Chapter: IV

Adolescence Appeal in the Works of R.K.Narayan
Alexander McCall Smith admires R.K.Narayan:

R. K. Narayan’s novels are like a box of Indian sweets: a highly-colored container conceals a range of delectable treats, all different in a subtle way, but each one clearly from the same place. There are fourteen novels in the oeuvre – enough to create a world. Enthusiasts of his work will read them all and return to them time and again. The busy, or the less committed, may open the box and take out one at random – it does not really matter which order one reads them in. But be warned: the consumption of one leads to a strong craving for more. (A.M)

R.K.Narayan is renowned as the creator of fictional works located at a town ‘Malgudi’ which exists nowhere on the map of India but in the mind of this writer. He is considered as a successful regional novelist like Thomas Hardy. All his novels and short stories are set on the locale of Malgudi. It will not be exaggerating to say that Malgudi has become the synonym of Narayan. He portrays an acceptable picture of South Indian life in his works through Malgudi. He is master of characterization who ranges from infant to old age. Out of his fourteen novels few are fully dedicated to the transformation of the childhood into boyhood, for example, *Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts, The Financial Expert*. The researcher aims to discuss these three fictions in detail in this chapter. Selected stories are also considered here to interprete Narayan’s views on adolescents. They are: *A Shadow, Iswaran, Mother and Son, and Naga,*
Swami and Friends

R.K.Narayan belongs to the group of leading writers who succeeded enormously with the publication of the very first novel and achieved recognition and acceptance. His *Swami and Friends* is the first novel by him and it is considered as the classic Indian English novel. The novel is set in pre-independence era and revolves around a pre-adolescent boy Swaminathan living in Narayan’s fictitious town Malgudi. The novel describes the life of boys in South Indian schools, and highlights much of R.K.Narayan’s personal experience of his childhood. A reader gets a vivid portrayal of the thoughts, emotions and activities of school boys. The plot revolves round Swaminathan shortly called Swami by his family and friends, the hero, and his fast friends Mani, Shanker, Somu, the most intelligent boy of the class, Samual and Rajam, a late arrival, brilliant and charming, the son of the Police Superintendent.

The novel is noteworthy for the author’s understanding of child psychology and for his depiction of the carefree, cheerful world of school boys in a most realistic and influential manner. It renders people and their actions as they appear to boys at the school stage. Swami is one of Narayan’s immortal creations. One can only fully agree with prof. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar who wrote:

> It is as though everyday actuality has taken Narayan’s pen and written out this universal epic of all our boyhood yesterdays that are now no more.

(R.Srinivas)

The very first paragraph of the novel presents a realistic picture of school boys who dislike going to school on Monday morning after enjoyment of sweet weekends. R.K.Narayan has given a fantastic title to the first chapter: ‘Monday Morning’ Most of the students have the same story. It seems here that Swami, a pre-adolescent boy of ten and the hero of this fiction is the representative of all the students. What happens in his life happens in most of the students’ life. The novel opens with these words:

> It was Monday morning. Swaminathan was reluctant to open his eyes. He considered Monday
specially unpleasant in the calendar. After the delicious freedom of Saturday and Sunday, it was difficult to get into the Monday mood of work and discipline. He shuddered at the very thought of school: that dismal yellow building; the fire-eyed Vedanayagam, his class-teacher; and the headmaster with his thin long cane. (R.K., Swami and Friends)

The very first passage of the novel indicates clearly about Swami’s attitude regarding study. He is an average student. He fears a lot from the teachers of his school especially the headmaster. R.K.Narayan makes use of some of his personal experience of his childhood as a raw material in this novel. In his autobiography My Days, he mentions the same approach towards study. He writes:

When we passed an orange-colored school building with a green gate, my uncle promised that I would in due course find myself there. I did not welcome the idea. It was a gaunt-looking building with a crucifix on its roof, and I hated it at first sight. (R.K., My Days)

Swami wants to enjoy the freedom of life. But, unfortunately he can’t find his life as free as he wishes because of his father’s strict nature at home and some teachers at school. He is an average student and finds study hard. As a result, he doesn’t pay more attention on learning. He performs some mischief in the classroom. He is a fearful boy who fears from every possible danger. He avoids taking risks. But, when a fanatic teacher named Mr. Ebenezar insults Hindu Gods particularly Lord Krishna, Swami’s blood boils. He raises some questions before the Christian teacher that if he (Jesus) did not commit sin, why he was crucified. He further asks if he was a God, why he ate flesh and fish and drink wine. R.K.Narayan points out here the belief of a school boy regarding Gods of different religions. Swami’s asking questions to the fanatic teacher like Mr. Ebenezar shows his sensitivity about his
Hindu religion. He can’t tolerate severe insult of Hindu God. It also indicates his courage to challenge the teacher openly.

At adolescent phase the boys and girls have different images about Gods and religions. They have not sufficient comprehensive power to grasp spiritual and religious ideas and concepts. Even some times the adults can’t understand such ideas. For Swami, as a Brahmin boy it is inconceivable that a God should be a non-vegetarian. He knows little about Gods and their stories. At last, he gets punishment for opposing the teacher. Narayan depicts this incident in the beginning of the novel which indicates that Swami is generally submissive but in the issues of religion, he can dare to challenge even the fanatic teacher. It also points out that mostly Indians are highly sensitive about religion even if they are young. Somehow the adolescents develop this sensitivity from the environment surrounding them, religious festivals, elders’ beliefs, religious leaders and so on.

Apart from Swami R.K.Narayan introduces some other school boys like Somu, Mani, Samual and Rajam. Narayan’s art of characterization is really incomparable here. He develops the personality, nature, hobby, weakness, habits and other features of school boys in different manner and yet there are certain common characteristics a reader can observe here that are found in most of the adolescents. The first is Somu, the monitor. He is known as a brilliant boy and chummy even with the teachers. He has a strong command over the class. He is more or less the uncle of the class. Another boy is Mani, the mighty but good for nothing. He is physically very strong and short tempered lad. He towers above all the other boys of the class. His learning method is different. He seldom brings any books to the class and never bothers about homework. He comes to the class, monopolizes the last bench, and sleeps bravely. No teacher prods him. He is very senior student of the same class. Swami always wanders with him.

The most brilliant Sankar is another type of lad. He can solve any problem given to him in few minutes and always manages to border on ninety per cent. If he begins the cross-examination of teachers, they can’t face him properly. Another friend of Swami is Samual, known as ‘the Pea’ on account of his size. Among the school boys, there exists a custom or habit to call the boys with another name. Almost every
boy in the class has another name given by the class-mates. The name depends on the physical appearance, some special habit of the boy, from the name of the popular stars like sportsman, film star. Samual is an ordinary student. The hero of this novel is very much impressed by Rajam, the son of Police Superintendent of Malgudi. Swami and all his other friends belong to middle class or lower economic class, while Rajam is rich. He lives in a bungalow and has a lot of attractive toys and games to play. Swami is mighty proud to be friend of this scholar boy. He comes late to school yet he recovers so well that he secures very good result.

R.K.Narayan’s world of youngsters is rich enough to include the lads of various backgrounds based on family, economic condition, level of intelligence, physical appearance (Mani is very tall while Samual is short that’s why he is named Pea,) and many other different elements. Every boy has his own personality and differs from the rest. Yet, there are certain similar things commonly found among most of them.

Friendship at young time is one of the most fascinating elements. The adolescents try to spend maximum time with their friends. Quarrels, disputes, fights, rivalry are part of friendship. But, they may disappear at any time without serious attempt and the boys enjoy together. It shows their innocent, non-political and egoless world. After Rajam’s arrival in the school, Mani’s dominance is challenged. He is a rival to Mani. Not even teachers try to overcome Mani by power; Rajam is capable to compete him. If Mani is the overlord of the class, Rajam seems to be nothing less. Rajam is a challenge for Mani. Mani hates this lad and plans to beat him with his club. Swami is in trouble on account of this increasing enmity. A common friend has to suffer badly at the time of quarrels between two boys or groups. Swami is a common friend of Mani and Rajam. He performs the role of communicator in their quarrels. During a quarrel in the class room, the teacher notices Swami passing massage of Mani to Rajam. He is punished by the teacher. He is ordered to stand up on his bench. He takes it lightly. By nature Swami is a naughty boy and therefore punishment doesn’t make any difference in his behavior. Standing on the bench as a part of penalty he counts the caps of the other students. In Narayan’s humorous words:
Swaminathan paid no attention to the rest of the lessons. His mind began to wander. Standing on the bench, he stood well over the whole class. He could see so many heads, and he classified them according to the caps: there were four red caps, twenty five Gandhi caps, ten fur caps and so on. (R.K., Swami and Friends)

