RITUALISTIC REITERATION
From the quest of the Absolute in Raja Rao, and Anand's projection of Indian society in a historical perspective, one enters into a different world altogether in Narayan's novels. Here the 'sacred' is not juxtaposed as a 'metaphysic' or a 'dead myth' against the socio-cultural scene but enters into the rough and tumble of daily living in the lives of inmates of Malgudi from their birth to the last rites. Malgudi, the imaginary town of Narayan's fiction, represents colonial India in the throes of transition. Malgudi is portrayed in its different phases of urbanisation — under the western impact — evolving into a modern city where life is routinised under the burden of the traditional social structures and new contingencies.

...the life of Malgudi — never ruffled by politics — proceeds in exactly the same way as it has done for centuries, and the juxtaposition of the age-old convention and the modern character provides much of the comedy.¹

It is not only Graham Greene who perceives a stasis in the life of Malgudi but Narayan has also been reported to have told Naipaul, "whatever happened, India

would go on." What Narayan perceives as the survival of a culture, despite changes in the external circumstances, tacitly panders to the Western view of the traditional societies. It would be fallacious to maintain that, in India, the pattern of living "proceeds in exactly the same way as it has done for centuries" as Graham Greene converses upon Narayan's readers to believe. Naipaul has rightly pointed out:

"The India of Narayan's novels is not the India the visitor sees.... Too much that is overwhelming has been left out; too much has been taken for granted. There is a contradiction in Narayan, between his form which implies concern, and his attitude, which denies it."

Unlike Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, Narayan studiously avoids making any claims regarding the aim of his fiction which, as some of his critics would have it, is nothing more than pure storytelling. Narayan has enjoyed the reputation of 'pure' storytelling in the vein of pure comedy. But it is questionable whether there can be pure story-telling and pure comedy without an underlying world-view. As Narayan has himself maintained:

2Naipaul, V. S. An Area of Darkness, p. 228.

3"Narayan is a story-teller, nothing less and seldom more." Parameswaran, Uma, A Study of Representative Indo-English Novelists, p. 46. C. Paul Verghese also holds a similar view.
"Every story has implicit in it a philosophical or moral significance, and an underlining of the distinction between good and evil. To the storyteller and his audience the tales are so many chronicles of personalities who inhabited this world at some remote time, and whose lives are worth understanding, and hence form part of human history rather than fiction. In every story, since goodness triumphs in the end, there is no tragedy in the Greek sense; the curtain never comes down finally on corpses strewn about the stage. The sufferings of the meek and the saintly are temporary, even as the triumph of the demon is; everyone knows this. Everything is bound to come out right in the end; if not immediately, at least in a thousand or ten thousand years; if not in this world, at least in other worlds."

Even though Narayan is describing the ethos of the traditional Indian storyteller, yet this description unwittingly fits Narayan's fiction as well. Narayan does not harangue like Raja Rao or Mulk Raj Anand but cleverly smuggles his import through his fiction.

Responding to the question "which elements of the Indian tradition appeal to you and how would you envisage their interaction with modern consciousness for a fuller and happier living?", Narayan replied, "Vedic and epic traditions. I do not know how to answer the second half of the question." In his polite reluctance to answer.
the second half of the question lies the subtle secret of Narayan's art of storytelling. It is this subtlety which has been acclaimed by T.D. Brunt as the hallmark of Narayan's fiction:

"Fiction of this kind will, of course, be Indian in the deepest sense. It will depict analytically the quick and spirit of Indian society - by showing individuals whose experience is Indian culture. But it will be free of fake profundity, orientalism and lush scene painting. It will be written 'with the eye on the object' and without pandering to the national self-esteem of the Indians or the gullibility of European intellectuals."

It needs to be examined whether the safe-distancing is a literary technique or an attribute of Narayan's vision, and also whether his depiction of the quick and spirit of Indian society is analytical or axiomatic. An attempt has been made through an analysis of the three novels of Narayan - 'The English Teacher', 'The Financial Expert' and 'The Guide' - to appraise the working of Narayan's comic irony and its vital reservations on the incursion of modernity on traditional Indian sensibility.

Impact of exposure to English Education on the style of living and thinking of Indians is the focus of 'The English Teacher'. Krishnan feels irritated and outraged when an exasperated Mr. Brown, Principal of Albert Mission College, tells him admonishingly:

"Could you imagine a worse shock for me? I came across a student of English Honours, who did not know till this day that Honours had to spell with 'u'?" (p. 2).

