Fourth Chapter

Hindu theatre of Karma
There were only two years left for India to gain its freedom when Narayan published his novel *The English Teacher* (1945) and if there is any easily discernible irony in it the reader should not be blamed for unwarrantedly inventing it. It is about a man who teaches the literature of a people who were planning to abandon their burden because it was no longer sensible to rule a country that had been methodically stripped of its precious possessions. Between his previous novel *The Dark Room* and *The English Teacher* there was a gap of nearly seven years which is attributed to the untimely demise of his wife. How much of Narayan’s view of India changed or underwent a radical revision is merely to be guessed at. The novel in question is admittedly autobiographical, and, as such, is not readily amenable to any overtly political reading even when it is produced so titillatingly close to the moment on which India gained independence. Yet, the novel is endowed with a certain degree of potentiality to be read at different levels due to the very fact that it is the story of an ‘English’ teacher who suffers his wife’s bereavement and spends his time in a state of despondency. This may not strike the reader as an exceptionally drab and tedious theme to have been written a novel on. And of course it would have and may have passed as an
uncontestedly platitudinous work but for the timing of its arrival and the susceptibility of this metaphor ‘wife’ to be perceived in varied ways.

_The English Teacher_, considered to be the most personal of his works, has an ability to have its reader wondering about the possible sources of the motive for the appalling measure of ambiguity the novel is shot through with. This is, however, not to claim an accomplished virtuosity in the work on account of the vagueness of its attitude. The novel, written at a time when the British imperialism was on moribund, professes a wearily incomprehensible view of the celebrated glory of colonialism the memory of which, like that of Krishnan’s wife, weighs heavily on the writer’s heart. The novel, at its simplest, traces a naive story line that revolves around the life of Krishnan who, after the death of his wife Susila from typhoid and having managed to overcome his profound grief, chooses to adopt a ‘non-European’ set of values to render his personal life more fulfilling and gratifying. Narayan presents his concept of traditionalism which is the fountain-head from which his other philosophical concepts such as orthodoxy, superstition and the role of fate in life flow as its inseparable channels, through the middle class life of Malgudi which is his only locale. The traditional world of Malgudi has its own custom of arranged marriage which is settled by parents after negotiations and matching of horoscopes. In Indian society marriage is looked upon as a sacrament and a spiritual union. The novel at a particular
phase enters a bizarre world of psychic experiences and occult practices that make it more ‘surreptitious’ in its ideological intent.

The personal dimension of the novel is more suspect a ruse in spite of the expression of simple and uncomplicated outlook on the part of the protagonist. His attempts to communicate with his dead wife lend an outlandish aspect to the otherwise ‘worldly’ work. The man devoted to the physical pleasures and mundane experiences, on his being separated from his wife, decides to take refuge in the comforts of psychic séances. For some readers this grotesque twist in the story may appear to be a natural course of consolation taken recourse to by a grief-stricken husband. The first person narration—perhaps an unconvincing attempt to render the novel more personal and coherent—becomes more and more disconnected from the reader as the novel reaches its end.

The narrator receives a letter from a ‘medium’ who has accidently opened a stable line of communication with Krishna’s dead wife who wants to reassure her husband that she is happy in ‘the other world’. He manages to exchange a few comforting thoughts with his dead wife and, we are told, this reassurance and exhortation from his wife sets the narrator on the normal course of secular existence. However, at any rate, this strange set of experiences of Krishna cannot be termed as spiritual in essence. He continues
to maintain his esoteric rapport with his deceased wife from the other world and the ‘spirit’ readily doles out reams and reams of written advice, guidance and psychological counsel to the narrator. Strangely enough, very often the clairvoyant counsel pertains to mundane and earthly affairs. The nature of arcane directions is unambiguously admonitory and slightly imperious in tone. Here is an exhortation from the dead wife:

“You fret too much about the child. Have no kind of worry about her. When you are away at college, you hardly do your work with a free mind, all the time saying to yourself ‘What is Leela doing? What is she doing? Remember that she is perfectly happy all the afternoon, playing with that friend of hers in the next house, listening to the stories of the old lady. Just about the time you return, she stands at the door and looks down the street for you. And when you see her you think that she has been there the whole day and feel miserable about it. How you can help it, you never pause to consider. Do you know that she sometimes insists upon being taken to the little children’s school, which is nearby? And the old lady, whenever she is free, takes her there and she has become quite a favourite there? Why don’t you put her in that school? She will be quite happy there.” (119)

Krishnan's change comes about not as a result of any grand plan or ambition, but as a result of a series of challenging circumstances which arise once he begins to take steps away from the cloistered and protective
environment of his school. But although Krishnan's journey is unpredictable, a number of themes are being worked out in the course of the novel. These themes might be said to be Krishnan's progress from predictability to unpredictability, from the academic world to the real world of life and death, from adulthood to childhood, and from a western mentality to an eastern mentality.

The omniscient spirit's communications continue in the similar tenor, making the narrator feel constantly revitalised and protected. The worldly-wise spirit keeps urging the narrator to be more actively involved in the material aspects of his life. The reader finds it difficult to apprehend the incongruous view of the world actively and steadily controlled by esoterically scribbled manuals for wellbeing imported from the other side of the world. The novel, when it is half-way through, begins to split thematically, which is often claimed to be an advertent act, making the intensely personal experiences of the narrator central to the operation of the novel. It may not strike one as a mere coincidence that Krishna’s establishment of the robust mode of communication with other world is progressively marked by his gradual withdrawal from the real world mediated by the colonial experiences. It is profitable to view this psychic dimension of Krishna’s life in juxtaposition with his feeble attempts at registering his resistance to the British colonialism. He is different to and conscious of the heated debates about the continued colonial rule that mark the regular meetings in the
college. He even takes pains to participate in some of them-occasions that are believed to demonstrate the protagonist’s – and of course that of the novelist’s-acute political awareness. This token expression of solidarity with anti-colonial resistant movement may have been felt a prudent and gainful strategy to have been embraced when the acquisition of freedom appeared an imminent reality. It is not the ‘spirit’ of Susila alone which is sagacious and far-sighted; the novelist is more accomplished at employing his worldly wisdom, though one is at a loss as to know where his communications come from.

