Third Chapter

Burden of a Nation
Anti-colonialism diversified into many strands in India as it did in the rest of the colonised world. The nature of resistance was uncharacteristically divergent and widely varied in practice. It is practically impossible to map the subtle and diverse history of anti-colonial resistance in the country in its reality. And, our attempts at tracing the histories of resistant movements are mere reconstructions of what we are led to believe to have happened by a range of texts. It has become a popular strategy to view nationalism and anti-colonial resistance as predominantly cultural. In order to accept this perspective on anti-colonial resistance discourses it is necessary to be willing to theorise colonialism as primarily a cultural phenomenon. This understanding of imperialism-being persistently flouted by many theorists-, like the psychoanalytical-centred perception of colonialism, chooses to look at the world from the wrong end of the telescope.

The basic presumptions of the European project of colonialism are rooted in a deep-seated faith in the cardinal principles of essentialism. Very often the fundamental precepts of essentialism that provide a fortifying logistic support to political economy that informs imperialism are grossly
ignored by postcolonialists. The racist ideology that can often be found underscoring colonial economic enterprise has to be countered at the ideological and epistemological planes meant to prepare ground for larger anti-colonial resistance movement. Any critiquing of the modes of cultural colonisation has to stay grounded in the materiality of the area of operation of the colonial apparatuses. These issues of colonialism, anti-colonial resistance and the cultural implications resulting from the factors of incompatibility and the non-availability of the mutually sensitive interfacial spaces are too complex to be referred to in passing.

Yet, these thorny subjects are closely related to the problems of nationalism and modernity. European as they are in origin, practice and essence, these two concepts have generated more heated debates and polemics than any other in postcolonial theories. Any understanding of Narayan’s outlook to the world around him has to be in relation to the discourses of nationalism that were in circulation in pre-independent India. His mode of resistance, if it can be discovered to have informed his works in its unique ways, requires to be related to other forms of cultural resistance that existed in that period.

Europe had prepared itself, of course self-consciously, for the arrival of nationalism that swept across the entire continent in the nineteenth-century.
The reasons marshalled in support of this argument are premised on the assumption that there were no substantially marked contradictions between social and cultural micro-dynamics on the one hand and the triumphant nationalism on the other. The problem with the non-West, it has been resoundingly argued by postcolonial theorists, in coming to grips with the emergence of nationalism was that these societies and culture were hardly equipped to handle as big and as radical an idea like nationalism. In the Indian subcontinental societies an acute awareness of the lack of preparedness to allow nationalism permeates their modes of existence takes different forms which range from efforts at self-training to religious revivalism. This Euro-centred view of history tends to see nationalism as something that comfortably gels with metanarratives of democracy, modernity and progress.

However, we know that nationalism has meant something more intriguing and protean in our national context than something which can be comprehended in terms of our strengths and inabilities. Partha Chatterjee argues that this kind of shallow schematisation is typical of liberal political line of theorisation. For the European historians and political thinkers the phenomena that occur in any part of the world are an integral part of a non-exclusive grandnarrative that has been taking a definitive shape under the influence of the western civilisation. Apart from being seen as the sole
ideology for the realisation of the universal urge for political liberty, nationalism has often been theorised as a potential source of violence and rift. Attempts to defend nationalism in terms of the political ends that are hoped to be accomplished by it are often dangerously poised to make every crime appear and sound normal. This is what Partha Chatterjee says about the attempts to incorporate the idea of nationalism into a larger juggernaut of the master-narrative of progress:

Thus, it could be argued that given the very special sociological circumstances in which new nations have to struggle to modernise themselves, it might be perfectly rational strategy for them, in a sense, to postpone the democratic consummation of their efforts until the economic structures of their societies are sufficiently industrialized and their social institutions are modernized. An empiricist sociology can do wonderful things to resolve the moral dilemmas of a liberal conscience. (5)

It often becomes a very taxing task to map the patterns of cultural resistance to the myth of progress so suavely designed with gilded streaks of democracy and nationalism. As it has been pointed out some of the writers adopted subtle forms of resistance that astoundingly defy any rationalisation and theorisation. They chose to evolve the methods and strategies of resistance that were not notably confrontational in terms of their engagement with the ruling cultural order. The non-confrontational modes of resistance
were much more difficult to discern, to keep track of and to master. They are also evasively subversive and, at times, appearing as such can be stultifyingly complicitious. It is this problem of the impossibility of discovering the affiliative tendencies of the works of Narayan that prevents us from defining his writing in political terms. Malgudi is predominantly a pre-independent Indian village that retains the basic ideological formative traces unto Narayan’s last work. It does not develop any extraordinary dimensions in the course of its growth that challenge the essential structure. Malgudi keeps refusing to evolve into a non-Bramhinical India. The moment of its genesis in a pre-independent India continuously reproduces itself well into 1980s, hardly admitting any possibility of change.