The hatred between Mani and Rajam reaches to climax. They decide to see each other at the river bank of Sarayu at evening for fight. Mani and Swami wait for Rajam at the bank. With a heavy wooden club as weapon in his hand, Mani feels mighty. At last, Rajam arrives. R.K.Narayan draws this verbal picture of this meeting in remarkable way. A dramatic situation has been created here by the novelist:

Rajam stood very stiff and said to Mani: ‘Here I am, ready.’ ‘You are late.’ ‘Yes.’ ‘We will start.’ Rajam shouldered his gun and fired a shot in the air. Mani was startled. He stood still, his club down. ‘You heard the shot?’ asked Rajam. ‘The next is going to be your into your body, if you are keen upon a fight.’ ‘But this is unfair. I have not gun while you have… It was to be a hand-to-hand fight.’ ‘Then why have you brought your club? You never said anything about it yesterday.’ Mani hung down his head. ‘What have I done to offend you?’ asked Rajam. ‘You called me a sneak before someone.’ ‘That is a lie.’ There was an awkward pause. ‘If this is all the cause of your anger, forget it. It won’t mind being friends.’ ‘Nor I,’ said Mani. Swaminathan gasped with astonishment. In spite of his posing before Mani he admired Rajam intensely, and longed to be his friend. Now this was the happiest conclusion to all the unwanted trouble. He danced with joy. Rajam lowered his gun, and Mani
dropped his club. To show his goodwill, Rajam pulled out of his pocket half a dozen biscuits. The river’s mild rumble, the resulting of the peepul leaves, the half-light of the late evening, and the three friends eating, and glowing with new friendship- Swaminathan felt at perfect peace with the world. (R.K., Swami and Friends)

The meeting for fight between Mani and Rajam turns dramatically into a kind of picnic at the river bank of Sarayu. This scene is one of the most entertaining in the fiction about the adolescents which reflects how enemies become friends in few seconds. Only the school boys can behave like this while the adults have their ego which hurdles for such frank approach. Instead of bullet from gun, Rajam offers biscuits and Mani soon welcomes the friendly attitude. Actually, Mani didn’t expect Rajam with gun and when he finds it, he is frightened. But, Rajam removes the fear by his compromising hand. The entire drama reflects how boys fight on minor reasons and also compromise for even more trivial reasons. It is a daily matter for them. In this respect P.S.Sundaram comments:

Swami and Friends must have been written in illustration of this statement. Aren’t Swami, Mani and Rajam the ideal three “for comradeship, even if it is not always exactly the same as friendship”? Is there any particular reason why Mani should want to crack Rajam’s shoulders with his clubs, bundle him up and throw him into the river? Doesn’t all this blood-thirstiness give place in the twinkling of an eye to friendship and eternal love? (P.S., R.K.Narayan as a Novelist)

Sundaram’s remark seems true; the reason for Mani’s hostile approach towards Rajam may be his interest and affection for this brilliant boy. Quarrel is a part of love. Mani might pretend to hate but in the depth of his heart he likes
him. After this humorous and dramatic meeting all three comrades Swami, Mani and Rajam are found together everywhere.

R.K. Narayan’s career as a fiction writer covers more than fifty years. During this long experience of writing he noticed enormous change in Indian society. He witnessed the Indian freedom movement in pre-independent era and he also lived in free India. He has mentioned changing Indian society and lifestyle. His Malgudi represents India. Some critics consider Malgudi as microcosm of India. What happens in India happens in Malgudi. This town witnesses various changes time to time. The Malgudi of Swami and Friends is different from the Malgudi of The Man Eater of Malgudi. However, certain things rarely change in Indian society. Still today people prefer to live in joint family. A child enjoys the stories of grandparents especially at bed time. In comparison to foreign children; Indian children get more time to spend with grandparents. In the present novel, Swami has a loving grandmother who proves to be his best companion. He talks to her everyday about his school activities, his friends and a lot more things. She listens to him with a great interest that pleases him. When Swami’s father scolds him, Swami goes to this old woman’s lap for protection. Her warm lap is the safest place in the world for this boy. He talks about his new friend Rajam to her. He is highly impressed by this new boy, the son of Police Superintendent. Swami is timid boy who fears from every authority. At home his father, at school his teachers, headmasters and outside police fear him. Therefore, the son of Police Superintendent is something special for him. He boasts about Rajam’s skills before his granny. Swami doesn’t prefer to be with his father who handles the boy strictly and orders him to study every time even in vacation. So Swami keeps a safe distance from his father. His mother is always busy with her second child, Swami’s younger brother. She complains to her husband against Swami’s wasting time in wandering. Swami gets joy and warm only in the affectionate company of his grandmother. She recalls old incidents of her husband. Both enjoy the company of each other.

Children have special feelings for their grandparents. The grandparents have command over their son and daughter in law. They support the children in trouble; fulfill their wish. Sometimes they are more important than parents for the children. Narayan depicts this relationship very delicately.
R.K.Narayan shows the economic class distinction through the character of Rajam. This boy belongs to a rich family. His father is the supreme authority of police in the town. The novelist focuses the fascination of common boys for rich people, bungalow, luxurious facilities and the most attractive toys. When Mani and Swami pay a visit at Rajam’s home, he doesn’t miss any opportunity to impress them. He is a good friend of both these boys, but he treats them like an aristocrat. The novelist also clarifies that Rajam has learnt to be different and important before other people from his father. Children imitate their parents, elders, and teachers. They do not follow words of adult but their action. Swami and Mani enter Rajam’s room. Narayan narrates this visit:

To Mani and Swaminathan the room looked larger. There were chairs in it, actually chairs, and a good big table with Rajam’s books arranged neatly on it. What impressed them most was a timepiece on the table. Such a young fellow to own a timepiece! His father seemed to be an extraordinary man. Presently Rajam entered. He had known that his friends were waiting for him, but he liked to keep them waiting for a few minutes, because he had seen his father doing it. So he stood for a few minutes in the adjoining room, biting his nails. When he could keep away no longer, he burst in upon his friends. (R.K., Swami and Friends)

Rajam then takes them to a cupboard and throws it opens. They are astonished to see the miniature trains and motors, mechanical marvels, and a magic lantern with slides, and a hundred other things. After delicious snack they return home.

Narayan differentiates Rajam from other common boys. This sense of superiority in Rajam is due to his observation of his father’s behavior. At very young stage such awareness of economic superiority and hypocrisy may be found among the adolescents.
A common feature among the school boys is calling student by a special name given by the group or friend. The boys try to please or tease an individual by calling this name apart from the real one. This additional name may refer the boy’s physical appearance like Samual is called ‘Pea’ because of his small size; some weakness or bad habit, comparison with some star or celebrity as the boys shout with joy and give Swami the title, ‘Tate’, (a famous fast bowler of Narayan’s time) when Swami bowls Rajam on very first ball in the game of cricket. Once in school Swami is shocked to hear that he has earned a new name, ‘The Tale- Rajam’s Tale’. The reason for this kind of name is Swami’s attraction for Rajam. Other boys notice Swami who avoids them and spares more time with this rich lad. Unable to tolerate this insulting label, Swami fights with Somu and other school boys who tease him.

Moreover, this practice of giving nickname is popular among young age group. The interesting thing here is that the name changes according to circumstances and with the passing of time. Swami’s earlier offending name ‘Rajam’s Tale’ changes later on and he gets an honorable name ‘Tate’.

R.K. Narayan creates a studious environment at the time of examination. Two weeks before the examinations, in April, Swami realizes that his father is changing for the worse. Every time he reminds Swami to study. He frightens his son suppose he fails all his class-mates will go up and he will be left behind. The takes this matter seriously not for educational point of view but not to depart from his friends. At school everybody seems to be overwhelmed by the thought of examinations. The atmosphere turns studious. The naughty and carefree boys like Swami and Mani never take anything seriously also found affected by exam fever. Narayan is an artist of pure humor. He creates humorous situation before exam time. Mani visits the clerk’s home with some brinjals as bribe to get some important questions for the exam. The clerk advises funnily to read all pages of the books. Mani is befooled in this way.

Narayan throws light on almost all the aspects of schoolboys’ life in this fiction. Examination is a significant part of study. He effectively shows the influence of examination over different students. Every student prepares in his own way for exam. The student like Mani tries to get hints for exam papers from the school clerk.
illegally but gets befooled. A reader can observe here the change in the school boys for exam preparations.