After all Narayan is not so unmindful of his bounden political ‘responsibilities’ as he has been accused of; perhaps his avoidance of head-on colonial encounters in his is a recondite strategy of subversion a lay reader does not find it appropriate on his part to try to comprehend. This requires an extraordinary skill and John Thieme, who seems to be in possession of it, sums up the theme of the novel in the following words:

Once again the location is central (to The English Teacher): the particular properties of rooms and buildings link the social themes of the first half of the novel, which not only centres on ‘domestic life’ but also Krishna’s place in Malgudi’s colonially oriented education system, with the second, which moves into psycho-spiritual terrain. A concern with the dialectics of space runs through the whole novel and Narayan introduces a
series of sites that allow him to debate the competing claims of the social, political, psychological and spiritual. (55-56)

Yet, it is very uncomfortable a stance to take in relation to the novel, which does not seem to have been invested with a substantial enough amount of ideological strength to be treated as essentially anti-colonial in its outlook. The divisive line that splits the novel on the basis of the planes of its operations is characteristic of the novelist’s understanding of his political and ideological orientations. Narayan is often hailed to use the ‘principle of balance’ to structure his novels which facilitates the construction of a unified worldview that his characters strive endlessly to attain. His understanding and representation of reality is fundamentally problematic on account of its unreliable instability, its opportunistic authenticity, and its convenient political naiveté. Krishna’s predicament is unwarrantedly valorised so much so his decision to continue to live in spite of his wife’s death is represented as nothing short of an act of gallantry. His unobtrusive withdrawal from the an active involvement in the world which, he strongly believes, he does not belong to is, the reader is often tempted to conclude, meant to be taken as the consummate sacrifice on the part of the stoic Brahmin Krishna.

Malgudi, as has already been pointed out, has its due share of the presence of European institutions that structure the mode of life of its
inhabitants. Krishna teaches English, for it pays and, of course, there are certain things about what teaches which he has come to love in the course earning his livelihood. This does not make him any more European than what he actually is, the same way the fact that he manages to communicate with his dead does not make him any more Indian than he permits himself to be. The India of his imagination and desire is, as that of Krishna’s, suffocatingly constricted and seems to be predicated on a limited understanding and knowledge of India that sprawls outside his socially and culturally walled-in locality. The willed insularity of Narayan, and Krishna, from the rest of the non-Brahminical India is so glaringly evident in the novel that any Indian reader unfamiliar with nearly cabalistic world and its puzzling practices of the twice-born ones would find *The English Teacher* and Narayan’s other works tantalizingly incomprehensible on social, cultural and epistemological planes. Here is an instance of how unimportant and marginal the rest of the country and its people appear to Narayan, and his representation of this ‘unsavoury’ and ‘expendable’ part of India is very clinically anthropological in style and chillingly detached in treatment. The psychological distance between Krishna and the place where his daughter’s headmaster lives is perpetually unbridgeable as it becomes increasingly conspicuous with his finding the whole milieu oppressively alien, a feeling that never seems to have overwhelmed him during his presence in Albert Mission College.
His house was in Anderson Lane, which was a furlong east of my house—a locality we had never visited. It was a street within a street, and a lane tucked away into a lane. There was every sign that the municipality had forgotten the existence of this part of the town. Yet it seemed to maintain a certain degree of sanitation, mainly with the help of the sun, wind, and rain. The sun burned so severely most months that bacteria and infection turned to ashes. The place had a general clean up when the high winds rose before the monsoon set in, and whirled into a column the paper scraps, garbage, egg-shells, and leaves; the column precipitated itself into the adjoining streets, and thence to the next and so on, till, perhaps, it reached a main thoroughfare .... (141-142)

A passage after this, still providing the ‘futile’ details of the same place the narrator continues:

Carpenters, tinsmiths, egg-sellers and a miscellaneous lot of artisans and traders seemed gathered in this place. The street was littered with all kinds of things—wood, shavings, egg-shells, tin pieces and drying leaves. Dust was ankle deep. I wondered why friend had selected this of all places. I was afraid to allow my daughter to walk here. I felt she would catch all kinds of dreadful diseases. Unkempt and wild-looking children rolled about in the dust, mangy dogs growled at us, donkeys stood at attention here and there. (142)
It is almost unethical to pass on without making a couple of striking points about the above passages. The passages are not merely sarcastic—it certainly is not innocuous comic perception; they are charged with a huge sense of cynicism and an impregnable complacence. It is interesting to note that the same sun, wind and rain are never present in the place where Krishna lives and not certainly in the form they do in the headmaster’s locality. It is really amazing to discover that no dirt, no dust, no squalor ever reaches the hallowed place of Krishna’s residence even though it is merely a furlong away. The presumed reader of the novel—who has to be as high-born as the narrator to be ignorant of the bigger and more diverse India—is not deigned upon with any details of the ambience of the narrator’s ‘abode’. The house in which Krishna has lived with his wife and continues to live after her death is central to his implosive consciousness that appears prepared to admit only a certain kinds of experiences into its fold. The spatial and temporal limits of his Brahmin consciousness are grudgingly non-inclusive and self-righteously inviolable. He has a strong sense of possessiveness about the house he chosen to live in; the same house he ends up having his extrasensory experience with his dead wife.

The turning point of the story arises from Susila's unpredictability. When they go to look at the house we could not possibly predict that she would go for a walk on her own, get stuck in a contaminated lavatory, and
then become ill. The futility of clinging to the belief that life can be orderly, predictable, and knowable is shown in two central, and symmetrical, predictions which occupy a prominent place in the novel. The other prominent demonstration of the futility of believing that life can be knowable and predictable is seen in the headmaster's belief in a prediction made by an astrologer, who can see past present and future as one, and give everything its true Both of these episodes show the limitations of man’s ability to know and predict the world.

The idea of the hallowed spaces and their sacred inviolability circumscribes Krishna’s psyche, and the ‘impure’ European is, because of his presumed racial and cultural superiority, oxymoronically present on the horizon of Brahmin’s consciousness. It is the non-Brahmin Indian other that finds itself ostracised from the ‘imagined community’ grandly baptized India. The axis of the cultural and imaginative authority between the coloniser and the producers of the grand narratives of the Indian imagined community is not merely a conspiracy of political economy; it is more about evolving the infallible strategies of mastering and containing the non-European and non-Brahmin spaces. The world he chooses to withdraw into is not merely an idealised India devoid of any intellectual contamination, but also is pervaded by a spiritual and metaphysical matrix.
Krishna decides to abandon his loyalty to the empire when it becomes certain to him that it is unwise and perilous to stand by a crumbling, dilapidated and massive edifice. His ‘resignation’ from his job as an English teacher and his professed renunciation of ‘grihastya asrama’, considering his religious and reviverist proclivities, does not come as a surprise to the reader. Krishnan repeatedly finds himself being drawn out of situations which ought to have been predictable and ordered by events which are spontaneous and unpredictable, and it is clear that he finds spontaneity and unpredictability to be stimulating and life-enhancing, while predictability and order, although providing a cushion of comfort and security, is ultimately stifling and deadening. Susila brings unpredictability into his life at every turn. The truth is that we cannot know, and cannot predict, and any view of life, whether deriving from modern western science, or ancient eastern mysticism, which disregards the unknowable and sees only what is supposedly known, and supposedly predictable, is hopelessly inadequate. While the weird episodes fail to provide Krishnan with anything rational to believe in, they do bring him face to face with the reality of life and death, and confronting the realities of life without retreating into the safe cerebral world of literature and philosophy is an important component of his journey.