One wonders as to where this need for remaining intransigently immutable springs from and one also catches oneself feeling amazed at the strength of Narayan to resist changes. This kind of attitude cannot be cursorily dismissed as being rooted in a strong desire to protect one’s world against all adversities. His desire to be impervious to change may also be construed as Narayan’s subtle form of protest and resistance. The patterns of resistance to be found in his fiction are subtle, but strangely familiar: it does not take many efforts to trace them to the land of their origin. Sartre, in his preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, talks about this kind of influence in quite crude words:
In the colonies the truth stood naked, but the citizens of the mother country preferred it with clothes on: the native had to love them, something in the way mothers are loved. The European elite undertook to manufacture a native elite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of Western culture; they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, whitewashed. These walking lies had nothing left to say to their brothers; they only echoed. From Paris, from London, from Amsterdam we would utter the words "Parthenon! Brotherhood!" and somewhere in Africa or Asia lips would open "... then on! ... therhood!" It was the golden age.(7)

This kind of accusation could be very crude and overreductive with reference to Narayan and his fiction. Yet, the point remains that due to the unfathomable ambiguity of Narayan’s writing in terms of its political stance it renders itself susceptible to the allegations of complicity. The present chapter proposes to discuss the above issues drawing on the four novels written in the initial years of his career. *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938) and *The English Teacher* (1945) are the main focus of the chapter which traces the ways in which the native intellectual negotiates the predominant cultural discourses of the colonial power. It also tries to understand how, Narayan –being part of the native intellectual elite-
employs the native cultural and intellectual resources to counter colonial ideology and power discourses. Of these four novels it is Swami and Friends, which appeared in 1935 as a result of many efforts made by Narayan and Greene, which sets the definitive tone of his other three pre-independent novels.

This work can be taken to be representative of Narayan’s views and attitude to British Empire and everything it was believed to stand for. This is also one work that can be found struggling to come to terms with the problem of striking a balance between the apparently irreconcilable cultural modes of living. Swami and His Friends originally had a different title and Narayan went by the name Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Narayan Swami both of which he was persuaded into changing as a gesture of compromise to have his first work published. It appears on hindsight that he was willing to make many sacrifices in order to get started as a recognized English writer. This was the time when there could be very little confusion as to how the thriving political scheme of things stood; the ideological battle lines were perspicuously drawn. If one chose to be confounded over the contemporary cultural and ideological discourses it should be understood to have been done so purposely and purposefully.
The line of argument this chapter means to tread follows the hypothetical view that the lack of clarity in terms of cultural affiliations Narayan’s works seem to betray is a carefully contrived ruse and has a particular intent to it. This becomes manifest in *Swami and His Friends* and is reinforced by other three novels this chapter deals with. It is interesting to note the efforts made by Narayan to get *Swami* published which he vividly recounts in his *My Days*. More fascinating is what Narayan wanted done to his first novel on its being rejected. He says:

*My friend and neighbour Purna, who used to hop over the wall and come to listen to my reading of Swami and Friends, had left in August 1931 for Oxford, promising to find a publisher for my book while he was there. When I had completed the novel, I faithfully dispatched it to Allen and Unwin and when it was returned, to another publisher and then another. I had got used to getting back my manuscript with unfailing regularity once every six weeks-two weeks onward journey, two weeks sojourn on a publisher’s desk, and two weeks homeward journey with a rejection slip pinned to it; all in all it provided me with six weeks of hope! I had got used to this as an almost mechanical process and had shed all emotions surrounding a rejection. The last publisher to return it to me was Dent, and I had advised them in my covering letter to forward the manuscript when rejected to Purna at Exeter College, Oxford. I sent a parallel letter to Purna advising to weigh the manuscript with a stone and drown it in the Thames.*