When the examinations are over, there is the most amusing scene in the school compound. Students rush outside the exam hall like the flood in a river. Narayan describes:

At the end of the prayer the storm burst. With the loudest, lustiest cries, the gathering flooded out of the hall in one body. Mani did some brisk work at the school gate, snatching from all sorts of people ink-bottles and pens, and destroying them. Around him was a crowd seething with excitement and joy. Ecstatic shrieks went up as each article of stationary was destroyed. One or two little boys feebly protested. But Mani wretched the ink bottles from their hands, tore their caps, and poured ink over their clothes. He had a small band of assistants among whom Swaminathan was prominent. Overcome by the mood of the hour, he had spontaneously emptied his ink-bottle over his own head and had drawn frightful dark circle under his eyes with the dripping ink. (R.K., Swami and Friends)

In any corner of the world, the children have the same innocent fun. They are impulsive and act accordingly without care of rules and regulation of fear. An individual boy may behave properly, but the number multiplies by more boys it take the shape of crowd which is uncontrollable. Young boys get highest pleasure in group like this without discipline. In vacation, the boys loaf and enjoy mostly away from home. Swami’s one consuming passion in life is to get a hoop. He dreams of it day and night. A young boy of ten dreams not for gold, high bank balance or other thing but some entertaining toys so as Swami. Now he has free time to enquire for it. A coachman deceives him by collecting eighteen paisa and not giving the hoop he promised. The coachman denies recognizing him after some time. The novelist
shows in this episode how a school boy is cheated by an adult. Mani, Rajam and Swami plan to kidnap the coachman’s son but in vain.

During 1940s, there wasn’t much development of technology. The children had not television set, mobile phone, video game, computers, laptop and such modern means for entertainment like today. They found joy in different outdoor games, in climbing trees, wandering, bathing in river and so on. In vacation days, Swami and his friends enjoy such games and activities in the hot summer of Malgudi. They spare maximum time together doing some mischief. The young boys like to imitate their parents. Rajam’s father is a high rank officer of police force. Rajam observes him and sometimes imitates him. Narayan presents a very funny verbal picture here. When Swami, Mani and Rajam loaf on the road side, they stop a cart driven by a young village boy and ask some questions. Rajam tries to appear as the police officer here and the other two his assistants. This may be considered a kind of raging but harmless and funny one.

Swaminathan held the paper and pencil ready. Mani took hold of the rope of the bullock, pushed it back, and turned in the other way round. The cart driver protested. But Mani said: ‘Don’t worry. It has got to stand here. This is the boundary.’

‘I have to go this way, Sir.’ ‘You can turn it round and go.’
‘What is your name?’ asked Rajam. ‘Karuppan,’ answered the boy.
‘Age?’ ‘I don’t know, sir.’ ‘You don’t know? Swami, write a hundred,’ said Rajam. ‘No sir, no sir, I am not a hundred.’ ‘Mind your business and hold your tongue. You are a hundred. I will kill you if you say no. What is your bullock’s name?’ ‘I don’t know, sir.’ ‘Swami, write “Karuppan” again.’ ‘Sir, that is my name, not the bullock’s.’ They ignored this and Swaminathan wrote ‘Karuppan’ against the name of the bullock. ‘Where
are you going?’ ‘Sethur’ Swaminathan wrote it down. ‘How long will you stay there?’ ‘It is my place, sir.’ ‘If that is so, what brought here?’ ‘Our headman sent ten bags of coconut to the railway shed.’ Swaminathan entered every word in his notebook. Then all the three signed the page, tore it off, gave it to the cart driver, and permitted him to start. (R.K., Swami and Friends)

The humorous sight entertains any reader young or adult. It is a pure fun without any mixture of vulgarity or violence. The adolescents may enjoy treating their younger one in this way. Swami is basically defensive and meek but in the company of his friends and before a boy younger to him acts like a commanding person. The boys act as if they were policemen. In the novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* Tom and his friends run away to Jackson’s island to become pirates. The adolescents have a great fascination for adults’ world. They try to imitate the adults. Being the son of a police officer, Rajam dominates the group. In this scene he seems a kind of higher authority and the ordinary boys Mani and Swami follow him as his assistants. In their drama like situation reality still can be observed. One interesting thing to be noticed here is the surrender of the young village boy, the cart driver. He doesn’t challenge the fake police party but gives in and follows the orders made by the three commanding boys. This indicates ignorance and innocence of the village boy.

The growth of children is affected by many factors. One effective factor is social environment. Apart from family and school, the society in which the child lives affects directly or indirectly on the development of the young. In great martyr Bhagatsinh’s life there was a great influence of freedom movement and he was moved to see the violence and killings at Jaliyawala bag, Amritsar at young age. At that time he determined to take revenge of such slaughter. Then Bhagatsinh and his comrades rebelled against the British government and ultimately sacrificed their lives to make India free. Narayan (1906-2001) witnessed both era of India, pre as well as post independent. He was closely familiar with the national freedom movements. He employs this knowledge into this novel. There are strikes and public speeches and
much political activity in some of his novels. Swami’s friends do not take part in this movement but he alone joins a public meeting. He breaks the window panes first of his own school and then of the Board High School. He gets severe punishment in the form of lathicharge. The boy is unable to bear the pain of police sticks and his craze for patriotism is found no more. One more penalty he faces in the form of his exclusion from Albert Mission School, Malgudi. He has to take admission in the Board High School which is considered to be an inferior institution.

Despite changing school, Swami keeps in touch with Rajam and Mani as before. When Rajam proposes for a cricket team, Swami welcomes enthusiastically. After considering various names of their team, M.C.C. (Malgudi Cricket Team) is finalized with Rajam as the Captain and Swami as ‘the Tate’ so called because of his skill in bowling. Narayan here points out the knowledge as well as ignorance of the school boys about founding a cricket team and taking government permission for that. The boys fear that if their team has two names, they will have to pay double tax but it is removed, two names are conformed: M.C.C. for regular administration and Victory Union Eleven for tournaments to frighten their rival teams. They face several difficulties at initial stage. Malgudi is a small town and cricket tools are not available in any shop. They have to place order at some big center like Madras. They collect a catalogue of sports goods of a reputed firm of Madras, Messrs Binns and write a letter to them for cricket tools. The letter proves to be a significant document for the skill of letter writing by school boys. After many corrections and arguments this letter was prepared:

From: M.C.C. (And Victory Union Eleven),
Malgudi.

To
Messrs Binns,
Sportsmen, Mount Road,
Madras.

DEAR SIR,

Please send to our team two junior Willard bats, six balls, wickets and other things
quick. It is urgent. We shall send you money afterwards. Don’t fear. Please be urgent.

Yours obediently,

CAPTAIN RAJAM (Captain).

(R.K., Swami and Friends)

The boys correspond with the Madras based firm and receive the cricket tools. They practise every evening with real bats and balls. Their excitement is boundless. The MCC challenges the Y.M.U. (the Young Men’s Union) to a friendly match. The challenge is accepted and the match is fixed for a Sunday after some terms and conditions. The preparations for match are made well. The match becomes so important for the boys that Rajam tells Swami that if they lose the match, he will commit suicide. The match is more than a matter of reputation for the boys. Swami cannot reach for practice because of his drill classes after noon. He tries his best to escape from the classes but in vain. He tries to make excuse of illness of delirious. He consults his family doctor Dr. T.Kesavan for a false medical certificate to be produced at his school. The boy tries to explain the doctor how importance their match is and his practice for it. The doctor does not give a certificate but a false promise about talking to his headmaster. Swami remains in the impression that the headmaster has been convinced by the doctor. He freely escapes from school for cricket practice. After a week, the truth comes out. The headmaster inspects in Swami’s class and terribly punishes him with a can. Unable to bear this punishment the boy rebels and runs away from the school.

There come out some important events in this cricket episode. The boys found a cricket club themselves and select proper names for it. They make a fantastic correspondence with Messrs Bins, Madras for sports goods. There is actual inauguration of the cricket club with three new bats, stumps, and other tools. These events throw light on the boys’ ways of thinking and acting. They may seem humorous for the adults, but they are quite serious matters for Swami and his friends. Without any guidance of adults the boys handle their problems in their way. It shows their ability as well as some ignorance to handle such situations. The regular practice of cricket creates serious problem in Swami’s life. He is found guilty befooling his headmaster and punished. It can be also observed here how an adult, the doctor plays
with emotions of a schoolboy. The entire cricket issue increases Swami’s frustration. He doesn’t know where to go. He fears to go home on account of his father’s strict nature and the both the schools in Malgudi are closed for him. There is no third school in the town. Ultimately, he runs away from home, school and Malgudi.

Narayan’s heroes can’t face problems or critical situations may be Raju, the protagonist of the novel Guide, an adult man or a schoolboy Swami who tries to avoid the difficulties by running away from home. They are escapists who are incapable to solve their problems. They lack heroic qualities that are found in other writers’ protagonists. This strategy worsens the problem. At the end of the novel they return home.