There are abundant hints about the nature of grounds he wants to prepare on which his idea of India is to be conjured up. The problems and challenges the India of Krishna’s of dreams has to come to grips with are not
either social or economic but are predominantly religious, intellectual, and spiritual. It would be pertinent to cite what John Thieme says about the novel and the ways in which it could be interpreted:

In its conclusion, then, the novel could be seen to desert the everyday realities of the South India life for a mystical dialogue with the after-life, but the totality of its various strands makes it an altogether more complex work and ultimately these suggest the tensions and confusions in Tamil Brahmin culture, which leave the protagonist pulled in the different directions by the various possible choices of dharma that are open to him. The autobiographical origins of the work make it highly personal text on one level, but such a perspective does not preclude the possibility of reading it as an allegory about Tamil Brahmin society in the second quarter of the twentieth century. (66)

The need for caste-based social and political realignment, which had been relatively latent in the consciousness of the Indian elite during the height of the British Raj, began to resurface with its becoming progressively certain that the process of decolonisation was sure to set in. The imminent departure of the coloniser made the Indian high-castes perceptibly nervous and jittery about the future its social, political and cultural status in India, without being presumably shielded by the English rule and its elite-friendly laws. It is imperative for people like Krishna to construct a world of his own
in which he can take refuge on the departure of the coloniser. And the India Krishna envisions for himself and his daughter is driven by inscrutable spiritual forces and ‘spirits’ that communicate to a chosen few. The efforts made by Narayan to subvert the generic conventions inherited from the European literary traditions are unconvincing in their intent and force. Mimicry has the potential to be subversive, yet it could as well be primarily a pathetic attempt to ape the putatively superior.

It must have proved very painful for writers like Narayan to forgive the English for their historical betrayal; the kind of investment made by the Indian upper castes to be part of the ruling establishment was inconsiderately and callously disregarded by the coloniser while unceremoniously departing India. It is very difficult to view this as a subversive strategy of mimicry, which Homi Bhabha theorises as the most potential form of resistance. Bhabha seems to deliberately ignore the possibility that the acts of mimicry are very often born of a strong desire to imitate the ruling order and its cultural modes of representation. Elleke Boehmer believes that this is the best method employable to understand the works of not only Narayan but even that of V.S.Naipaul.

As the phrase suggests, subversion by imitation is reflected mainly in the unspoken and the understated within texts. It emerges in ironies, double
meanings, unlikely juxtapositions and disjunctures. Muted opposition of this sort can be demonstrated in the work of two writers of colonized experience, V. S. Naipaul and the Indian R. K. Narayan. (Neither writer, however, is in fact strictly colonial in period, both having published widely since independence.) Though their approaches were always rather different, both, significantly, avoided the stance of overt repudiation. The comic pastorals of R. K. Narayan, taken here from his early period, emphasize the continuity and harmony of small-town India. His work deals with the colonial presence mainly by avoidance.

In R. K. Narayan’s early novels, Indian self-sufficiency is brought to the fore through the simple device of ignoring the British presence. The British were still in power when he first began to publish, yet in his novels they are marginal. If they appear at all, as in the first scenes of Swami and Friends (1935), or in The Bachelor of Arts (1937), they act merely as aggravating but avoidable hindrances to Indian purposes. From the beginning Narayan has of course drawn on a legacy of British rule, the English language, as his narrative medium. But, though he does not adapt Indian speech-rhythms, unlike Raja Rao, he does use the language to demarcate a very non-English cultural space, defined by its own beliefs and practices. Beginning with his first novel, Swami and Friends, Narayan has employed the English language and English literary conventions to map the
social life of the south Indian town Malgudi across a long series of subsequent novels. (167-168)

It is remarkable that Boehmer finds it possible to juxtapose the discussions about these two writers who are believed to be masters of subversion through mimicry. This similarity and parallel cannot be an accidently perceived striking feature that unites these two disparate writers; there has to be something more profound and concrete than it is readily discernable. The seemingly mysterious affinity between the two writers gains equally surreptitious dimensions with Naipaul taking an incomprehensibly ambiguous stance with regard to Narayan and his works. Many specious aspects of the mainstream postcolonial line of theorisation become disconcertingly uncovered as one attempts to delve deeper into the potential nature of the seamy nexus that exists in a legion of apparently benign ways among supposedly postcolonial writers. Boehmer’s understanding of the possible causes of these two writers’ shared ideological is not commendably deep, and takes more than a traditional postcolonialist view to comprehend the ideological and intellectual space Narayan and Naipaul’s writings converge on.

Naipaul, in India: A Wounded Civilization, has a few precious insightful comments to offer about Narayan and his works. The main focus of his
argument revolves around *Mr. Sampath: The Printer of Malgudi* (1949) the main character of which, Srinivas, he adduces as the epitome of the average Indian or more appropriately Hindu character. *Mr. Sampath* appeared four years after *The English Teacher* and both are set in the worlds that are politically far removed from each other—if Indian independence did mean anything to the characters that populate Malgudi.

Yet very little separates these novels in terms of the consciousness that informs them and the well-defined milieus of these novels hardly seem to reflect the larger realities of change and a radical sense of discontinuity. As there is very little in the novels of Narayan that can be said to belong to the realm of social, it is unprofitable to rely on them as the authentic records of the larger social reality and its vicissitudes. The yawning rift between the myriad social realities and the sanitised psychic world circumscribed by Brahminic consciousness is the constant feature of his fiction. Narayan and Naipaul have an understanding of India that is essentially identical, at certain points even organically related to their similar elitist social status, in its content. It is no mystery why diasporic Indians like Naipaul go to or strongly advised to go to Narayan for a better understanding of India and this continues to happen even when it is obvious that the India represented by Narayan is merely socially and culturally ‘redeemed’ and ‘purged’ India. Naipaul finds it difficult to share Narayan’s stoic and restrained view of
India, yet it is unnecessary to consider this difference in perception of these two writers as more than profoundly a shallow one. Here is what Naipaul says about Narayan:

But Narayan’s novels did not prepare me for the distress of India. As a writer he had succeeded almost too well. His comedies were of the sort that requires a restricted social setting with well-defined rules; and he was so direct, his touch so light, that, though he wrote in English of Indian manners, he had succeeded in making those exotic manners quite ordinary. The small town he had staked out as his fictional territory was, I knew, a creation of art and therefore to some extent artificial, a simplification of reality. But the reality was cruel and overwhelming. In the books his India had seemed accessible; in India it remained hidden. To get down to Narayan’s world, to perceive the order and continuity he saw in dereliction and smallness of India, to enter into his ironic acceptance and relish his comedy, was to ignore too much of what could be seen, to shed too much of myself: my sense of history, and even the simplest ideas of human possibility. I did not lose my admiration for Narayan; but I felt that his comedy and irony were not quite what they had appeared to be, were a part of a Hindu response to the world, a response I could no longer share. (11-12)

There are many ways of handling the problem of ‘dereliction and smallness of India’, and the best one is to follow Naipaul’s suit by writing
about it with alarming amount of cynicism and utter lack of concern to earn the recognition of the western readership. The fundamental difference between these two quintessentially high-born Hindu writers lies in the fact that if one conjures up a characteristically cleansed and aplomb world to flee non-Brahminic dereliction and smallness the other gloats over his difference from the accomplished pagans so that he can acquire a moral high-ground over them. The discontinuity Naipaul perceives between India’s past and present is the result of his own ruptured psyche that constantly disturbs his vision, and what he manages to see in and of India is an outcome what his hired Eurocentrism allows to see. Narayan’s world is smaller and his ambitions are much less lower; his comprehension of India as a nation and culture is solemnly unrealistic. The characters that seek to gain entry into Malgudi are thoroughly screened for possessing any potentially radical and subversive consciousness; they are inconceivably subdued and purged. The apparent stoicism and saintliness of Narayan’s characters are stunning by their depth and with such characters reality in his work appears tailor-made and contrived.

After the publication of his fourth novel, *The English Teacher*, Narayan’s writing entered a period of greater maturity and confidence. The autobiographical element which had been so obvious in his earlier writing became less prominent, allowing him to develop his characters more freely.
With the growing critical success of his novels in the West, he began to lead the life of the successful literary figure both in India and abroad. He travelled widely and, in time, was showered with honours. He did not leave his accustomed milieu, though, which was Mysore, where he built himself a house, went for rambling and talkative walks, and savoured the quotidian pursuits of life, including agriculture, which he studied with interest.

Srinivas, the chief character of Mr. Sampath, is seemingly lost in the secular world and its grinding travails. The novel is about his everyday struggles meant to render his life more meaningful and, yet, he seems to know very little about the real locus of the meaning of life. The reader is sure to see him endlessly drifting, caught in the illusion that he is in quest of the ultimate meaning of life. The most significant and invariable feature of Narayan’s characters is their predictability and the stunning degree of their conformity to the deep-ruts of orthodox Hindu modes of life. They are adventurous in the limited sense of the word in that they can hardly imagine themselves violating even the most moderate of social values and norms. Srinivas is undecided as to what to do with his life, yet his apparently purposeless life is determined by larger Hindu patterns of life. With such unpredictable and change-resistant characters there is very little room for any social and political transformations. The Malgudi of Srinivas is imperceptibly and inconspicuously different from the Malgudi of either Swami or Krishna.
but for a few institutional shifts. One finds it impossible to locate any remarkable changes in the mindsets of Narayan’s characters living in the pre-independent and post-independent India. Ahistorical approach of Narayan to the prime locale of his fiction divests it of its contingent histories and specificities: Malgudi, despite its facade of spatio-temporal particularity, is oppressively universal. It is uncomfortable to view Malgudi as being representative of the socially and culturally non-elitist India. The construction of Malgudi is executed with clinical precision: the undesirable realities of India are frigidly excised and characters who are unlike Narayan and his people are exorcised from this small south Indian town. Both Srinivas and Sampath belong to this ‘consecrated’ world of Narayan. He writes in his autobiography how Sampath entered his life and a character in one of his novels:

I found Sampath a charming friend, always cheerful, bouncing with enthusiasm, full of plans (although not for printing jobs), and involved in a score of tasks not always concerning him. He specialized in the theatre, was a master of the dramatic arts, his office walls were covered with photographs of Sampath in various costumes and make-up and poses. He rehearsed his actors in his office, while galley proofs streamed down his desk untouched; he helped people in litigation by introducing them to his brother an eminent
lawyer; he found houses for those who needed that kind of help; he did
everything zestfully except his printing job.

In a novel of mine Mr. Sampath became a film director. Today I find
that the Sampath in real life too has become a very busy film personality,
with a shooting schedule almost every day at studios in Mysore and Madras.
Nor has he neglected his press work, which is still being turned out on his
old treadle; he never made the mistake of actually expanding his equipment
with double-cylinder or Heidelberg. (179-180)

Srinivas and Sampath have a strange relationship that never gets
demystified in the course of the novel. The impression the reader is meant to
go away having read the novel is the inaccessibility and the impregnability of
the character of Sampath who is nearly omnipotent and capable of keeping
the earth unfailingly spinning. Srinivas has an incomprehensible relationship
to Sampath who touches the former’s life only tangentially, but remains
profoundly attached to him. The novel lacks a definitive structure that defies
any attempt at mapping due to the fact that the main character itself is
indefinably amorphous. Krishna of The English Teacher knows his mind
because he inhabits a colonial space that allows one the luxury of
constructing the other and act and think accordingly in relation and
opposition to it. The final decision taken by him would have been impossible
and even have made no sense in a postcolonial world, which poses the
problems that are radically different from the ones that spring from colonial experiences. Colonialism gave a sense of certainty to the colonised subjects in terms of their social, political and cultural objectives which in turn enabled them to evolve definitive identities. Srinivas does not find it comfortable to live in a world that is dreadfully large, unbound and free. It is understandable why Narayan’s first post-independent novel appears irritably fragmented and haphazardly structured.

Narayan’s strategy of untraceably banishing the other space and its cultural matrix from his world proves partly counterproductive in Mr. Sampath. Srinivas is at a loss as to define his self as there are no tangible perimeters that can provide him ontological orientations. The character like Srinivas is bound to be confounded about his existential bearings because his creator has serious problems understanding his responsibility as a writer in a newly-decolonised country. The writer has finally gathered courage to engage, of course non-committally, with the issues of nationalism and the legacies of colonialism. The issue, however, becomes pronouncedly irrelevant in the absence of the forces of political and cultural occupation. The writer and his protagonist are in the same confounding predicament; both suffer from a gnawing sense of emptiness created by the demise of colonialism. This psychological vacuity is to be generally found being strongly present among the communities that unconsciously identified and associated themselves
with the colonising power and its internalised values. The presence of material manifestations of colonialism is an inexhaustible constant source of justificatory ideology relied on by the native sympathisers of imperialism. The novel is set in the last years of British colonialism and has in it many overt references to the travails of politically subjugated nation. Yet, it is impossible to discern the ideological allegiance of the tonal nuances in the novel. Srinivas, created after the English left India, is fervently nationalist in outlook, but his idea of and ideals about the nation of India are strangely unrealistic and naive. His script prepared for Sampath’s film reflects some of his views about the nation that is in the agony of wriggling itself out of colonialism. He reads his story to Sampath:

*He read on. The others listened in stony silence. The hero of the story was one Ram Gopal, who had devoted his life to the abolition of the caste system and other evils of society. His ultimate ambition in life was to see his motherland freed from foreign domination. He was a disciple of Gandhi’s philosophy, practicing ahimsa (non-violence) in thought, word and deed, and his philosophy was constantly being put to the test till in the end a dilemma occurred when through circumstances a single knife lay between him and a would-be assailant; it was within the reach of both; it was the question of killing or getting killed....*(99)
This is not meant to be taken as lack of maturity on the part of Srinivas, for he often provides extraordinary acumen when it comes to understanding the worldly affairs that affect his life. The references to national movement and Gandhi are appallingly casual and self-consciously perfunctory. Sampath is more sincere in admitting that time has not come for the Indians to engage with Gandhian ideals, though he limits his comment to the Indian film audience. For both Srinivas and Sampath, at certain levels for Narayan, the obvious choice is the Indian mythology, which, all of them firmly believe, is the sole mode of creative expression. India seems to be on the threshold of entering a new era which Narayan thinks can be better gained access to through an earnest return to a pre-colonial and unmediated Hindu society driven by invisible spiritual forces. It is these forces that he wants the life of Indians to be centred on. Srinivas, Sampath and Ravi all seem to be controlled and steered around by mysteriously capricious forces that continuously rob their lives of any meaningful action. The confrontations between Srinivas and the representatives of the Raj often appear puerile and even farcical. The desire for resisting the colonisers and their policies on Srinivas’s part lacks earnestness and obviously half-hearted. Moreover, there is very insignificant little political dimension to the futile acts of resistance that invariably fail to gather any noteworthy momentum. While holding safe for Ravi who has been dismissed from his job in an English-run bank for misspelling an English name, Sampath argues with mock chivalry with former’s employer:
“This is not India of East India Company days, remember, when you looked upon as a sahib, when probably your granduncle had an escort of five elephants whenever he stirred out. Nowadays you to give and take at ordinary human levels, do you understand? Forget for ever that god created Indians in order to provide clerks for the East India Company or their successors” (107)

Srinivas is capable of this kind of outburst, yet he does not sound as convincing as Narayan wants him to. His inconsistency undermines the structure of the entire novel. It is often argued that the novel is meant to represent the chaos and anarchy that accompanied the years that preceded and followed Indian independence. The fluidity of the chain of events that follow one another is disconcerting and often leaves the reader wondering as to the nature of the central thematic preoccupation of the novel. Srinivas, however, is not as much confused about his priorities of life as he is indifferent to his responsibilities. His monumental sense of detachment to the secular world makes his actions bewilderingly irresponsible and he is apathetic to their consequences. His attempts at establishing himself in the world of real people and real things are non-committal and he carries out his obligations with an astonishing measure of impassiveness that often borders on a disguised form of cynicism. There is very little sign of him earning any money to run his household in the course of the novel. This absence of any
reference to money in the life Srinivas is to be taken as a virtue on the part of the protagonist resulting from his transcendental worldview that can keep him safely removed from the concerns of quotidian life. His brother takes care of money whenever Srinivas needs it and there is no sense of gratitude for the money that arrives from long distance. His only refuge from the grinding and harrowing realities is the image of Nataraja that he constantly turns to.

He prayed for a moment before a small image of Nataraja which his grandmother had given him when he was a boy. This was one of the possessions he had valued most for years. It seemed to be refuge from the oppression of time. It was of sandal wood, which had deepened a darker shade with years, just four inches high. The carving represented Nataraja with one foot raised and one foot pressing down a demon, his four arms outstretched, with his hair flying, the eyes rapt in contemplation, an exquisitely poised figure. His grandmother had given it to him on his eighth birthday. She had got it from her father, who had discovered it in a packet of saffron they had brought from the shop on a certain day. It had never left Srinivas from that birthday. It was on his own table at home, or in the hostel, wherever he might be. It had become a part of him, this little image. (19)

This passage speaks volumes for Srinivas’s attitude to life and to world that he refuses to be an integral part of; he becomes constantly resigned to
this passive state of mind when faced with daunting adversities. The absence of faith in the material world he lives is so marked that it makes the novel a heightened non-serious work. The loose structure of the novel may be seen as a narrativised metaphor of a newly-emergent nation that is incapable of defining itself in concrete terms. The essentially elitist Hindu mind has conceived India as a nation that is exclusively peopled by individuals like Krishna, Srinivas, Sampath or Ravi. All of them see themselves as representing the ‘real’ India in its homogenised and monolithic entirety. All of them are looking for sinecures which, they believe, they deserve, or are even entitled to, by virtue of their high-caste. Narayan’s novels are symptomatic of the privileged Hindu worldview that holds the million little narratives of the nation to ransom. Naipaul believes that this malady of Bramhincal (of course he carefully avoids using this term) self-centred view of life stems from an utter indifference to the immediate reality. Lack of active involvement in the worldly affairs on the part of Srinivas, for Naipaul, is begotten by a gnawing fear of ‘defeat and destruction’. This ethical lassitude is, for him, an outcome of the infertility of Hindu mind. He is wilfully confused: he is sure to have known about Indian society more than always pretends. The invisibility of larger India in Naipaul’s interpretive narratives is neatly corroborated by Narayan’s imploding India. What Naipaul calls Hindu is characteristically Brahmin, a nomenclature he brazenly shies away
from. Ravi’s madness is equally inscrutable like Srinivas’s obstinate inaction both of which seem to originate from the same solipsistic ontological views.