(127)
The last sentence is much more revealing than the author permits it to be. Narayan knows where he wants his works should be drowned as he knows where they should be published. Published as and where it was desired by author *Swami* has to be read in line with and against a cultural backdrop that does not need to be exclusively Indian. And, significantly how India was envisaged in 1930s and 1940s has to be veritably different when the ideas of nation and cultural nationalism were very fluid. The world Narayan creates is shot through with bafflingly cultural contradictions and discrepancies; the generic and literary tradition of *Swami* is unmistakably English. Yet, the idea of India, as it is envisioned by a Tamil Brahmin, permeates Malgudi in its essential form and content. Bred on English literature and with an Indian elitist’s esoteric penchant for European culture, Narayan creates a partly surrealistic India that remains outside the reach of the subaltern India. *Swami* is simultaneously Indian and its contents are often flabbergastingly unlike it. The experience of going to school has always remained a greedily-coveted prerogative in India since long before Narayan, by virtue of his caste, was bestowed on this privilege and 90 years after it more than half of the Indian children continue to be deprived of this experience. As such the novel that deals with such privileged experiences has to be characteristically elitist and singularly Bramhinical. The apparently apolitical tone and texture of the novel are capable of tricking the reader into senselessly accepting the ‘attributive neutrality of the novelist.
The points of confrontation in the novel are much subtler and notoriously elusive, and often work as thematic strategies forcing the reader to think about the novel in deceptive circles. Colonialism, it must be insisted, did not simply bring the colonizer and the native to a straightforward bilateral confrontation. The category of the colonizer and the native is, contrary to the accepted notion of simplicity of its theorization, notoriously an untheorisable space which persistently defies the attempts at conceptualization. It is not only the colonizer/categorizing subject who stands to gain from homogenization of the native subject, even though that is what one is led into blindly believing by the orthodox postcolonial theories. The native elitist power centres have different sets of dynamics and variables operative in the process of creating the idea of homogenized native subject. Quite frequently this elitist strategy conflates the contradictions and dissent within the category of the colonized other. The terms of engagement between the colonizer and the colonized are unsustainably (both empirically and conceptually) reduced to a simplistic bipolarized dialectically cultural encounter. This immensely profits both the colonizing and the colonized elitist subjects. Subsumed in this fierce confrontation between the genetically-disposed Eurocentric white man and the ruling native are the categories of the subaltern other. The political and cultural power struggles between the native ruling class and the ruled take on arcane dimensions with the cultural
strategies like writing in English fortifying the elitist efforts to consolidate its cultural dominance.

The following passage taken from *Swami and Friends* is indicative of the line Narayan wanted the fight between the colonizer and the colonized to be on lines of, whereas the real friction was on much subtly-defined lines between the classes of people all of who necessarily did not come from outside:

*He then turned to Christianity. 'Now see our Lord Jesus. He could cure the sick, relieve the poor, and take us to Heaven. He was a real God. Trust him and he will take you to Heaven; the kingdom of Heaven is within us.' Tears rolled down Ebenezar's cheeks when he pictured Jesus before him. Next moment his face became purple with rage as he thought of Sri Krishna: "Did our Jesus go gadding about with dancing girls like your Krishna? Did our Jesus go about stealing butter like that arch-scoundrel Krishna'? Did our Jesus practise dark tricks on those around him?" He paused for breath. The teacher was intolerable to-day. Swaminathan's blood boiled. He got up and asked, 'If he did not, why was he crucified?' The teacher told him that he might come to him at the end of the period and learn it in private. Emboldened by this mild reply, Swaminathan put to him another question, 'If he was a God, why did he eat flesh and fish and drink wine?' As a brahmin boy it was inconceivable to him that a God should be a*
non-vegetarian. In answer to this, Ebenezar left his seat, advanced slowly
towards Swaminathan, and tried to wrench his left ear off. (4)