Narayan shows remarkable insight into the psychology of the boy- Swami, and his thought process while running away from home. At a certain distance, he realizes that he should return. He feels homesickness and tired. But, in searching the trunk road for Malgudi, he moves to some unfamiliar places and finds himself missing. With the growing of darkness, his fear increases. He thinks about imaginative souls and feels insecure. He is tired physically by constant running and mentally by reaching some unknown place at night. A meek school boy of ten, tired of long running, alone at unknown spot in the darkness of night keeps a reader to complete the novel. Narayan deserves sincere appreciation for narrating the situation of the helpless boy, Swami:

He could see its small eyes, red with anger, its tusks lowered, and the trunk lifted and poised ready. He just rolled to one side and narrowly escaped. He lay panting for a while, his clothes wet with sweat. He heard stealthy footsteps and a fierce growl, and before he could turn to see what it was, heavy jaws snapped behind his ears, puffing out foul hot breath on his nape. He had the presence of mind to lower his head and lie flat, and the huge yellow –and-black tiger missed him. Now a leopard, now a lion, even a whale, now a huge crowd, a mixed crowd of wild elephants, tigers, lions, and demons, surrounded him. The demons lifted him by
his ears, plucked every hair on his head, and peeled off his skin from head to foot. Now what was this, coiling round his legs, cold and slimy? He shrank in horror from a scorpion that was advancing with its sting in the air. No, this was no place for human being. The cobra and the scorpion were within an inch of him. He shrieked, scrambled to his feet, and ran. He kept looking back, the scorpion was moving as fast as he, there was no escaping it; he held his breath and with the last ounce of strength doubled his pace. (R.K., Swami and Friends)

The striking bowler Swami is missing on the day of the match. All the players of team are waiting for him till the last moment of the match. He collapses with exhaustion on the middle of the road. A cart man Ranga finds him and informs the sircar officer living in the Travelers’ Bungalow. Like the fathers of some of Narayan’s novels, Swami’s father searches every corner of Malgudi. Finally, in the conventional Indian style, the boy returns home with the help of sircar officer. The novel seems to be over here, but Narayan adds one more touching sight. Swami doesn’t remain pleased on returning home. Mani informs him about Rajam’s father’s transfer and his leaving Malgudi. Swami is shocked to hear the news. He feels ashamed and sense of guilt to see Rajam. The last scene takes place at the railway station. He sends Rajam the tiny volume of Andersen’s *Fair Tales* through Mani as a parting present writing on it ‘To my dearest friend Rajam’. The train leaves the station leaving behind a world of memory for Swami and Mani.

The entire novel focuses on life of school boys. The schoolboys have their own joys and sorrows, fears, hopes expectations and dreams which may seem trivial to adults, but which are much exaggerated by their imagination and seem much more important to them than they would to a an adult person. Even simple or normal situation may give them heavenly joy or deepest frustration.The cricket match becomes a matter of life and death for the boys in the novel. Adults reading about such things may find them absurd and exaggerated.
A lot of admiring remarks have been made by different scholars regarding this book and R.K.Narayan’s creative art of fiction writing. His very close friend who supported him to find the publisher of this first novel in England, Graham Greene praises: ‘It is a book in ten thousand.’ The blurb of *Swami and Friends* reads:

This is far more than a simple narrative of Swami’s adventures- charming and entertaining as they are. By the delicate use of detail sympathetically observed, the author establishes for us the child’s world as the child himself sees it; and beyond, the adult community he will one day belong to-in Swami’s case, the town of Malgudi, which provides the setting of almost all Narayan’s later novels. (blurb)

G.W. Russell also remarks the difference between childhood and boy hood:

In ancient shadows and twilights
Where childhood had strayed
The world’s great sorrows were born
And its heroes were made.
In the lost boyhood of Judas
Christ was betrayed. (G.W.)

Away from vulgarity and violence, social problems, political intrigues, romance of lovers, complexities of human relationships, Narayan takes a reader to another universe of innocence, ignorance and pure fun in *Swami and Friends*. 
The Financial Expert

*The Financial Expert* is the 6th novel by R.K. Narayan. His every novel differs from the earlier one and has his own place in Indian Writing in English, though he tells the story of the same folk of Malgudi. He got a noteworthy break through with his first novel, *Swami and Friends*, highlighting school boys’ world. Then, *Bachelor of Arts*, is a story of an adolescent boy, Chandran, falling and failing in love, running away and returning home. The next is *The Dark Room*, a moving tale of a tortured wife, Savitri. *The English Teacher* is his next fiction based much on his own domestic life. This fiction is followed by *Mr. Sampath*, the story of a clever and enterprising rogue Mr. Sampath. *The Financial Expert* is a new experiment by Narayan about the financial expertise of the protagonist Margayya. It is a fiction regarding the rise and fall of Margayya. As P.S. Sundaram points out:

The Financial Expert, first published by Methuen in 1952, is the story of the rise and fall of Margayya. Margayya has no surname, no initials. Actually it was given to him by his admirers, and means the Path Finder and the Path Shower, the Guide. To poor people perpetually in need, Margayya showed an easy way of making money, benefiting himself, of course, in the process. (P.S., R.K. Narayan as a Novelist)

Apart from the story of Margayya’s up and down of fortune, the novel peeps into father-son relationship, Margayya and his son Balu, an adolescent boy. From the childhood days, Balu proves to be a headache for his father Margayya. He throws his father’s important red account book into street gutter page by page. The father loses his temper but he remains helpless before the kid. He thinks his child has ruined his future by destroying his account book. But, in fact, it proves an important landmark in his life. He succeeds in amassing a lot of wealth by changing his profession of simply giving loan forms and guidance to the farmers and begins another business of publication first and then collecting money from people offering them higher rate of
interest, 20 percent. He becomes rich; his life style changes with the passing of time but remains a strict father for his growing up son Balu. Narayan narrates:

“I have a son studying in high school,” said Margayya. He liked the feel of the word. Studying in High School. He felt very proud of Balu for the moment, but at the same time he felt a tinge of pity at heart. He had been too severe with him during the day. (R.K., The Financial Expert)

R.K. Narayan highlights the conflict between an optimist father Margayya and a poor student, his son Balu. The father dreams bright future for his son. But, on the contrary, the son is dull enough not to clear matriculation exams after three attempts. This kind of struggle is found in many Indian families. The father is a symbol of authority in Indian family system. He takes most of the decisions on behalf of children regarding education, career, job, marriage and many other matters. However, some children like Mali, the son of Jagan in Narayan’s other novel The Vendor of Sweets, and Balu of this novel prove to be disobedient. The father tries to impose his authority upon them and interfere the life of the son. Consequently, rebel takes place. Balu, runs away from home, Mali ignores his father and does whatever he likes. Ultimately, the father has to compromise or withdraw from imposing the parental authority. God doesn’t give everything to everyone. He gives certain permanent problems or weakness to everyone may be the Prime Minister or peon. The poor human being struggles throughout his life on account of that defect. This problem may be in the form of physical defect, financial crises, disobedient children and many more. Margayya achieves in amassing enormous wealth but his worries for his son Balu increases day by day. Narayan brings out this tension:

The next to the subject of money, the greatest burden on his mind was his son. As he sat in his shop and spoke to his clients, he forgot for the time being rest of the world, but the moment he was left alone he started thinking of his son: the boy had failed in his matriculation exam, and that embittered him very
much. He wondered what he should do with him now. Whenever he thought of it, his heart sank within him. “God has blessed me with everything under the sun; I need not bother about anything else in life, but…. But….” (R.K., The Financial Expert)

Margayya tries to overcome this problem by providing every comfort for his son’s education. He engages three tutors at his home, one for every two subjects, and it costs him quite a lot in salaries. Balu’s mother also provides nutritious food during his examinations. They even speak slowly in the house in order to maintain peaceful environment for the boy’s study. But, the result is the same, Balu fails again and again. It is found in many cases that the sincere students study despite being denied some of basic facilities perform excellently in study while sometimes the rich people provide every possible comfort to their children for study but they do not respond well. As there is a proverb: ‘You can take the cattle to water but cannot make it drink it.’, similarly, Margayya facilitates his best for Balu’s study but of no use. P.S.Sundaram comments in this respect:

But in spite of Margayya’s influence in the school as Honorary Secretary, the many private tutors he engages, and his constant advice, promises and threats, the boy proves a sad failure and cannot pass the S.S.L.C. examination even in his third attempt. How can Margayya show his face to the world, he asks his son, when every little idiot passes the examination but Balu cannot? To which the boy replies, logically enough, what business is it of the world? When the father brings home the S.S.L.C. register and confronts his son with it, the latter in a rage tears it up into four quarters and throws it into the street gutter. The dark waters close over the fragments as inexorably as they did earlier over Margayya’s red account book similarly consigned to them by his son. (P.S., R.K.Narayan as a Novelist)
Margayya’s expectations from his son are more than his capacity. He is poor as a student and not interested in academic field. Therefore every attempt made by the father, tutors and teachers fail. The father fails to notice this lack of interest in his son. He thinks about his prestige as an academician of a reputed high school. The people of Malgudi are simple and righteous. Narayan indicates the sense of morality here in Margayya. He can use his influence to help his son in exams but he doesn’t; and Balu talso does not try to misuse his father’s higher authority in his school. Today the situation is different. People of high influence can apply any malpractice for their children during exams. Ultimately it spoils child’s healthy learning. Such children find short cut for success everywhere. Moreover, Margayya feels ashamed for his son who cannot pass in matriculation exams. While in recent days the parents do not feel ashamed for their children even if they are in jail. With the passing of time the norms of morality change in society and it influences the development of children.

