balloon of a world is punctured by Raja who finds man as puny and insignificant: “I
got a totally wrong notion of human beings at that angle. I had thought that they were sturdy and fearless. But now I found them fleeing before me like a herd of deer, although I had no intention of attacking them.” (Narayan, 1983: 116) This cowardice is embodied in Jaggu the giant man, who, in spite of possessing a very strong physique, dashes into the cage and shuts himself inside it, while Raja the tiger wanders about in freedom.

Raja’s wandering among human beings naturally invites various reactions and gradually numerous other facets of human nature unfold. Raja finds them quarrelling, fighting, spreading rumours, boasting, scheming. He comes to know opportunists like the assistant headmaster, ruthless poachers like Alphonse, corrupted officers like those of the Save Tiger Project. Apart from these individuals Raja feels the existence of a phantom-like crowd of unknown faces, always pushing and fighting and talking and wondering. Raja has lost forever the silent peace of the jungle. “For one used to the grand silence of the jungle, the noisy nature of humanity was distressing. In due course, I got used to it. When I imbibed my Master’s lessons, I realized that deep within I was not different from human beings, and I got into their habit myself and
never had a moment’s silence or stillness of mind – I was either talking (in my own way, inaudibly) or listening, and thus became fully qualified to enter human society.” (Narayan, 1983: 44)

With the help of his master’s yogic power Raja is enlightened and learns about mankind. But was this enlightenment necessary? The textual probing shows Raja’s life in the jungle filled with a paradisal peace – his cave beside a cool rivulet, the peaceful shade of the bamboo cluster, and all the other animals acknowledging his superiority. His only worry used to be the mischievous monkeys. Though the jungle too has its own problems of uncertainty and violence, it does not know meanness and hypocrisy. In the wild every action is taken for the sake of survival. Raja misses it and often lapses in a mood of reminiscence: “When I recollect my forest life, I am likely to lose all restraint.” (Narayan, 1983: 15) So considered beside this pristine innocence of the jungle, is the enlightenment welcome at all? Is it worth compromising so much on Raja’s part? The result of Raja turning into a creature of human attributes does not show us a satisfactory picture.

Instead of a clean and vacant mind that knew no grief or fear, Raja’s mind has tuned into a disturbing beehive where the buzzing of
his newly acquired power of language cannot be stopped anymore. His statement that he finally became qualified by learning the language: "and never had a moment’s silence or stillness of mind" (Narayan, 1983: 44) sounds double-edged, for the purity implicated in the word ‘silence’ discredits the achievement of “language”. Moreover, his natural habits now disturb him leaving him nowhere. He will never be able to eat leaves and roots, yet his usual food of animal meat turns unpalatable. He goes about with guilt for hunting animals, though Nature had created his beautiful and strong limbs and muscles for this purpose. Hunting for his food had given his life a purpose and also a sense of glory over each achievement or victory. Raja’s health now deteriorates not merely because of aging, but malnutrition and lack of healthy exercise were taking their toll. If he had lived in the jungle, as before, he would have been forced to work hard for his own survival and thus maintained his natural health.

The only redeeming aspect of this enlightenment is the wonderful magic of a tiger and a man living in mutual trust. It is truly magic-like, a wonderful exception constructed to reveal man and beast as the creations of the same authority. It is a totally different plane of truth and
offsets all the noisy meanness of human existence. It stands as a promise of hope for salvation, the utopian dream for a future paradise where man and beast would again combine to enjoy the bounties of God. In the story this unusual friendship of a Swami and a tiger starts showing some influence and we find the rival groups of fighting men joining hands to come to the Swami and ask for his pardon. The condition of man is not utterly hopeless and the writer finds a sense of ambivalence that doggedly follows human nature while destroying as well as recreating the world. The friendship of the Swami and Raja is not for the purpose of showing a tiger’s enlightenment. In that case the writer would have shown the Swami in a halloed light instead of filling the pages with the description of his human imperfections. The writer impresses upon us the image of a human being and not a saintly saviour. The main motive lurking in the work is exposing human nature in all its colours. Raja’s association with the circus people had exposed the grotesque side, while his friendship with the Swami reveals hope. It is a beautiful metaphor to express faith in human nature.