This is how a zealot Christian missionary and an orthodox Brahmin
may have fought over the issue of the putative superiority of their respective
religions, but it is unlikely that this tenor of encounter marked the nature of
the general attitude of the Indian masses. The resistance is not to be
characterised in terms of the war of two civilisations or two religions, which
Narayan knows better than any of his contemporary non-Brahmins. Yet, he
carelessly hangs on to this non-expanding discourse in hope of appealing to
the white reader with his uncompromising candour. The construction of the
binary between Jesus and Krishna is deceitfully posited as the cardinal point
of difference that divides the ruler and the ruled. The Indian nationalism of
the 1930s was distinctly Hindu or more precisely Bramhinical by definition.
The metanarrative of Indian nationalism constructed by the leaders of the
Congress party was unqualifiedly Hindu, though its terms were relatively
liberal---as liberal as Gandhi’s thoughts are said to have been. Even though
most of the discourses of nationalism were ideological reproduction of
European models, the perceptions of pre-colonial Indian polity and society
greatly influenced these discourses. Most of these discourses and notions
were obviously romantic, idealistic and unwarrantedly nostalgic. The
prominent leaders of anti-colonial resistance movement chose to construct an
overreductive and single-layered view of India because of their sanskritised background. Majority of these leaders earnestly believed that all Hindu gods did not eat meat, for their knowledge of multiple modes of living that existed in India was next to nothing.

This has been the case with most of the Indian-English writers who seem to believe that the country they live in is as simple as Malgudi. Narayan’s idea of India is intriguingly simple, devoid of inconvenient and uncomfortable aspects that characterise the real country. This portrayal of microcosmic India called Malgudi has drawn on a set of carefully selected sources and resources that are sweepingly exclusionist. Here is what Narayan admits about his knowledge of the part of India he lives in and the construction of Malgudi in his interview with Stephen Graubard:

I know only about my part of the country, a little; and of course, Mysore. I don’t know rural Mysore. I don’t like villages. I don’t even know the whole of Karnataka, though I have visited all parts of the state. I have written about Karnataka, but not as fiction. My fiction is set in my own background, though Malgudi is imaginary. Malgudi is fixed in the 1930s, and that gives me extraordinary freedom. I can even put a lighthouse there if I want to, though there is no coast near Malgudi. (234)
There is a lot more to this apparently frank admission than that meets the eye. Swami does not seem to make any commendable efforts to defend himself from the different forces of the encroaching Western culture, nor is his adherence to the values of the world he hails from is noticeably ardent. Yet, his ontological predicament does not appear to be troubled by a sense of discomfort or existentialist angst at being torn between two incompatible worlds. The Mission School Swami attends is not something which he looks at with absolute disdain or indifference. Narayan accepts the School as an unobtrusively inseparable part of the general scheme of things in Malgudi. Like many other English institutions, the Mission School is there in Malgudi to stay. The best way of countering the English education is by learning to live with it and, if possible, master it. Yet, one does not note any of the novels of Narayan betraying hints of a sworn and resolute antipathy for what the English represent. It is this brand of nationalism, if it can be termed as such, which transcends the simple logic of resistance and confrontational politics. Between the world Swami belongs to and the world he manages to integrate himself with there is a silenced and elided universe that the novel seems to hardly acknowledge the presence of.

The thesis is not unmindful of the efforts to see the very corpus of colonial writing as intrinsically oppositional; this tenor of postcolonial theorisation very often ends up trying to defend the untenable, keeping in its
explicit ideological agenda. The ambivalence exhibited by the colonial writers is often attributed to the process of transition from colonialism to freedom. This unsustainable view marks much of postcolonial theory which has determinedly refused to recognise the conspicuously drawn battle lines. Bhabha is the most prominent of such prevaricating argument. He declares in his introduction to *Nation and Narration* as to how this ambivalence characterises colonial writing:

> If the ambivalent figure of the nation is a problem of its transitional history, its conceptual indeterminacy, its waverings between vocabularies, then what effect does this have on narratives and discourses that signify a sense of 'nationness': the Heimlich pleasures of the hearth, the unheimlich terror of the space or race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class; the customs of taste, the powers of political affiliation; the sense of social order, the sensibility of sexuality; the blindness of bureaucracy, the strait insight of institutions; the quality of justice, the common sense of injustice; the langue of the law and the parole of the people. (2)

This is a misleading argument about the potential process of the making of a nation; construction of a national identity involves more than mere contradictory processes and the invisible rules of the langue. The Narayan of *Swami and Friends* is capable of transcending these ambiguities.
Bhabha talks about in the above cited passage as is demonstrated by the character of Swami. This insertion of the notion of structuring element of ambivalence into postcolonial polemics appears to be illadvisedly counterproductive. The colonised elite flaunt its fixation with the celebrated idea of ambivalence as the overriding principle shaping the national identities. The problems Swami has with the certain selective aspects of the alien rule are the outcome of the projection of the fears of the indigenous elite as that of an entire nation and all its communities. However, it is not a novel with an unambiguous attitude to colonialism that Narayan’s intended readership was prepared to read in the 1930s. In the same Introduction, Bhabha talks about the potential originary locations of this ‘ambivalence’. Here he is self-consciously cautious about the possibility of unrepresentable spaces of national population:

The 'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation.