Mother is a significant member in Indian family. She maintains every household responsibility and balances of relationship among family members. She finds herself sometimes in critical role when there is clash between her husband and her son. She cannot favor or oppose any. In this novel, Balu’s mother faces such situation. She is helpless witness to a terrific struggle between two positive minded men, for she no longer has any doubt that her son is now a grown up man. She knows Balu’s smoking habit but she keeps this secret to herself since she doesn’t like to set up her husband against him. Balu tells her not to interfere in his personal matters, when she advises him to be more sincere and polite towards his father. She leaves him alone. On the other hand, she doesn’t want to make her husband worried about their son as he feels tired when he returns home at evening. Like a wise woman she avoids conflict in the house and leaves the problem to be resolved itself.

Adolescence is an exciting phase; a boy, neither fears like a child nor understands like an adult. This may create tension for parents. Children are controlled by force or temptation or promises. Swami’s father has full control on the boy in Swami and Friends. His mother informs his father if he makes any mischief. Throughout this novel, it can be observed that the boy remains disciplined in the presence of his father in the home. An adult behaves like a mature man. But, a growing up boy may prove to be a problem. More use of force may make him
aggressive and intense feeling may spoil him. Margayya accuses his wife for spoiling the boy with extreme love. While the wife notices that harsh behavior of her husband has made the boy aggressive and indisciplined. Both may be right. When Margayya scolds his son on his constant failures, the boy replies:

“Don’t talk nonsense, father.” The father is stupefied. He can’t believe that the boy can speak so much. He is offended by the boy’s aggressive manner. He says to his wife, “It’s all your doing. You have been too lenient. You have spoilt him beyond redemption. You with your—“. (R.K., The Financial Expert)

When Balu runs away and his family receives a message (false one) of his death, his mother sobs. She moves towards Margayya and cries:


The father seems more responsible for the boy’s escape from home. The school boy dreams for free life. His excess interference in Balu’s life tortures him. He wishes to live in his way. More insistence for any particular activity may force any boy to rebel.

As it happens in many fictions about adolescents, Balu runs away from home at the climax of his patience. He is tired of daily quarrel with his father. After tearing the S.S.L.C. Register- a very important document of his school, the boy leaves home in anger. Then he is found missing. His father searches for him late at night. The reason for this silent search is his reputation. Margayya is a well-known man in the city. Still he thinks his prestige more than his own child. Narayan comments here on such hard hearted fathers. Margayya doesn’t inform the police. He can’t announce a reward for anyone who traces him. For several days there is no news for the missing son. His mother loses the taste for food. Margayya behaves wildly whenever he is
reminded of the missing son. He declares before his wife dramatically that Balu is not
his son. He further tells that a boy who has an utter disregard for his father’s feelings
is no son. He considers the son as a curse for them sent by God. It is really a serious
and sensitive responsibility to be parent of growing up child.

Narayan’s satire on the hypocrisy of reputed people can be noticed here. Margayya declares that his son has gone on a holiday to Bombay or Madras, and lightly adds:

“Young boys of his age must certainly go out by
themselves and see a bit of the world: I think that’s

Like a politician, he handles the inquiries of people regarding his missing son. People are waiting to comment on others’ weakness. Someone remarks about his son’s failure in matriculation and tells that boys must have at least S.S.L.C. The same person as is responsible for his son’s missing replies this remark in strange way:

Margayya dismissed it as a foolish notion. “What is there in Matriculation? People can learn nothing in schools. I have no faith in our education. Who wants all this nonsense about A squared plus B squared. If a boy does not learn these, so much the better. To be frank, I have got on without learning the A squared and B squared business, and what is wrong with me? Boys must learn things in rough school of life.” (R.K., The Financial Expert)

This kind of double standard of parents may create erroneous impression on the mind of growing up children. The young at this stage begins to develop the sense of morality. They can judge the adults from moral point of view. Margayya applies every possible way to get his son pass the matriculation exam. He has a great value of study. He feels ashamed to be the father of a dull boy who can’t clear this exam after three attempts. But the boy’s result shows little improvement which creates a hope for
him that the boy is perhaps destined to be a doctor. He imagines the wonderful future for Balu, Doctor Balu. But, when the son fails; he considers the education system useless. A dramatic change can be observed in his ideology.

An important incident takes place in the story in the form of a nameless postcard from Madras received by the family informing that Balu is no more in the world. The letter creates panic for the family. Margayya is advised to go to Madras to find out more about it. Perhaps, there is still some chance of his being alive. His trouble is where to go in the big city. He has no any address or name mentioned in the postcard. Like Narayan’s other novels, the father of Swami in Swami and friends, and Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts, Margayya has a challenge to find out the missing son. Luckily, an inspector of police guides him for searching the boy during the train journey towards Madras. He visits the man who had written the postcard. He is a mentally retired man and sends post cards of such news whoever asks him for help. Ultimately, Margayya succeeds to find out the boy working in a cinema. The reunion of father and son is a touching scene. The father feels embarrassed for himself and repents to see Balu in a pitiable condition. His face is wet with tears. However, Balu is not happy to be found. He fears his free life is disturbed again. He asks his father:

“Why couldn’t you have given me up for dead? I was quite happy, seeing pictures every day. I want to be in Madras. I like this place. What are you going to do with me? Make me read for exams I suppose.” (R.K., The Financial Expert)

Balu’s words indicate that an adolescent boy longs for freedom. He is happy with simple but free life without more facility like at home. He doesn’t like to go home with his father. Sometimes parents may prove a great hurdle in the free life of the young. As a father like Margayya considers his son a curse, in a school boy’s mind the father may seem a villain. The boy thinks that his father doesn’t let him live in his own way. Ruskin Bond’s Rusty in the Room on the Roof hits his guardian Mr.Harrison. The boy no longer tolerates his physical and mental torturing and declares rebel.
Finding Balu in pitiable condition, Margayya realizes his mistake. There is a dramatic change in his behavior with Balu. He makes a great compromise with circumstances and his son. In reply to the boy’s hesitation for not returning home again, he says:

“You need not go near books: you can do just as you please,” said Margayya indulgently. He was filled with love for his son. He felt an indescribable pity as he saw the dirty, greasy dress and the famished appearance the boy had acquired. He became absolutely blind to all the dozen persons packed into the compartment. He hugged his shoulders and whispered: “You eat, rest, and grow fat— that is all you are expected to do, and take as much money as you like.” (R.K., The Financial Expert)

In some cases, Parents realize their mistake of handling the adolescents so strictly but too late. They do not learn any lesson from others. Luckily, Balu, and Swami, the school boys return home without any harm. But all boys do not have the same story. Everyday newspapers report that every year hundreds of children are found missing. Such stories of school boys should be a lesson for other parents. Reading literature is fruitful for so many reasons and this is a significant one: ‘Learning from other’s experience’. The fiction about adolescents serves as an important document for the parents of the growing ups.

Each novel of Narayan has its own identity and introduces a different group of characters, plot construction and other novelty. In his first novel Swami and Friends, the story of school boys, he shows the boys spend most of time together. The title itself suggests that this is a story of not only Swami, the hero but also of his friends’, Mani, Rajam, Somu and Sankar.Here, Narayan focuses on the feature of friendship naturally among the school boys. Chandran in Bachelor of Arts, has a fast friend, Mohan. But, Balu’s story in The Financial Expert is different from this point of view. This boy doesn’t have any friend with whom he can share his feelings.
Perhaps, Narayan has deliberately not shown Balu with friends to point out something. If Balu had some good friends, his story would have been different. They might have helped the boy in study and made it easy and interesting for him. It happens in many cases, a bright student inspires his friends to study sincerely. He solves the doubts of his weak or average friends who sometimes hesitate to consult the teacher for guidance. Balu is in high school and his father occupies a higher position in the school trust. Yet he is friendless. He could have many friends, classmates from elementary level to high school.