Narayan, as a writer is neither a satirist, moralist nor a critic of human behaviour. He finds the world vibrating with different colours
including black, and it is the ambivalences that attract him more than anything else. Although he creates the magic of the man and tiger friendship, he does not let us imagine the Swami as a god-like figure who emerges out of thin air to save the tiger. Solidity is Narayan’s forte and he methodically builds a solid history behind the Swami’s yogic existence. It is Jayraj the photographer who remembers him as a familiar face out of his memory:

At one time I used to see him cycling up the Market Road every morning to his college. He lived in Ellamman Street in one of those solid houses built by an earlier generation. I can’t remember that man’s name now, Govind, Gopal, or Gund? I don’t know. He was arrested during the Independence Movement for climbing the Collector’s office roof and tearing down the Union Jack, and then again for inscribing on the walls, with brush and tar, ‘Quit India’, aimed at the British. I was told that he drove his mother mad by his ways. She would cry her heart out every time he was sent to prison. He didn’t pass his B.A. – too busy, mixed up as he was in every kind of demonstration in those days. When things quietened down after Independence, he came to me one day to have his passport photo taken, but never collected it, though he had paid for it in advance. His photo must still be there somewhere in those piles of stuff unclaimed by my customers for reasons best known to them. I must put them all to the fire some day before all that junk drives me out of my own shop . . .

Later on, I used to see him occasionally coming to the market with his family, driving a motor car. At this stage, he was completely changed, looked like a fop with
his tie and suit and polished shoes. One day I had the hardihood to hail him and to say that he should take away his passport photograph, since he had paid for it. I’m not the sort to keep other people’s property. He halted his steps but before I could pick up his stuff and pack it, he muttered ‘I will come again’ and hurried out. He was perhaps a busy man, as he was said to be holding a big job in a foreign insurance firm which had its office in New Extension.

I never thought of him again until I heard one day that he had vanished, abandoning his wife and children. The police came seeking his photograph but I didn’t give it. If that man chose to disappear, that was his business, why should I be involved?” ((Narayan, 1983: 152-53)

Later, when his yogic power over the tiger is well known, his wife comes to him with the hope of taking him back with her. She cannot accept his spiritual talk and retorts back with all the solid experiences of the life she had shared with her husband and which she has borne all her life as a very precious memento:

Husband, husband, husband, I’ll repeat it a thousand times and won’t be stopped. I know to whom I’m talking. Don’t deceive me or cheat me. Others may take you for a hermit, but I know you intimately. I have borne your vagaries patiently for a lifetime; your inordinate demands of food and my perpetual anxiety to see you satisfied, and my total surrender night or day when passion seized you and you displayed the indifference of a savage, never caring for my health or inclination, and with your crude jocularities even before the children, I shudder!” (Narayan, 1983: 170-71)
In this way the hermit is brought out of his hallowed existence and recreated by others bit by bit into a being who cannot be classified. It is surprising how a man can never be a single unit. Through his contacts with others, he leaves behind contradictory impressions. For Narayan, even a holy man is a human being and not a supernatural agent created out of thin air. It is a carnivalesque attitude and would tolerate no monologic canonization.