Mr. Brown wonders if his thirty years stay in India had not been completely wasted since it could not open 'the eyes of Indians to the need for speaking and writing correct English." (p. 2) In sheer desperation Krishnan remarks to his colleague Gajapathy, "... there are blacker sins in this word than a dropped vowel" (p. 3) and asks, "why should he think that the responsibility for learning is all on our side and none on his? Why does he magnify his own importance' (p. 3). But what thrills Krishnan himself is the fact that, "I could still see where I used to sit assiduously cultivating correct language" (p. 4). His mind is always teeming with English authors and for describing his wife he falls back on Wordsworth. "My mind unconsciously quoted - the habit of an English teacher" (p. 56) reveals how far the enchantment with English language could go. Describing his father, Krishnan says:
"He was a B.A. of the olden days brought up on Pater and Carlyle and Scott and Browning, personally looked after by Mr. William Miller / Mark Hunter and other prominent professors of Madras College, he was fastidious and precise in handling English language, though with a very slight pomposity, inevitable in the mind of those days." (p. 17)

Handling of English language has become a supreme value and criterion for measuring people up, for Krishnan. And yet he complains that teaching of English does not involve his being at all - it is blabbering out what he had mugged up earlier than his students whom he had to teach (p. 9). He regards his teaching of English as a dull and boring routine - an exercise in futility. Away from the cramping environment of his routine he experiences a new lease of life after a dip in the river Sarayu:

"I felt I was really in a new world I walked nearly four miles down the bank. Before turning back, I selected a clean spot, undressed and plunged in the water. Coming on shore and rubbing myself with the towel, I felt I had a new lease of life... There was something in the deliberate effort and the hour and the air, and surroundings. Nature, nature, all our poets repeat till they are hoarse. They are subtle invisible emanations in nature's surroundings; with them the deepest in us merges and harmonizes. I think it is the highest form of joy and peace we can ever comprehend." (pp. 6-7).

Writing of poetry, he thinks, is fulfilling his obligation to the cosmos:
"I... took out a sheet of paper and wrote a poem entitled 'Nature about fifty lines of verse. I read and re-read it, and found it very satisfying. I felt I had discharged a duty assigned to me in some eternal scheme." (p. 8).

His habit of occasionally writing verse to fulfil his role in the cosmic scheme is disturbed by the premature death of his wife. House hunting had taken both Krishnan and his wife to Lawley extension. Along with Sastri they were negotiating with the contractor for renting a new house. Sushila happened to go into the lavatory where she was bitten by the flies which after a protracted illness led to her death.

"The door was so bright... she replied softly. "I thought it'd be clean inside too.... but I couldn't come out after I went in the door shut by itself with a bang. I thought something terrible had happened.... Ah, the flies and other things there!" (pp. 67-68).

Krishnan's mother-in-law was convinced that Sushila was attacked by a malignant spirit (p. 92) and a Swami was invited to the house to exorcise it (p. 93) but this therapy did not work. Sushila's death further aggravates his lack of interest in his job and he tries to busy himself with the upkeep of his daughter.

7 "We left the river and went to Lawley extension... Under a new scheme, the extension developed farther south. There was a general scramble for these sites and houses...". (p. 50).
It is at this stage that Krishanan gets a mysterious message from someone who claims to be redirecting his dead wife's message to him.

Krishanan's relationship with his wife, after she is dead, becomes the centre around which Narayan spins in a sensitive touching way his jaunt into the realm of death, his undergoing psychic discipline with a view to achieving contact with his dead wife. What is surprising is that the death of his wife launches Krishnan into the realm of the occult without any interaction between character and incident in the structure of the novel. The first phase in Krishanan's life, his experiences as a college lecturer teaching English, his over-weaning infatuation with wife and affection for his daughter, obey the causative dynamics of novel. But after his wife's death, follows a succession of experiences which fall at a tangent to the earlier phase of the novel. Through reference to minute and elaborate details of everyday living, Narayan tries to manoeuvre suspension of disbelief. But what is intriguing is that Krishnan/ who shows an amused and detached reservations about his wife's secret life/never entertains even the slightest doubt about his own mysterious adventure. The first glimpse of her secret life also he had in a rather casual
and unexpected manner. Moving to the dining room for coffee he discovered:

"A lovely at the end of the dining room served for a shrine. There on a pedestal she kept a few silver images of Gods and covered them with flowers; two small lamps were lit before them every morning. I often saw her standing therewith the light in her face her eyes closed and her lips slightly moving. I was usually amused to see her thus and often asked what exactly it was that she repeated before her Gods. She answered this question to this day I have never learnt what magical words she uttered there with closed eyes. Even when I mildly joked about it. "Oh! becoming a yogi!" she never tried to defend herself, but treated my references with the utmost indifference. She seemed to have a deep secret life. There hung about this alcove a perpetual smell of burnt camphor and faded flowers." (p. 36).

\[ Communication with the spirit of his dead wife through a medium and later through his own self strikes as an occult thriller. \]

Narayan tries to redeem the eerie supernatural climate by relating it with the dailyness of living and through highlighting the role of sensory perceptions i.e., of jasmine flowers, saris of various colours and the other details about her bearing and mannerism. Narayan exercises his comic irony in making the supernatural participate and share his sallies in humour while he is receiving messages from his wife through the medium of his friends. He is reported by the spirits
that his wife was rollicking in laughter and, therefore, could not communicate any more. Narayan tries to make the supernatural quite familiar and plausible through the consciousness of Krishnan. He tries to give the supernatural a local habitation and a name. What, however, militates against the credibility of the exploits in the occult is lack of their correspondence with the logic of the novel. The room in which Sushila breathes her last is not used hereafter and kept locked. He does not care to keep her letters for which she admonishes him in her communications.

Unable to put up with the strain of his 'self-development' i.e. moulding his being to strike satisfying rapport with his dead wife, he resigns his job as a lecturer in Albert Mission College. He contemplates a resignation letter which "would singe the finger of whoever touched it." (205): About the contents of the letter he says:

"In it I was going to attack a whole century of false education. I was going to explain why I could no longer stuff Shakespeare and Elizabethan meter and Romantic poetry for the hundredth time into young minds and feed them on the dead mutton of literary analysis.

8 "The door of the room in which my wife passed away remained shut. It was opened once a week for sweeping and then closed again and locked." (p. 111).
and theories and histories, while what they needed was lesson in the fullest use of the mind.... This education had reduced us to a nation of morons, we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage." (205)

Krishnan resigns his job as an English Teacher not because he cannot put up with the inevitable strain of 'false consciousness - secondhand existence, but his schedule of dating with his dead wife is such a time-consuming preoccupation that he is hardly able to spare energy or inclination to go on with his job in the college. Narayan exploits the comic potential of the grotesque effort for acquiring plummage of English Education. Krishnan's disenchantment with English education is rather phoney. The way he describes his routine, "I got up at 8 every day, read for the fiftieth time Milton, Carlyle, and Shakespeare, looked through composition... and cajoling and browbeating a few hundred boys... so that they might mug up Shakespeare and Milton" (p. 1) - is more a caricature of Krishnan's habit of learning rather than that of English education. It may not be out of place to point that he is never shown reading a book but would use Taine's History of English Literature for stopping the alarm-bell of the clock. Mugging up seems to be his pursuit of scholarship.
In response to Mr. Brown's praise for his idealism Krishnan says,

"Sir, what I am doing in the college hardly seems to me work. I mug up and repeat and they mug up and repeat in an examination. This hardly seems to me work Mr. Brown. It is a fraud practiced for a consideration of a hundred rupees a month... it does not please my innermost self." (207.)