Strangely, he spends more time with Dr. Pal, an adult, his father’s business partner. Dr. Pal plays a significant role in his life. He arranges Balu’s marriage, puts ideas into his head regarding his father’s fortune, and enrages the son against his father. He is also responsible for taking Balu out every night to drink, gamble and associates with loose women. Margayya, on seeing Brinda, Balu’s wife, in tears, and then his son in the company of Dr. Pal and the prostitutes of the town, loses his control. He pulls the doctor out of his car and beats him. This incident takes him on the path of ruin. Dr. Pal proves to be the villain in well set business of Margayya. He spreads rumor about Margayya’s inability to return the money he has collected on higher interest. The next day there is a long queue of the creditors to collect their money. Soon Margayya finds himself in the same poor condition as he had been in some years ago.

Dr. Pal turns to be a devil for both Balu and his father. Balu develops the addiction of wine and women under the influence of Dr. Pal, an elderly person and friend of his father. This relationship between an adolescent and adult indicates that an adult may spoil or ruin the future of a growing up. As a pre-mature young boy Balu doesn’t know what he is doing. But, Dr. Pal knows very well about the consequences of his action. An adolescent may easily be trapped. Here, Balu becomes the victim of bad habits of an elderly person like an uncle for him.

*Swami and Friends, Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Lord of the Flies* and many such novels highlight the world of youngsters which is fully or partially governed by them. There is no role or little role of adults in these fictions. In *The Financial*
Expert Narayan focuses on the growth of a school boy in the world dominated by the adults and shows that how his development is influenced by elderly authority.
R.K. Narayan is a prolific story teller. His stories reflect realistic presentation of typical South Indian society. His stories are verbal picture of the mixture of various colors of life like the feelings of joy and sorrow, dreams, relationships and so on. He paints this verbal picture with the brush of reality with mild combination of humour as well as gentle irony. Narayan is indeed a genius craftsman of the form of short story. He uses a simple descriptive prose narrating the events without any comment.

A Shadow is a moving tale of an adolescent boy Sambu living with his widow mother. R.K. Narayan creates an unusual situation in this story and presents two different reactions to the given situation. Sambu, a lad feels thrilled to see on the film screen his dead father who had passed away just six months ago. He is excited to watch his father’s film Kumari as if his father has come back. His mother on the other hand finds the experience unbearable. The implied contrast in the two attitudes indicates the power of shadow of a dead man can still wield. The writer manifests the working minds of two different stages of life. Sambu, an adolescent boy is eager to see his father in the theatre screen, while his mother, a widow tries to avoid seeing her dead husband alive again in the film. Sambu being a lad is governed more by feelings and his mother thinks rationally. She is fearful to imagine that her husband is going to speak, move and sing for at least for six hours a day in the theatre three streets off. R.K. Narayan narrates this paradoxical situation with the conversation of the son and his mother:

‘Mother, won’t you also come and see the picture?’
‘No’ ‘Please, please. You must come.’ She had to explain to him how utterly impossible it would be for her to see the picture. The boy had a sort of ruthless logic: ‘Why should it be impossible? Aren’t you seeing his photos, even that big photo on the wall, every day?’ ‘But these photos do not talk, move or sing.’ ‘And yet you prefer them to the picture which has life!’ (R.K., A Shadow)
Ultimately, the film is realesed. Sambu feels great excitement about it. He boasts of his father’s talent. He informs his friend with esteem that his father was paid ten thousand rupees to act in that film Kumari. In addition to that he had himself written the story. Sambu proposes his class-mate to see that film. But he is disappointed by his friend’s unenthusiastic reply. His friend replies that he hates Tamil film and he would not even pass that way. R.K.Narayan brings out here a school boy’s prejudice towards the language. How innocent minds of students are affected by social barriers, narrow-mindedness of adults can be observed in Sambu’s classmate!

R.K.Narayan depicts Sambu’s reaction seeing his father alive again on the screen. He takes his seat in four annas class early and waits eagerly for the picture to begin. He is not interested in trailers and advertisements. Ultimately, his father appears on the screen. In the film his father teaches a little girl arithmetic. Sambu minutely observes every movement on the screen. Strong memories of his father teaching him the same subject overcomes his mind. He compares his father teaching the girl in the reel and him in real when he was alive. When the film is over, the lights are on. Sambu turns back and gazes at the aperture in the projection room as if his father had vanished into it. He feels the world now poorer again without his father. At nine o’clock, he returns home. He continues to talk about his father throughout the dinner. He also requests his mother to see the film but she denies to go for the show.

Sambu being an adolescent is unable to read his mother’s mind in such situation. But, his mother is mature and understands the boy’s enthusiasm. She offers him to go for the film the next days. The boy welcomes this generous proposal and attends the show daily. R.K.Narayan describes the mental condition of this adolescent son:

For a week more, three hours in a day, Sambu lived in his father’s company, and felt depressed at the end every show. Every day it was a parting for him. He longed to sit down and see the night show too, but mother bothered too much about school lessons. Time was precious but mother did not seem to
understand it; lessons could wait, but not father. He envied those who seeing the picture at night. (R.K., A Shadow)

Sambu asks his mother repeatedly to see the film. Unable to stand his persuasions any more, she agrees to see the picture on the last day. They reach the theatre. She sits in women’s class. The writer clearly differentiates the mental conditions of an adolescent boy, Sambu, and an adult person, his mother, when the film is about to begin. The boy being excited to see his father on the screen sits through the trailers and slide advertisements without enthusiasm. While his mother feels a great relief as long as the slide advertisements and trailer pieces last. She feels uneasy to see her dead husband alive again on the screen. She shuts her eyes many times and feels pain. She is deeply affected by an unbearable scene of her husband moving, talking, dancing and doing other things as if he had come back to real life.

On the other hand, Sambu, sitting in his seat on the men’s side, enjoys seeing his father in the newspaper scene of the film. Meanwhile, he hears a burst of sobbing in the women’s class. Lights are on; the show stops. Sambu curses this interruption; he stands up on a bench to see what the matter is. He finds his mother being lifted from the floor. He immediately reacts: ‘This is my mother! Is she also dead?’ (R.K., A Shadow). He screams and jumps over the barrier. He comes to know that his mother has only fainted and nothing has happened to her. When Sambu’s mother opens her eyes, she says: ‘Let us go away.’ (R.K., A Shadow)

Sambu immediately fetches a jutka and decides to take her home. While going out he hears from the darkened hall a familiar voice of his father. On hearing it Sambu’s heart becomes heavy and he bursts into tears. He is affected both by his mother’s breakdown and by the feeling that this is the final parting from his father. They are changing the picture next day. Here R.K.Narayan depicts the pathetic situation of an adolescent mind.

At the end of the story, Sambu is eager to see his father shouting at Kumari, the little girl in the film. When the show stops, he curses the interruption. But when he comes to know that his own mother has fainted, he rushes to her. He respects her
wish to go home leaving the last show of the film incomplete. Sambu all of a sudden, appears a mature and responsible son. He has already lost his father and fears lest he may lose his mother too. He controls the situation and leaves the theatre with his mother. In Rabindranath Tagore’s short story *The Post Master* Ratan ceases to be a little girl and at once becomes the mother and nurse of the ill postmaster. Similarly, Sambu like a mature one handles the situation and gives up his desire to see his dead father on screen for the last time for the sake of his living mother.

Adolescents can appear mature, responsible in crisis. However, it doesn’t mean all adolescents react in the same way in critical conditions. But there are many such incidents we come across in real life as well as in literature. History also witnesses many young princes who had to take charge of the kingdom as the king at very young stage of life. Therough Sambu’s story R.K.Narayan reflects how a school boy manifests ability to overcome the possible crisis. He has departed from his father forever and wishes not to lose the elder. No elder is present to guide him to take the right decision. At once, Sambu decides to take his mother home. He knows it well that his father is on screen for few minutes while his mother will be with him for a long time.
Iswaran

Every story of R.K.Narayan presents a different picture of Malgudi expressing every aspect of the life of Malgudi people especially the ups and downs of middle class or lower middle class or classless folk. His gallery of powerful characters ranging from children to aged people draws our attention. Iswaran is a story of a student of Intermediate class. R.K.Narayan depicts here the inner conflict going on in the mind of Iswaran, an adolescent boy. The story points out how stress built in the mind of a school boy takes him to madness and how madness results into his death. It is fact that in contemporary era, students face stress or burden of education. But it is equally true that it was too in the days of R.K.Narayan. The cases are increasing today unquestionably, but during Narayan’s time students’ suicide cases were taking place too. Today a student may commit suicide mainly because of failure in competition and uncertainty of future while earlier the students’ suicide chiefly was due to social status. Iswaran, in this story feels ashamed because of his constant failures in Intermediate exams. His family also has such approach.