Just twenty years have passed between Gandhi’s first call civil disobedience and the events of the novel. But already, in Srinivas, Gandhian nonviolence has degenerated into something very like the opposite of what Gandhi intended. For Srinivas nonviolence isn’t a form of action, a quickener of social conscience. It is only a means of securing an undisturbed calm; it is non-doing, non-interference, social indifference. It merges with the ideal of self-realisation, truth to one’s identity. These modern-sounding words, which reconcile Srinivas to the artist’s predicament, disguise an acceptance of karma, the Hindu killer, the Hindu calm, which tells us that we pay in this life for what we have done in past lives: so that everything we see is just and balanced, and the distress we is to be relished as religious theatre, a reminder of our duty to ourselves, our future lives. (15)

The colossal degree of forbearance with which Srinivas restrains himself from action—which Naipaul calls quietism—exemplifies the ways in which Narayan expects changes to come. The Hindu theatre of Karma plays out throughout the novel in a singularly ‘exotic’ way. The flawed views of Hinduism both Naipaul and Narayan nurse in their consciousness are strikingly identical. Srinivas’s understands of Gandhi and Hinduism is a very convenient and incomprehensive one; so is that of Naipaul’s which is cleverly
predicated on a large number of ellipses in his knowledge. Naipaul writes about the possibility of grossly misunderstanding a writer and his works due to a lack of a contextual knowledge of and exposure to the world that makes such a writer or his works possible. He would have us believe that his visit to India made him change his views, which had long subscribed to, about the nation his forefathers had hailed from and, consequently, his views about Narayan changed. This had to happen as what he had heard of did not square with what he bore witness to. And, it may be very timidly suggested, it is always possible that there exists an unbridgeable chasm between what one sees and what one understands. The crowning folly of Naipaul is his monumental pretension to be able to comprehend everything he catches a glimpse of. This presumption informs Narayan’s fiction in many subtle ways. This is what Naipaul says about the gap between the novel and India:

*Because we take to novels our own ideas of what we feel they must offer, we often find, in unusual or original work, only what we expect find, and we reject or miss what we aren’t looking for. But it astonished me that, twenty years before, not having been to India, taking to Mr.Sampath only my knowledge of Indian community of Trinidad and my reading of other literature, I should have missed or misread so much, should have seen only a comedy of small-town life and picaresque, wandering narrative in a book that was really so mysterious.*
(r)ead during the Emergency, which was more than political, I saw in Mr. Sampath a foreshadowing of tensions that had to come to India, philosophically prepared for defeat and withdrawal (each man an island) rather than independence and action, and torn now between the wish to preserve and be psychologically secure, and the need to undo. (15-16)

It is a formidable proposition that one should try to grasp what he had thought of India and what he chose to think about it on visiting it, and where does Narayan along with his fiction stand in relation to Naipaul’s perception of India. What Narayan envisions as India of dreams is what Naipaul has, as a result of his estrangement with Indian civilisation, steadily learnt to abhor. They are two Brahmins separated by the difference in the degree of their perceptual myopia: one is blinded by his infatuation for the West; the other is dazzled his own idea of India as it has never existed. This lopsided view of these two writers shapes their perception of India as a nation. The narrative mode Narayan chooses to appropriate in his novels is indicative of his notion of India. The chaos Srinivas sees, identical to the way Naipaul feels mystified by India’s multiple facets, all around himself is a direct outcome of his views of a perfect Hindu nation. India, as a nation, is characteristically Hindu for Narayan; his brand of Hindu does not include a lot about Indian civilisation that is not to his liking. For Naipaul Mr. Sampath is a fable that represents the
Indian ‘national character’ of imperturbability and ingrained nonchalance. And, for the representative Indian like Srinivas “identity became an aspect of karma, self-love was bolstered by an ideal of nonviolence”. Naipaul refuses to see anything other than people like Narayan are prepared to show and what they show constitutes very little of India as pluralist society. If Naipaul writes about India with a hard-acquired illusion of having understood India inside out and that of being able to view it objectively, Narayan writes about India, or should we say writes of it, with a wilful fantasy of being a part of it. If the former suffers from an overdeveloped sense of fallacy of being an Indian descendent the latter lives in an emotional and psychological exile which deters him from connecting with India of legion histories and million subcultures. It is not frightfully difficult to defend Narayan’s attitude to Hindu society and Indian as a nation, which of course a good number of Indian metropolitan critics have taken immense pains to do on preposterous grounds; yet, the present researcher is left wondering about the propriety and desirability of subscribing to an effectively defective and tapered view of India. The ground which neither Naipaul’s nor Narayan’s ideas of India cover is bewilderingly sprawling and methodically exclude a great measure of Indian modes of living. If the adaptation of the genre of novel by Indian writer is travesty of it in its European pristine form, it miserably fails to become an accomplished genre of literature in a country that has avidly chosen to remain culturally and psychologically colonised forever. Hence, for
him the novel in Indian context is a mere fable, as all Third World literature is
political allegory for Fredric Jameson. John Thieme tries to bridge the gulf
between these two awry views of India:

In Mr. Sampath the film is roundly satirized and when the project
collapses, Srinivas feels relieved to have escaped from the ‘chaos of human
relationships and activities’ through his vision, which enables him to see it
as part of a larger design. But all of this remains inscribed within mundane
realities of day-to-day living, the here-and-now contingency that
characterizes the Western novel from its eighteenth-century infancy
onwards. Hindu fable is present, but Naipaul’s view of this as an all-
important infrastructure distorts the emphasis. His reading involves a
narrowly prescriptive view of the novel genre, a reductive account of karma
and a view of Mr. Sampath, which even though it still allows for the
presence of social comedy—he says his re-reading made him realize that
Mr. Sampath was also a religious fable—over-emphasizes the mythic elements.
The central dynamic of the novel relies on the syzygy, the psychological
opposition between the two main characters. (77)

The play of Karma theory does not end with Mr. Sampath, nor does the
intensity of its assertion diminish in any way in Narayan’s following novels.
The Financial Expert which appeared next in line lies out of the purview of the
present dissertation and as such is left out of our discussion of Narayan in
favour the putatively the most political of his novels *Waiting for The Mahatma* which appeared in 1955. Gandhi is a very difficult subject for any writer to grapple with and this subject becomes very unwieldy if a given writer is unsure of his or her attitude to the Mahatma. The novel appeared six years after Gandhi was assassinated and has in its background freedom movement brewing and the Mahatma looming large. It is inappropriate and even irrelevant to be suspicious of the possible reasons for the timing of the appearance of a book even if it is about seemingly as innocent a subject as Gandhi. Gandhi is not the prime thematic concern of the novel; yet he is the primary driving force of the acts and actors of the novel. However, it must be admitted that writing about colonial resistance movement eight years after India gained independence is not same as writing about it when the coloniser was around with his brutally coercive state apparatus.