The address to nation as narration stresses the insistence of political power
and cultural authority in what Derrida describes as the 'irreducible excess of
the syntactic over the semantic'. What emerges as an effect of such
'incomplete signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the in-
between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political
authority are negotiated. (4)

The outcome of this adroit process of negotiating meanings through a
grid of cultural and political power structures is not merely a reconfigured
national cultural matrix, but a reinforced and reconsolidated elitist power
network. Narayan does it in a subtle, but unpretentious way by keeping the
focus of his early narratives centred on the processes of social and cultural
power consolidation. Swami is not so much about the throes of growing up in
a society at a crossroads as it is about the need for raising a certain form of
consciousness conducive to the realignment of the forces that have been
debilitated as a result of historical processes. Swami’s understanding of his
immediate reality is not unmediated by his sense of being the inheritor of an
uninterrupted heritage. He, certainly like Narayan, is proud of his legacy
which he goes on building a subtly-fortified defence mechanism to protect
from an alien cultural domination. His mode of registering his resistance
against European prominence is less than crude but never attains an
accomplished finesse it demands which is meant to be as ungainly as it

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appears as it is seen through the consciousness of a Brahmin boy. The following is what swami thinks of Europe’s map:

*He sat at his table and took out his Atlas. He opened the political map of Europe and sat gazing at it. It puzzled him how people managed to live in such a crooked country as Europe. He wondered what the shape of the people might be who lived in places where the outline narrowed as in a cape, and how they managed to escape being strangled by the contour of their land. And then another favourite problem began to tease him: how did those map makers find out what the shape of a country was? How did they find out that Europe was like a camel’s head? Probably they stood on high towers and copied what they saw below.* (48)

Chandran of *The Bachelor of Arts*, who may be seen as *Swami* in his adolescence and adulthood, is shown to be struggling hard to come to grips an alien educational system hostile to his own social and cultural milieu. What appears as ambivalent stand of both the novels is a rather carefully designed subterfuge that intends to defend his own social status in league with the institutional and intellectual succour of the English. The quandary Narayan would have us believe Swami and Chandran to be in is practically non-existent and imaginary one. A strand of postcolonialist theory argues to the effect Indian colonial writing had to be ambivalent vis-a-vis the Empire as the colonial confrontation in India was not only dialogic, it was even
mutually beneficial. Colonialism, the same school believes, was after all not as devastating in India as it proved to be in African continent. As shallow an argument like this is meant to demonstrate the lack of political clarity that has been celebrated as much-priced ambiguity.

Contrary to the strongly-held view that it is the structuring notion of uncertainty and indeterminacy (with fervent theoretical support from postmodernism) that makes Narayan lasting, it is more tenable to attribute his success to a meticulous representation of a society in its imagined stasis. The pre-independence novels of Narayan are often described as being optimistic in their outlook—a speculated result of a general atmosphere in the country enthused by the hope of the imminent arrival of independence—opposed to his later novels believed to be shot through with a sense of despair and disillusion. A closer analysis, devoid of highly-infectious elitist metropolitan academic orientations, would prove this simple but idealist view of Narayan’s works fundamentally erroneous. The uniting factor that holds all his works together and lends them an unmistakable singularity is not very obvious, but not impossible to discern.