The very first paragraph of the story introduces the theme of the story:

When the whole of student world in Malgudi was convulsed with excitement, on a certain evening in June when the Intermediate Examination results were expected, Iswaran went about his business, looking very unconcerned and detached. (R.K., Ishwaran)

Iswaran has failed repeatedly in Intermediate class. His parents sympathise with him on his first failure. But, subsequently they grow more critical and unpleasant. After repeated failures they lose all interest in his learning and examinations. Iswaran is discouraged by his parents who are like ordinary parents. He requires support from them while they often ask him to discontinue his studies and try something useful.

Poor Iswaran’s nervousness increases out side his home too. The whole town makes fun of him. People pass funny remarks about his constant failures. Such
attitude adds fuel into fire. Iswaran is already tense regarding his results. And his family as well as the entire town makes him more uneasy. He is not a brilliant boy but surely he is a sincere student. He is still not tired of attempts to pass his examination. He believes in the theory: ‘Try and try until you succeed.’ He also requests his parents to give him one more chance. He clings to university education with a ferocious devotion. On the contrary, his father pays no attention on his interest and hard work. He sharply comments on him:

You are the greatest optimist in India at the moment; but for this obstinate hope you would never have appeared for the same examination every year. (R.K., Ishwaran)

This remark seems very common in average Indian family. When a student fails, he is laughed at and discouraged by people. Atleast his family should support and encourage him. And when the family fails to understand his tense situation, he turns to be more hopeless and negative. Inspiring recent Bollywood movies like Tare Zamee pe, Three Idiots seem to have failed to create a long time appeal to the parents. In the cinema hall, the parents are impressed by the inspiring message of the films regarding their adolescent children’s education. But out side the hall, they soon forget the sympathetic approach towards their children. So many parents especially educated parents fail to understand the mental condition of their children when they fail in some important exams. They mostly taunt and pass critical remarks on their failures and demoralize them. As a result, incidents of students’ suicide are found in daily news papers.

Though Iswaran is a story of only few hours, it reveals universal fact regarding students’ world. On the day of result, almost all students feel a kind of uncomfortable situation, restlessness and tension. They may do any activity but their mind is constantly thinking about result. R.K.Narayan makes use a very appropriate word for this condition, ‘mask’. He points out that on the result day, Iswaran washes his hair, combs it and puts on a well-ironed coat that seems luxurious. He swings his arm, tries to look comfortable and goes to cinema. But all this is only a mask. Under it, there is a fearful soul longing and praying for success. To divert his mind he
attends both shows of at the Palace Talkies. There is not a single student except Iswaran in the whole theatre. All the students of the town are near the Senate House eagerly waiting for their results. Iswaran alone feels unhappy to be there. The diversion in the form of white screen, music and shouting, the cry of pedlars, selling soda, comments of the spectators somehow helps him to forget the Senate House and student life for few hours.

In the second show, Iswaran notices in the semi-darkness, several groups of boys in the hall-happy groups. He is sure that they must have all passed and come to celebrate their success. In 1960s very limited means of entertainment were available in the town like Malgudi and cinema house was the centre of attraction. But he soon gets tired and comes out of theatre. He compares himself with other students. He says to himself: ‘I am not fit to live. A fellow who can not pass an examination….’ (R.K., Ishwaran)

This idea develops in his mind. He thinks death as the solution to all his difficulties. This thought proves to be the turning point in his life. Many students under pressure of exams choose this option to solve their problems. Such cases are published in daily news papers.

Iswaran has decided to end his life in the river Sarayu. On account of fear to fail, he avoids to check the result of recent exam. He reaches to the river bank and walks few steps in water. It is nearing midnight. He looks over his shoulder at the cluster of university building. He finds a light burning on the porch of Senate House. He thinks to take a last look at the result board. With great excitement, he looks through the numbers of people who have passed in third class. But there is not his number-501 in the list. He thinks about people’s reaction and about river. Then he gazes at the second class columns after first class list. He looks fixedly at each number and finds his number in this list. All of a sudden, his mind runs fast. He plans for future. He comments on the people who make fun of him. He imagines that he is conconqueror. He loses control over his mind. Finally, he rushes to the river and sinks into silent water of Sarayu. Perhaps, it is true that one can not bear too much and unexpected happiness.
Next afternoon Iswaran’s dead body is discovered. Meanwhile, some persons hand over his coat and the slip of paper with the inscription:

My dear father: By the time you see this letter I shall be at the bottom of Sarayu. I don’t want to live. Don’t worry about me. You have other sons who are not such dunces as I am. (R.K., Ishwaran)

Few words of Iswaran’s suicide note reveal a harsh reality of our education system as well as society’s approach towards average students. People of the town and Iswaran’s family members label him as a failure, a dull student. As a result, he also begins to believe that he is dunce and cannot pass exam. He expects only pass class even if he has worked hard. When he finds his number in the list of second class students, he reacts in a strange way. This reaction shows how people around him have made him believe that he is poor at study. He loses confidence and hope on his own hard work and expects only pass class. For family members, neighbours and other people Iswaran’s case is like a red signal. We should be alert not to make any student another Iswaran. This is a pathetic story that shows how failure and frustration lead dreadful consequences. It is different type of story that points out the bitter reality of education system and pitiable condition of an average student.
Mother and Son

Mother and son is a simple story of a widow mother and her growing up son, Ramu. It is like R.K.Narayan’s another story, A Shadow highlighting two characters widow mother and her juvenile son. However, the story teller peeps into mother-son relationship from different point of view. Institution of marriage in India has its own place. Discussion goes on in every family regarding marriage when the son or daughter grows up. Usually, meal time is more suitable for such light discussion about engagement and marriage. Ramu’s mother, the central character of the story initiates the talk of his marriage during dinner time in the beginning of the story.

An adolescent son’s mother finds her son to be fit for marriage in many communities in India even today. She begins to persuade her son for marriage. She dreams of beautiful, well-mannered and good-natured daughter in law. On the other hand, the son struggles to settle in life. He is either studying or struggling to learn some skills for bread and butter. Here, Ramu’s mother insists that he should marry her brother’s fourteen years daughter. Besides, she also thinks to get handsome dowry with the girl. She makes use of every trick to convince the boy. She makes the most disputable argument with the boy:

A man’s luck changed with marriage. The harvest depends not on the hand that holds the plough but on the hand which holds the pot. (R.K., Mother and Son)

When she finds that the boy is not ready to fulfil her wish, she thinks to pressurize the boy emotionally. The narrator depicts her thought process:

Earlier in the evening Ramu’s mother had decided that if he refused again or exhibited the usual sullenness at the mention of marriage, she would leave him to his fate; she would leave him absolutely alone even if she saw him falling down before a coming train. She would
never more interfere in his affairs. (R.K., Mother and Son)

Ramus’ mother fails to read his mind. His condition is pitiable. He can not get through his Intermediate even at the fourth attempt; he can not get a job even at twenty rupees a month. In addition to that, his mother insists him to marry. Because of marriage at such crucial stage of life, the career of a boy may be disturbed. The boy may not be capable to shoulder family responsibility as well as economic burden. But Ramu’s mother does not care for such difficulties as their own life also might have married earlier and faced adverse conditions. Today atleast the teen age boys are in a better condition in matrimonial system in comparison to earlier time. They have a greater scope for career as average age for marriage is majorityly above twenty years.

What is more in Ramu’s denial for marriage with his cousin is his dislike for the girl. He always feels that if he marries, he will marry a girl like Rezia, whom he has seen in two or three Hindi films. Adolescents may live more in dream world. They are attracted to film stars. Some times, they dream to marry their favourite star. Ramu does not consider that he is an ordinary boy; while Rezia is a film star. Since he is adolescent, he ignores the vast difference between him and his dream girl, Rezia. He is governed more by fantasy world rather than reason and reality of life. And he is not alone to have such whims; most of young people live in romantic world.

The conflict between enthusiastic mother and disobedient son, Ramu, increases. His mother tries her best to persuade him. She plays every trick but in vein. She fails to understand his feelings, interest, willingness and working of mind. She tortures him. The poor son requests her to stop the issue. When the boy criticizes the food, she taunts him: ‘If you are so fastidious, work and earn like all men. Throw down the money and demand what you want. Don’t command when you are a paurer.’ Such insulting words by his own mother hurt him.