As it has been already admitted Gandhi is a hard subject to handle and we have a number of examples of how writers have miserably faltered in treating this knotty theme. This is complicated by the presence of an incredible range of diversity, and often even stunning contradictions, in the perception of Gandhi as a man and a force. And the whole issue takes on an intriguing dimension with a good deal of discontent brewing in writers and intellectuals about the Gandhian brand of nationalism. It is not impossible to understand as to why Gandhi has been both projected and understood as
representing Hindu nationalism in its not so modest form. The idiom of Gandhi and the Congress was not only singularly Hindu very often it sounded elitist. William Gould in his Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics sheds this aspect Gandhian politics

Gandhi’s own references to Hinduism involved a strategy of using moral and religious questions to bolster a political standpoint. The juxtaposition of ideas about ‘Hindu’ religion with the moral and political integrity of the nation suggested that Gandhi possessed a concept of ‘Hindu community’, and, importantly, that he related its welfare to India. Unlike many other Congressmen who, whilst using a sense of religiosity in their political appeals, rarely described their religion with the actual title ‘Hindu’, Gandhi was very free in his descriptions of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Hinduism’. In his writings leading up to and after the fast he talked of conversions ‘from’ Hinduism as if it were an actual religious sect: ‘It speaks volumes for their loyalty for the innate virtue of hinduism that millions of harijans have clung to it. And ‘An untouchable who loves his Hinduism in the face of persecution at the hands of those Hindus who arrogate to themselves a superior status is a better Hindu.’ Interestingly, Gandhi also used religious references to describe his fast. (120)

Gandhi could also be seen to be peripheral to the main narrative of the novel which is an uncomplicated love story unfolding against the backdrop
of India’s struggle for freedom. Sriram is one of the numerous Brahmin young men of Malgudi around the existential and ontological difficulties of whom the chief line of narration of the novel is woven. Bharati, whom the protagonist has madly fallen in love with, is a Gandhian to her fingertips and has power to make her pursuer adapt an austere life. Sriram has little to worry about his livelihood as his grandmother has already taken care of it from the money saved from his father’s pension. Like all the characters of Narayan he is unsure of his bearings and is a perfect drifter. His accidental encounter with Bharati brings him into contact with Gandhian philosophy, leading him to a more confused state of existence. Political as it is and as it has been flaunted to be, the novel makes very unsettling disclosures about the writer. There is little the present researcher desires to comment about the Gandhian brand of Hindu nationalism and how this elitist concept of Indian nation alienated the subaltern communities from the grand narrative of India. Yet, it is incumbent on this researcher to make a passing reference to Hindu nationalism, Hindu idea of India, Gandhi as the prime advocate of this regressive ideology and Narayan’s perceptions of this exclusionist view of India. Priyamvada Gopal comments about the ‘ignorance’ of a typical Gandhian:

*Though it rarely relinquishes its bantering tone, the novel does take the question of personal transformation seriously as its protagonist*
attempts to evolve from Malgudi delinquent to Gandhi-man and, eventually, dedicated citizen of independent India. In one sense, the structural challenge for the novel itself, as its action expands tentatively outwards from Malgudi to cover other parts of India is to juxtapose the local, the familiar, and the intimate with the imagined vastness of nation. At a philosophical level, it poses the question: what happens when our commitments must expand—sometimes overnight, as in this case—from the local and the proximate to encompass the places we have never been to and people we have never seen? As Benedict Anderson (1991: 6) has famously suggested, the nation ‘is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’. The vast, new spaces of free India can only be traversed with a degree of trepidation by the brand-new ‘Indian’. Sriram’s comfortable ignorance of a world beyond Malgudi occasions some uncharacteristic editorializing from Narayan when his protagonist arrives at a village, having seen one only in Tamil films. ‘Sriram could hardly believe he was within twenty miles of Malgudi and civilization . . . [His] idea of a village was nowhere to be seen’. (56-57)

Since the inception of the Indian National Congress in 1885 till India gained independence in 1947 the idea of India as a nation evolved in many directions and acquired many dimensions. However, due to the homogeneity
of the English-educated Indian elite the entire notion of nation was socially, culturally and intellectually unidirectional and crystallised around Hindu religious ideology. It was felt necessary, in order to develop a cogent idea of Indian nation, to search for a common and celebratory past of the people of the subcontinent. This quest and discovery of the national past of India had its strong roots in Hindu political, social and cultural history. The Congress party was shot through with this elitist ideology of nation blindly modelled after European concept of nationhood. As Benedict Anderson has theorised the emergence modern nation was made possible by a new mode of narration resulting from the birth and the growth of the genre of novel. It is not a mere coincidence that in Indian context the development of the notion of Indian nation corresponded with the growth novel in English and regional languages.

Gandhi was Hindu to the core in his views, outlook and practice. Gandhi’s understanding of India’s past was different to a great degree from that of the English-educated Indian intelligentsia that controlled the Congress. Gandhi’s search for a shared past of the nation led him to myths in favour of which he discarded history. It was his strong view that this was the best way Indians could prove the Englishman wrong in assumptions. With a determined view to defeating the European colonial ideology he adapted the Hindu ideas of history which was primarily myth-driven and faith-informed.
This vision of India came to dominate the Congress political cultural ideology. His attitude to modernity was very ambiguous which in the final years of the freedom struggle drove the working class away from Gandhian ideology. Gandhi’s nationalism was informed his intense opposition to both western modernity and British colonialism. This led to the rejection of political ideologies of modernity such as Marxism and feminism. National movement came to be envisioned in terms of ‘harmonious Hindu community’. The entire movement led by Gandhi and the Congress acquired a complex dimension by subscribing to an equivocal attitude to caste and untouchability. Debjani Ganguly has the following to say about Gandhian view to Hinduism in *Caste, Colonialism and Counter-Modernity*:

Gandhi saw Hindu religion and Hindu social structures as containing within them the potential to undo the harm done by exploitative caste practices. That is why he insisted that the untouchables needed to be brought back into the Hindu fold, and asserted that the penance by caste Hindus would enable Hinduism to regain its spiritual power as a ‘living faith designed to satisfy the most exacting conscience, the deepest thinker and the godliest person. As he says in epigraph to My Soul’s Agony: ‘it will only be out of the ashes of untouchability Hinduism can revive, and thus purified become a vital and vitalising force in the world’. Since Gandhi was bent on assimilating the untouchables into the Hindu fold, his programmes
for their rehabilitation not surprisingly focused on the practices such as interdining, intermarriage and temple entry, practices that the radical dalit leaders such as Ambedkar interpreted as being dependent on benevolence of the caste Hindus as to constitute no fundamental challenge to the status quo.