Dispossessed of its cultural and intellectual command, on the arrival of the English in the subcontinent, over the masses the Indian upper castes went into a state of shock and panic reaction that in later decades transformed itself
into an instinct to reconsolidate the intellectual hegemony. The jostling for the cultural and intellectual domination that ensued between the English and the twice-born castes of India manifested itself in a gamut of forms, at times subtle and silent at others raucous. However, it was not always confrontational; not so quite infrequently this would resolve itself in a kind of collusion where both the camps decided to have an equal share of the gullible ruled. The attempts at cultural subversion are often active at substratum of Narayan’s works, though it is not necessary to see them as being comprehensively supportive of nationalist interests in the real sense of the word. Yet, critics, both traditional and postcolonial, are intent upon establishing a strong tie between writers like Narayan and anti-colonial resistance. The imaginary space like Malgudi, with all its social and cultural exclusivity and insularity, is projected as an outcome of a robust political awareness and a result of the realisation of a dire need to construct unreal spaces in protest against colonial rule and cultural domination. Dennis Walder in his Post-Colonial Literature in English has to say the following about Malgudi in relation to Said’s views:

On one level, the authority and conviction of Narayan’s work is derived from this sense of place, as a realizable, detailed fictional milieu thoroughly imbued with his own values, themes and issues.
According to Said, one thing which links writings out of the ‘moment’ of ‘anti-imperialist nationalism’ is a desire to create distance from the ‘British, French or (later) American master’—a distance which is achieved in part by imagining place. ‘For the native’, Said argues, ‘the history of his/her colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss to an outsider of the local place, whose concrete geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored’. Yet Narayan, beginning to write during the period of strong nationalist assertion leading to Independence, initially proclaims a sense of the local which can be understood as a response to the (declining) power of the Raj.

This imagined place after all, as we begin to better understand the dynamics that underlie the work of Narayan, is socially and culturally so elliptical and tailor-made that one may read into a strong desire on the part of the writer to create a distance from some inconvenient elements of his own world. In the case of many upper caste Indian writers the need for creating an unbridgeable chasm between themselves and the Indian other was as intense as it was with the European master. Very often construction of the imagined spaces like Malgudi was as much an assertion of burgeoning nationalism as it was the direct result of a strong drive to construct a particular brand of nationalism based on certain preconceived ideas of the Indian nation. Dennis Walder says further that writing of Narayan, while embedding in it a host of
histories, also involves in it the colonizing history which, he would have us believe, is meant to retrieve agency to the colonised through the creation of the localised setting:

*Malgudi includes representations of the British presence-the Mission College, the courts, the railway and the police station-but it is evidently run by and for the local people who, like Narayan himself, bear the marks of cultural traditions which predate the British by more than a thousand years. His characters are entirely local, and although everything is given in English, with hints of local inflection in syntax and style, the reader easily accepts the convention by which we assume characters to be speaking in their own language.* (96-97)

It was not the awareness of a couple of thousands of years of history that keeps driving Narayan’s fiction, it is the strongly-felt need for reclaiming this corpus tradition and history for the social ruling order he belongs to which works as the fulcrum of his works. What is meticulously hidden behind the veneers of indeterminacy and ambivalence is a self-perpetuating anxiety about the possibly imminent loss of a familiar world that has always rendered any form of social and cultural intercaste frontiers inviolable. Chandran’s character so singularly Bramhinic that the West-influenced India—distinctly unlike Malgudi of course-seems all determined to desecrate his hallowed physical and spiritual entity. Evil powers lurk in every corner of the
pagan-turning country to lure young people like Chandran into the abysmal carnal sin. This attitude of Chandran may, if one is charitable enough, be read as a negation of *varnashramadharma* which he finally comes to regret. But this kind of reading demands an extraordinarily tremendous effort on the reader’s part and a certain degree of willed blindness to Narayan’s social and cultural agenda. Chandran’s struggle with himself to come to grips with non-Bramhinical reality is representative of Narayan’s own resolve to develop his art into self-protective armour that shields his fictional world from the rest of depraved and lowly India. This is how Chandran feels having escaped from the clutches of vice called Kailas:

*Chandran fled from Mint Street. He had escaped from Kailas. This was the first time he had been so close to a man in drink; this was the first time he had stood at the portals of a prostitute's house. He was thoroughly terrified.*

*After leaving Kailas several streets behind, Chandran felt exhausted and sat down on a pavement. He felt very home-sick. He wondered if there was any train which would take him back to Malgudi that very night. He felt that he had left home years ago, and not on the previous evening. The thought of Malgudi was very sweet. He would walk to Lawley Extension, to his house, to his room, and sleep on his cot snugly. He lulled his mind with this vision for some time. It was not long before his searching mind put to*
him the question why he was wandering about the streets of a strange city,
leaving his delightful heaven?(167)