After the supper, Ramu goes out in disturbed mood leaving his mother alone. She first thinks that the boy has become indifferent and irresponsible. But soon she begins to worry about him. After all she is a mother. She thinks where he has gone. She repents for her bitter words for him. R.K.Narayan peeps here into the working of
the mind of a mother of an adolescent boy. Her anxiety increases every moment. She fears for some unwanted step by the boy. She can not sleep. She imagines horrible things about him. It is really a challenging task to handle a growing up boy. R.K.Narayan expresses the stream of thoughts going on in the mind of Ramu's mother:

She did not dare to contemplate what he might have done with himself. Gradually she came to believe that her words during the meal had driven him to suicide. She sat up and wept. She was working herself to a hysterical pitch. When she closed her eyes to press out the gathering tears, the vision of her son’s body floating in Kukanahalli Tank came before her. His striped shirt and mill dhoti were sodden and clung close to his body. His sandals were left on one of the tank steps. His face was bloated beyond all recognition. (R.K., Mother and Son)

The climax of the story takes place when the frightened mother screams aloud and jumps from the pyol. She rushes to the old Agrhar Street. She passes a sleepless night and reaches the tank. She feels relieved when she finds him sleeping on one of the benches that lined the bund. She shakes him vigorously. He sits up rubbing his eyes. She takes him home under great excitement. The son is absolutely in the dark about the mother’s condition.

*Mother and Son* is undoubtedly a believable story about the love between a mother and her teenage son. Like all of Narayan's works, it is beautifully written. He tells ordinary stories extraordinarily well. He takes you through his extraordinary worksto Malgudi, far from the clamour and commotion of urban India. Malgudi is a place where change is incremental and unhurried. It connects with a rural hinter-land, and jungle and forest are never far away. It teems with life, abounds with color. To wander any street, peer through a window or push open a door is to encounter a character. In compared to Western society; Indian society is not liberal in terms of
marriage. Western youth believes in love marriage while majority of Indians have to follow arranged marriage tradition. The children have to compromise with parents and marry the person selected by their elders.
Naga

As it is noted earlier in this study, R.K.Narayan presents ordinary people in his fiction through his imaginative town Malgudi, majority of his characters belong to middle class, below middle class or no class people. One fact regarding Malgudi folk is that though it is not a big city, there resides variety of people. From peon to higher official, common vendor to well established trade man, and many other kind of people ranging from children to grand parents live together with their dreams, hopes and struggle of life. Naga is a short story about relationship between man and animal. He belongs to no class category residing in the colony of huts. They are mutually dependant on each other for food. Their bond proves to be even stronger than blood ties. This is a story of an adolescent boy who lives in Malgudi with his father, a snake charmer. They are very poor and depend on the snake Naga for livelihood.

The principal character of this story, the boy is brought up in a different way. He doesn’t get opportunity for schooling. This motherless child is brought up in neglected and slum locality. He is compelled to assist his father at very young age. He loses all pleasures of childhood. The earlier two stories of this study A Shadow and Mother and Son highlight mother-son relationship. The boys in these stories have lost their father. On the other hand, the present story narrates the story of a boy who has lost his mother. He lives with his father. The boy has to work in stead of playing and study at the stage of boyhood. R.K.Narayan narrates his pitiable condition:

The boy had followed his father ever since he could walk, and when he attained the age of ten his father let him handle Naga and harangue his audience in his own style. (R.K., Naga)

As human beings like the company of birds and animals, the boy in the story is attracted towards a monkey. He asks his father to catch it and involve in their family. His father cleverly traps the monkey and the boy gets one more companion in addition to Naga. The monkey is given a name ‘Rama’ like the sanake whose name is Naga. But a strange thing to note here is that the boy or his father is not named by the story teller. The boy trains Rama and soon it becomes popular. They
travel widely, performing at all market fairs, and earn money for their livelihood. The boy develops tricks to handle the snake and monkey to entertain people of Malgudi.

Unfortunately, the boy’s father proves to be irresponsible and hard hearted. He goes away one early morning leaving the boy alone to face struggle of life. The boy has already lost his mother at early stage of life and now his father, his only relative in this selfish world abandons him. The boy feels some relief when he finds eighty paise in the lid of the basket. He soon leaves boyhood behind and steps into adulthood. The narrator describes this situation:

He felt promoted to adulthood, handling so much cash. He felt rich but also puzzled at his father’s tactics. Ever since he could remember, he had never woken up without finding his father at his side. He had a foreboding that he was not going to see his father any more. (R.K., Naga)

The sentence ‘He felt promoted to adulthood.’ indicates a lot. When the boy’s father goes away leaving some cash for him, alone in the world, the boy feels shocked. But he also feels something like ‘self reliance’. He feels that he is capable now to handle his responsibilities as he is not a child now. Circumstances mold human beings. A common boy living with his family may not feel like this. He does not face the world directly because of parents’ shalter. In some cases, he may not be capable to be self reliance even at adult age on account of parents’ over interference in his life. However, the boy in the present story of Naga feels promoted to adulthood all of a sudden. The reason is he has no other alternative. He has to be a grown person in this competitive world, as Darvin’s theory says: ‘Fittest is survived on the earth.’ He begins to struggle. In R.K.Narayan’s words:

The boy found that he could play the pipe, handle the snake and feed it also- all in the same manners as his father used to. Also, he could knock off the fangs whenever they started to grow. He earned
enough each day, and as the weeks and months passed, he grew taller, and the snake became progressively tardy and flabby and hardly stried its coils. The boy never ceased to sigh for the monkey. The worst blow his father had dealt his was the kidnapping of his monkey. (R.K., Naga)

A child needs the shalter of parents at every stage especially before adulthood. It has its own place in joint family system in India. The presence of parents provides a kind of safety and warmth to the children. The boy in this story Naga has lost his mother and his father does not sympathise with him or shows any affection or pity for him. In fact, he is expected to perform the role of the boy’s mother in addition to being a father. But he proves to be irresponsible. The poor boy thus loses the blessing hands of parents. When the boy sobs in loneliness, a neighbouring woman consoles him. She treats him pathetically. She tells him that she knew his mother. The mention of his mother makes him cry. This emotional scene is effectively narrated by the story teller:

She gently patted his head and said, “Ah, poor child! I knew your mother. She was a good girl. That she should have left you adrift like this and gone heavenward!” Although he had no memory of his mother, at the mention of her, tears rolled down his cheeks, and he licked them off with relish at corner of his mouth. (R.K., Naga)

An infant requires mother physically more, while an adolescent needs the warm and affection of mother more. The absence of mother makes the child poor and miserable. In real life as well as in literature such poor children are found who have lost either father or mother or both. The stories of A Shadow and Mother and Son show that the boys lose their father. In contrast to it, the short story like Naga, and novels like The Room on the Roof, The Vendor of Sweet important characters Kishan and Mali lose their mother. And the adolescent characters like Ratan, in short story The Post Master, and Kim, Tom, Rusty are presented ill-fated, poor and orphan in
respective novels *Kim*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Room on the Roof*. They face the struggle of life alone.

Perhaps, it seems true that a mother can alone bring up children in a better way than a father. It may be a natural gift to her that she can perform both roles well, the role of a mother as well as of a father. It makes a noteworthy difference how an adolescent is brought up in the absence of father, mother or both. The boy in this story *Naga* is in strange condition whose mother has died and father is alive but not with him.

The reason for the disappearance of the boy’s father here is a woman. In fact, the widower father is attracted towards a mean woman who is married. The boy observes his father’s attraction towards the woman. At pre-adolescent phase, boys/girls develop curiosity towards sex. They ask many questions regarding sexual organs, man and woman relationship and a lot more. The boy in this story tries to know why his father visits the woman in blue sari particularly when her husband is not present at home. He waits for his father outside the door of her house. When his father comes out, the boy asks many questions that his father tries to avoid or to answer incorrectly. The following conversation between the boy and his father reveals that the boy wants to learn about the relationship between his father and the woman while his father tries to hide or avoid the matter:

“What did you do there?” asked the boy, trying to look sound and innocent, and the man said severely, “You must not ask questions.” “Who is she?” “Oh, she is a relative,” the man said. To further probing questions he said, “I went in to drink tea. You’ll be thrashed if you ask more questions, little devil.” (R.K., *Naga*)

R.K. Narayan introduces in this story a pitiable condition of a growing up boy whose mother has died and father is irresponsible towards him. Narayan’s literary world shows common men’s life living in Malgudi, their joy and sorrow, success and failure. The story *Naga* points out how an adolescent boy longs for
parents’ affection. The boy struggles for his livelihood and ultimately manages himself to live independently. Adolescents, in adverse circumstances may prove capable to fight. Difficulties make them mature and self reliant at growing up phase.

In the forth chapter of this study, the researcher discusses how R.K. Narayan depicts the youngsters in his fictious works. Swami, Mani, Rajam, Balu, Iswaran, Ramu etc. are immortal adolescents characters Narayan has ever portrayed. Referring this list of characters, it can be stated that Narayan’s chief interest is found in male adolescents. Like his most of the novels and short stories are male dominant, his fiction about the juvenile follows the same pattern. His young protagonist are ordinary human being and in many cases, they are unable to face adversities. Ultimately, they prefer to run away rather than face the problem. They lack fighting spirit.
Works cited