It may not be denied that English Education system is a source of 'second hand existence' and tears people away from their roots. But the way back to the root, for Krishnan, is not joining Headmaster's children nursery school as he gives out for the consumption of public, to dedicate himself to fostering the healthy growth of children, but exclusively pursuing communication with his wife in her astral existence. Krishnan resigns his job to make an advance in his project of 'self development' and he considers it merely expedient to serve in the children nursery school. Narayan's efforts to make the contact with the dead, convincing and plausible in terms of psychological realism and the realistic depiction of the locale and the content of dialogues between the living and dead turn out to be a fiasco. In her communications with Krishnan, Bushila shares small details of the intimacy they shared during her existence on earth. What is the colour of the sari she is wearing,
how the Jasmine smells, a bundle of fourteen letters which he had preserved and the silver casket containing her jewellery are time and again, mentioned to establish correspondence between her this and other-worldly existence. In her communications, Krishnan's wife discourses on the prospects of freedom peace and higher evolution of human consciousness through 'self education', yet the substance of her communications with Krishnan always relates to the petty trivialities of her appearance and family life. The fourteen letters and the box of ivory and sandalwood are her supreme obsession even in her astral existence. Narayan strains the credulity of the readers to the unreasonable limits when he seeks to lend credence to the claims of the gentleman who initiated Krishnan into this kind of communication: "I spend long hours here, and desire nothing better than to be left here to this peace... it is a place which belongs to eternity and that it will not be touched by time or disease or decay" (p. 126), or when Usila expounds her mystique regarding the confusion about life and death: "The moment you call someone who is in the next room, he answers you and comes your side if may be. I am present at your side when you sit for development and union. At other times, it is as if I were in the next room, aware of the fact of your presence, easily
accessible and ready to come at your slightest behest. 
You may even think of the walls separating us as walls 
of glass\ (p. 194). For all Narayan's earnestness and 
belief in the hot line between Krishnan and his wife/
the mystique of the walls of glass, and death just meaning
someone in the next room whom you can call any moment,
remains a flagrant suspension of comic irony.

THE FINANCIAL EXPERT

Increasing westernization has introduced the 
spirit of entrepreneurship and institutions of modern 
financing in Malgudi. From under the banyan tree, in 
front of the central cooperative land mortgage bank, a
petty money lender Margayya grows into a financial wizard 
enjoying the reputation of being the richest man of Malgudi.
Towards the end of the novel, his financial empire 
collapses like a house of cards and a wiser Margayya is 
back to the banyan tree to resume his Tin-box money-
lending. To the prodigal son Balu, who has come back,
Margayya putting his arms around him says:

"You see that box there. I have managed to 
get it out again'. He pointed to a corner 
where his old knobby truck was kept. 'It's 
contents are intact as I left them years ago - 
a pen and an ink bottle'." (p. 177).
with a philosophical air Margayya says, "I am showing you a way. Will you follow it?... Very well then, if you are not going, I am going with it as soon as I am able to leave this bed...". (p. 178).

The reader is not allowed by the novelist to entertain any doubt about Margayya's 'showing the way'. He has survived the ordeal precipitated by his lure of riches, success and glory under a spell. The spell of phoney existence having been dissipated Margayya is projected by Narayan to be wiser and not in the least sadder. It is not wisdom without tears but it is much more precious than the tears.

Imagine Margayya playing with his grandson:
"Now get the youngster here. I will play with him. Life has been too dull without him in the house." (p. 178).

Is it the same Margayya who was reluctant to go to Madras (p. 190) to find the whereabouts of his lost son Balu and who would worry about him only if he found some time off his crowded schedule:

"His affluence, his bank balance, buoyed him up and made him bear the loss of their son. He lived in a sort of radiance which made it possible for him to put up with anything. When he sat at his desk from early in the day till sunset, he had to talk, counsel, wheedle out, and collect money; in fact to go through all the adventures of money making. At the end of the day as he walked back home his mind was full of the final results, and so there was practically no time for him to brood over Balu." (p. 121).
Marayan seems to hold Margayya's affluence responsible for what he unmistakably considers his degeneration. To have moved out of the traditional groove of his moneylending under the banyan tree and built a fortune through his wits in the competitive financial world is considered inescapably fraught with disaster.

The phenomenon of Margayya's meteoric rise is held suspect by Marayan despite his frolicking with the circumstantial flukes. Smarting under the insult of the impounding of the application forms by Arul Doss and the Secretary of the Cooperative Bank/Margayya launches the project of get-rich-quick through propitiation of goddess Lakshmi for forty days. A snatch of conversation between Margayya and the priest reveals initial reservations in the mind of Margayya; "Perhaps he is a sorcerer, or a black magician or an alchemist". (p. 29). Driven by a vague sense of desperation Margayya steps into the temple. He had told himself that he was going to see God and not the priest. While in the temple, for a moment, Margayya felt that:

"... he was in a world free from all worries and problems. It was in many ways a noble world where everything ran smoothly - no Arul Doss or Cooperative Society secretary; no villagers with their complex finances; no son to snatch away an account book and drop it in a gutter." (p. 38).
Margayya is thrilled to learn from the priest the queer relationship between Gods and Goddesses:

"Margayya felt immensely powerful and important. He had never known that anybody cared for him... and now to think that two Goddesses were fighting to confer their favours on him.... Why should they care for me? he asked innocently. The priest replies: 'How can we question? How can we question the fancies of Gods?' 'If it's just there that's all.... It's beyond our power to understand.'" (p. 41).