Yet, all the signs of modernity, which are conspicuously present in The Bachelor of Arts, hardly seem to have any conflict of interest with deep-rooted Vedic values. Narayan’s or, more cautiously, his characters’ anguish is not so much about coping with external signs of modernity as it is with the inevitable loss of social and cultural domination that accompanies the spread of modernity. Chandran appears to be conscious of his status as a colonised subject, yet his discontent with this Whiteman’s scheme of things has a lot to do with a sense of deprivation inflicted on people like him by the coloniser. It is not impossible to be taken in, as are many critics, by the frequent outbursts and innuendos of Narayan’s protagonists at the Raj and the people who run it. Chandran very often finds himself raving and raging at the English, though is not so unsure of the roles he and his brethren would have fit into while inheriting the coloniser’s legacy. All the deceptive strategies Chandran would take his reader through finally fall flat on their face as this protean Brahmin from Malgudi manages to reinvent himself with choosing to work for a newspaper. If there is any trace of ambivalence it is generated in the process of reading the text in the mind of the reader who is left wondering whether all the fuss about the alien rule has to do with finding a good job for oneself.
The Dark Room (1938) and The English Teacher (1945) are the two novels written prior to independence and as such require to be read circumspectly for the discernable patterns of anti-colonial awareness. The former novel has been hailed as being remarkably sensitive to the predicament of Indian woman and as positively reformist. The novel makes a desperate attempt to delve into the depths of gender relations in upper caste society, though the nature of queries is conditioned by the conventional outlook of the writer. The solutions that he offers are not radically ground-breaking either, as they do not dare defy the well-entrenched frontiers of the Hindu society. Savitri’s life is supposed to be representative of Indian (Brahmin) women and the plight of this woman appears to be treated with flippancy, leading to the discovery of incredibly superfluous solutions. The mythological allusions of the name Savitri are overpoweringly present and the implications of this infiltration of mythico-religious elements into the workings of the novel meant to dictate the agenda of the writer.

Narayan's women characters grow stronger and show that the emergence of the New Woman is not a myth or a utopia in India. However, this New Woman is mainly influenced by the West and expresses their resistance against oppressive elements of Indian culture by using the value of the West as resources. She struggles for freedom, asserts equality and searches for identity. Narayan's New Woman might not have brought earth-
shaking changes to India, yet she has certainly rough positive changes not only in her man but also in Indian society. Most of Narayan’s female characters, except a few, are traditional housewives. They are meek, submissive, docile and orthodox. They have traditional views of virtue and family life. According to them their happiness lies in the perfection of their duties as wives and mothers in the male-dominated society. So they merge there individualities in their husbands’. They live a life of compromise and abject surrender within the bounds of social and family tradition. Savitri in *The Dark Room* loves and cares for her husband Ramani. She spends her time in looking after her children and household affairs. Despite that she is ill treated by her husband.

Many critics have made it a point to draw our attention the conspicuous absence of any overt reference to political environment of the country. Yet, these critics have failed to detect a striking concurrence and alignment between Narayan’s political views as expressed in his other novels and his understanding of Hindu society, caste structure and marriage. One is at a loss as to find any plausible hint likely to have been dropped by Narayan meant to be a reasonably sensible answer for Savitri’s predicament. Caught as she is between a perfidious husband and her maternal obligations for her three children Savitri is unable to make up her mind as to her course of action, and the author himself suffers from the similar sense of disorientation.
Interesting aspect all this gripping sense of helplessness and hopelessness that overwhelms Savitri and the author does not either of them to feel the need for questioning the scheme of things responsible for this moral impasse.

Though R. K. Narayan is a traditionalist, he is undoubtedly aware of the oppressive elements of Indian traditional culture, which is quite different from the findings of many other Indian experts who attribute all the sufferings of subalterns to colonial rule and western culture. And further from his depiction we can also see that in his understanding the modernization of India not only means the re-examination of colonial rule and its leftover but also the re-examination of their own tradition which is cherished by the nationalists. Narayan’s traditionalism is further seen in the introduction of much that is fantastic but which is credible in the Indian context. Many popular superstitions, rituals and beliefs are frequently exploited. Sadhus, Sanyasis and Swamis are ever-recurring characters.