The Swami’s yogic power is unquestionable here; he has achieved the impossible. But when his renunciation is compared to the life of Buddha, it is impossible to take the comparison on its face value. In his style of presenting the Swami, Narayan has involved many self-contradictory informations that create a ground for polemics. This double-voiced style is typically carnivalesque as it raises doubts in the reader’s mind – should one appreciate this renunciation or criticize it? Is it not sheer irresponsibility on the part of the husbands who suddenly leave their family to fend for themselves and in the name of God decide to live alone? The Carnival is not anti-religion, but because of its down-to-earth approach to life it is not blind to the ambivalences that characterize all religious feelings. Carnival has the tendency to insult
deliberately, for it is critical of all that is canonized. Narayan’s shocking exposition about the holy man is deliberate, for his religious feelings are connatural to man’s corporeal life. This corporeal life of man is full of blunders and blemishes, inconsistencies and frailties. Though quick to detect man’s weaknesses, the carnival never fails to appreciate the aspirations, which are like the lotus blooming in the sludge. At the end when Raja’s physical condition turns hopeless, some men from the zoo come with the promise of looking after Raja for the rest of his life and we almost inhale the heavenly fragrance of the blooming lotus. The visitor from the zoo is a kindly person and brings no whip with him. He appreciates Raja’s stature as magnificent, grand and regal. Without much hesitation he approaches Raja and Raja cannot help feeling at ease in his company: “At first sight, I could understand that this man was fearless and used to the company of animals, and had sympathy, and not another Captain.” (Narayan, 1983: 175) There is an instant rapport between this man and Raja: “The man came near and stroked my back, and by his touch I could see that I had a friend.” (Narayan, 1983: 175)

Swami’s yogic communications with a tiger is an exceptional phenomenon which seems magic-like and unusual. But the message is
comprehensible. If this unusual friendship of a man and tiger has given the hope of realizing the dream of paradise, that paradise is partially but solidly achieved by the practical and kindly men of earth. The visitor is determined to save Raja for he considers Raja as one of the most magnificent gifts of nature. For this end, he does not need any help from the supernatural, but the simple benevolent touch of science: “Oh, truly the most magnificent of his kind, regal, of grand stature, although you think he is faded. We have our own system of feeding and improving with tonic and he’ll be record breaking. Our zoo can then claim to have the largest tiger for the whole country.” (Narayan, 1983: 175)

Raja, the unusual hero of Narayan’s novel opens our eyes to the surprising contours of humanity. Paradise, it seems, is achievable on this earth, and with the help of the same hands of humanity that destroy it.

Narayan’s inquiry into the natural and unsophisticated feelings of mankind results in a disruption of the idea that the human race is rational. Man is far from uni-dimensional, and even after granting him his due portion of rationality, consistency and uniformity are characteristics applicable to any other creature except man. Thus if his
rational inclinations lead him to his scientific aspirations for progress, sense of justice or a general goodwill, certain other mysterious and incomprehensible bents of the same human mind would playfully proceed to undo it. This paradox of man is granted a cheerful acceptance by the carnival worldview. In the carnival world the earth is at once the womb and the grave, and this paradox is imbued in man who is at once glorified as the king and degraded as a clown. Monologic and serious texts tend either to overlook such inconsistency of human nature, or authorize a sense of unity in the aesthetic ambience of the text. Sir Joshua Reynolds criticizes this tendency: “Critics seem to consider man as too uniformly wise, and in their rules make no account for the playful part of the mind. Their rules are formed for another race of beings than what man really is.” (in Fussell, 1969: 124)

Novelists who project human race as imperfect and grotesque often run the risk of countering the reader’s most cherished belief of life as a harmonious song. Yet it is in the imperfections that one may read the history of human aspirations and endeavours, it is in the weaknesses and frustrations that one may see the germination of still further yearning to survive. To be precise, it is the life force imbued in this
carnival world that redeems all imperfections of man. Paul Fussell writes:

Man is thus a mighty curious creature. A flesh-machine of self-destructive depravity fraught with ignorance and vanity, and at the same time inspirited somehow with an anima which has it in its power to redeem all defects except, perhaps, mortality; he is a wandering paradox perpetually looking for a place now to hide and now to exhibit himself. He both is and is not like an angel; he both is and is not like a brute. (1969: 110)

WORKS CITED