(76)

It is against the circulation of these anti-Gandhian discourses that we must try to critique *Waiting for the Mahatma* which exposes the holes in Gandhi’s and Narayan’s outlook to India and Hinduism. Sriram is caught in time warp; like Malgudi he never changes in the real sense of the term. Gandhian values are slow to percolate into the fossilised minds of Malgudi, and it is inconceivable for the people of this small place to think beyond what passes for Gandhianism. The arrival of Gandhi to Malgudi and what follows it is presented with a theatrical affectation that is present throughout the novel. Gandhi always conducted himself with a good deal theatricality and so was his brand of politics that so heavily relied on human pathos. And the novel provides this in plenty with a subtle undertone of sarcasm that springs from the author’s persistently unsubdued scepticism about Gandhi as the main source of influence of the modern India. This is substantiated by the manner in which Gandhi’s reception is depicted. For Sriram Gandhi is always marginal on his consciousness which is pervaded by Bharati. It is as if he
could not separate the thoughts of Gandhi from that of women. Both of them are very ironically interwoven in his mind:

    Gandhi seemed to be a man who spotted disturbers and cross-thinkers however far away they sat. He was sure to catch him the moment he arrived on the platform, and say, ‘You there! Come up and make a clean breast of it. Tell this assembly what your thoughts were. Don’t look in the direction of the girls at all if you cannot control your thoughts.’ Sriram resolutely looked away in another direction, where men were seated. ‘A most uninteresting and boring collection of human faces; wherever I turn I see only some shopkeeper or a schoolmaster. What is the use of spending one’s life looking at them?’ Very soon, unconsciously, he turned again towards the women, telling himself, ‘So many sisters and mothers. I wish they would let me speak to them. Of course I have no evil thoughts in my mind at the moment.’ (29-30)

    Gandhi had a very complex attitude to women and carnal desire. It very often made it possible for people to misconstrue his views and intentions. Sriram finds it impossible to get himself to see point of view to physical desire and the above passage seems to be a mockery of Gandhi’s tenets of austerity and celibacy. Thoughts of women never leave Sriram, nor does he stop pursuing Bharati in blind desire. At the critical junction where Sriram’s mad desire and Bharati’s nonchalance refuse to meet Gandhi stands
in denial of their worldviews. The constant refusal to understand the Gandhian ideals is persistent and well-evident; there are alternative discourses of freedom and India in circulation that continuously threaten to overawe what Gandhi stands for. Sriram is incapable of grasping Gandhian philosophy in its totality as he is unable to make sense of the dynamics of his contemporary social upheavals. Knowing very little about what it means to be socially active without renouncing his high-caste origins he flings himself into a simulated social reformatory movement. John Thieme has a pertinent point to make about this part of the novel;

*In this part of the novel Sriram lives in another familiar Narayan heterotopian space, a ruined temple, possibly suggesting that his involvement in social activism is underpinned by older spiritual codes and there is continuity from the Hindu past. If so, this would not only be reconcilable with Gandhi’s social philosophy, but also more generally the notion that progressive transformations need not involve a rupture with the past.* (94)

This is what is often projected to be the most radical aspect of the Gandhian philosophy and the most commendable element in Narayan’s fiction. The undesirability of any hiatus between the past and present is metaphysically designed into their schemes of thoughts. The quality of any desirable change is measured by its presumed conformity to the invariant
dynamic of continuity. Malgudi is perfect in so far as it manages to entertain and sustain changes that do not revolt against the spirit of the past. The present is and has to be seen as a logical extension of the past, and any attempt to disturb this continuum is deemed to be socially and spiritually disruptive and destructive one. The last part of the novel, which is set in independent India, laments the proliferation of the aberrational tendencies that seem to militate against the opulent legacy of the nation’s past. Sriram is released from the prison after the country gains independence and he steps onto the free India which does not seem to have changed in any substantial way. This is what he finds and feels in his free country:

He walked down the road towards town, wondering where he should go now. A few buses passed him. He hoped people would not recognise him. There was a policeman sitting in one of the buses and Sriram turned instinctively away from the direct line of vision. He walked on along the edge of the road. ‘This is an independent India into which I am walking now,’ he reflected. What was the sign that it was independent? He looked about him. The trees were as usual, the road was not in the least improved, and the policemen still rode the footboard of the highway buses. He felt tired and hungry. He had not more than a few rupees left after the warders had had their claim. He wished that some sort of transport was provided for prisoners let out of jail: it was very inconsiderate, even in a free India to have
to face it! He hoped that some day they would make him a minister and he
would open a canteen, and place the station-wagons at the disposal of
prisoners at the jail gate so that those that came out might not feel so lost.

(219-220)

He presents the characters in the light of the most contemplated
universal theory of *Karma* as devised by *The Gita*, a Hindu epic. Almost all
Narayan’s characters demonstrate the growing pains arising from the
dissatisfaction with their mundane lives. De facto, this dissatisfaction comes
in their process of achieving self-realization. Narayan’s characters achieve a
synthesis of flesh and spirit through the philosophic interpretation of their
own mundane activities. Narayan has also presented the great theory of order
and disorder in his novels. One finds the ‘order-disorder’ pattern on a large
scale in Narayan’s novels. In his presentation of human relationship between
two human beings, there is order in the beginning, but this order is not
lasting. Narayan’s fiction reiterates the doctrine of *Karma* (action) in the
Indian philosophical systems. The innate trust in life and the capacity of its
renewal in the face of a threat of its existence is the central principle of his
fiction. The Indian philosophy regards this life which functions in a cyclical
order subjected to various ups and downs as medium of true self-realization.
Narayan has presented the theory of *Karma* in some of his novels.
Narayan’s novels explore the theory of *Artha* and *Kama* in a truly Indian sense. It is a classic exposition of the Hindu philosophy of equilibrium where man survives the external shocks of adversity positively and peacefully. Narayan’s fiction corroborates with the eternal view of self-realization and *Moksha* as well as the contents of Indian philosophy. Moreover, his birth and upbringing in a traditional Brahmin family further substantiates this indelible mark of Hinduism on his personality and writing. The material body is perishable by nature. It may perish immediately or it may do so after a hundred years. It is a question of time only. There is no chance of maintaining it indefinitely. But the spirit soul is so minute that it cannot even be seen by anybody. In the Vedanta Sutras the living entity is qualified as light because he is part and parcel of the Supreme light. As sunlight maintains the entire universe, so the light of the soul maintains this material body. As soon as the spirit soul is out of this material body the body begins to decompose: therefore it is the spirit soul which maintains this body. He establishes the universal truth that the fulfilment of man’s desires and aspirations is limited very much by forces outside the control of the human will. There are certain facts of which death is the most obvious which no aspiration and no force of man can conquer.

There is a sort of stubbornness in the stuff of experience which frustrates and resists the human desire. There is very little that is felt
necessary to change and the kind of change Sriram and Narayan find desirable and missing in the new India does not involve a proposal for the redistribution of wealth or power. That would amount to discontinuing with the past violently. The novel ends with a description of the death of Gandhi in a matter-of-fact tone. The social and political activism Gandhi envisioned and approved of by Narayan is predicated not only on the abjuration of violence but also on being indifferent to consequences. All his characters – Krishna, Srinivas and Sriram- act because it is incumbent on them to do so: all of them like their creator believe in the theory of *karma* and earnest actors in what Naipaul calls the theatre of *karma*. 


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