The novel The Dark Room is said to represent the conflict between tradition and modernity the pre-independence India was caught in. Yet it is difficult to see any case being made for modernity in its true sense. John Thieme offers the following comment about the novel:

*In short, The Dark Room addresses the problem faced by Brahmin women in a changing society and is, at least superficially, progressive in its*
concern with feminist issues, issues which on two occasions are related to
the larger context of the ‘All-India Women’s Conference’. Yet, despite its
apparent challenge to gender codes prevalent in Malgudi society, it only
goes part-way towards questioning such norms. Its focus on Savitri’s
predicament has the effect of privileging the wifely devotion personified by
her mythic namesake over the westward-leaning modernity represented by
Shanta Bai: the latter is never seen from the inside and eventually
disappears, without any account of her fate being given. Narayan’s critique
is more concerned with the forces that are destabilizing the traditional
balance of gender relations within the society-forces such as the advent of
women into the workplace-than a plea for a sympathetic view of the
emancipated modern woman. (50)

It is Shanta Bai who is flatly indicted for being a disruptive force,
which is in keeping with Narayan’s view of Hindu society. The idea of this
kind of colonial fiction’s being insolubly ambivalent is an invaluable
contribution of metropolitan postcolonialism the agenda of which is as much
suspect as the intentions of the author. Nevertheless it is more profitable and
theoretically more rewarding to critique the novel’s view of stratified Hindu
society in conjunction with Narayan’s vision of India and Hindu society as
they are represented in the depiction of Malgudi. His attitude to modernity in
terms of the advent of unorthodox ideas is unambiguously antagonistic,
though it is quite easy to fall into seemingly innocuous trap of believing his views and thoughts to be unqualifiedly progressive. The basic flaw of the colonial writing subject is the assimilation and internalisation of the inverted Western ideals, values, views and ideology. And it is foolhardy to believe that elitist anti-colonial writer like Narayan did not fall prey to it. Anti-colonial nationalist theories –often in narrativised forms-often employed the Eurocentric myths of national cultural regeneration. And the imagery frequently used was that of woman and her body. Benita Parry sheds this aspect of resistance drawing on an important postcolonial writer:

Ellenke Boehmer’s discussion of narratives of nationalist recuperation, identity reconstruction and nation formation shows how images of the female body were used to embody ideals of the wholeness of the subjectivity, history and state. Thus, while reversing colonialist iconography figuring penetration, pillage and dismemberment-repression upon the objectified, enslaved, colonised body-such invocation of female body ‘rest upon the assumption of predominantly masculine authority and historical agency’, nationalism’s core concepts of nesting in the metaphor of the maternal body. Because, Boehmer argues, postcolonial discourses of self-determination ‘have a considerable investment in nationalist concepts of “selving” and retrieving history; the gender specifics of nationalist iconography are accepted, or borne
with, or overlooked’, the deconstruction of such configuration only now being effected in postcolonial literatures. (42-43)

Savitri and Shanta Bai are the two women who allow themselves and their bodies to be exploited, yet, Narayan’s sympathies lie with the former. However, the author himself seems to be the real force behind her choosing to go back into the family fold. It is Shanta Bai, who, for her apparently modern outlook and for her alleged role in destroying a household is arraigned by the author. It is significant that the novel appeared when the Indian nationalist movement was at its peak and at the moment when many national narratives were being invented and reinvented. Repression of women was a very popular theme which came in hand for the colonial writers who wanted a grand trope of allusion to the alien domination. Women and their problems in antiquarian colonial societies were the least of the concern of these writers, who found it more alluring to appropriate the images of their exploited women to drive home a political point. The point purported to be made did not even tangentially have any point of contact with women thus appropriated. The Dark Room is a classic example of this dispassionate use of the image of women for a cause that often undermines their interests. Beneath the garb of apolitical novel The Dark Room hides many a social and cultural agenda. The novel is as much about Narayan’s own proclivities as it is about the forces that have shaped the writer’s and his class’
mindset. It is the financial security that drives Savitri back to her husband, which she herself is too late to have learned to do something about. Savitri’s revolt, if it can be called so, lacks the backing of a strong intellectual disposition. The fourth novel *The English Teacher* written in 1945 deserves a detailed discussion for various reasons which will be taken up in the next chapter along with three more post-independence novels.
WORKS CITED