The divine is just there to pervade and permeate the consciousness of Malgudians as unquestioned as their own existence. Margayya wonders how he doubted the efficacy of the ritual prescribed by the priest - "he was 'feeling more and more in despair of how he was going to fulfill the various injunctions; red lotus, grey skin cow, and antelope - where am I? - what a world this is" (p. 48). Not able to decide whether he should or shouldn't walk up to the 'red lotus' pond, seeing a cart he wonders:

"... if he was expected to reach his lotus by walking and not by riding in a cart. Would that in any way affect the issues and would it violate the injunction laid by the priest? 'I don't think there is anything wrong in it.... Perhaps this card was sent here by God.'" (p. 49).

But his doubts were proved wrong for no sooner had he finished his forty days Puja, than he ran into Dr. Paul who hustled him into bargaining for his unpublished classic for whatever money was there in his
purse. Margayya was in a fix but "somewhere a cycle bell sounded. Wasn't it auspicious, the sounding of a bell?... The sound of the bell was the voice of the God. God spoke through his own signs. Margayya's decision was made." (p. 73)... Margayya shares with Malgudian the aptitude to recognize the divine intimations and signals. Under the spell of affluence when he dares dictate the planets and maneuver compatibility of horoscopes for Halu's marriage he comes to a sorry pass. When Kauda, an old client turns up and surprised Margayya asks solicitiously:

"What is the matter with you and where are your teeth gone?" The other just raised his arms heavenward, lifted up his eyes as much as to say, 'Go and put that question to the heavens if you like.'" Interminable dialogue goes on between the Malgudians and the heavens and they are quite complacent and facetious about it.

Margayya is discourteous to the astrologer whom he demoralized by keeping him waiting:

"By his manner and words, Margayya had now completely cowed the man. It seemed unnecessary as a first step to dictate to the planets what they should do. Margayya had made up his mind that he was going to take no nonsense from the planets, and that he was going to tell them how to dispose their position in order to meet his requirement: his requirement was the daughter of a man who owned tea-estates in Mempé hills, and he was consulting the astrologer purely as a formality. These were not the days when he had to wait anxiously on a verdict of the stars: he could afford to ask for his own set of conditions and get them." (p. 152).
On meeting the priest emerging from the Lawley extension, Margayya makes fun of the priest living in timelessness and his Puja therapy of triumphing over Yama. While Balu is launched on a crash programme of studies, he invokes blessings of Goddess Saraswati:

"Margayya had secured a small framed picture of the Goddess Saraswati, the Goddess of learning and Enlightenment sitting beside her peacock and playing on the strings of a Veena. He hung it in the study and enjoined his son ceremoniously to pray to the Goddess every morning as soon as he got up from the bed." (p. 90).

Shocked at Balu's insolence towards the Goddess he says:

"You will be called a useless donkey by the whole world remember", Margayya said, his temper rising.

"Learn to talk with more reverence about the Gods.... Do you know where I was, how I started, how I earned the favour of the Goddess by prayer and petition.... The Goddess is the only one who can...." (p. 91).

But the son could not get through his S.S.S.C.I. examination and Margayya had no doubt whatever that his son had incurred divine wrath. (p. 121).

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10 "The priest lived in a sort of timelessness and seemed to be in no hurry (p. 24). "... In holy business can we be glancing at a wrist watch all the time.... It is the Puja that enabled young Markendeya to win over Yama, the God of death." (pp. 25-26).
It is not without reason that Margayya launches his modern banking project at Market Road where he hits staggering success and glory which ultimately turns out to be his undoing. Narayan's suspicions regarding success oriented ethos of the West are rather unmistakable. A kind of sudden elevation is invariably brought about to culminate into a crash fall. Margayya's fall as a sequel to his quarrel with Dr. Pal seems rather untenable in the context of Margayya's shrewedness in handling men and matters. But it is made inescapable since the dice is heavily loaded against the success hunters who are dubbed as over-reachers in the context of Malgudian ethos.

And the mystique regarding money betrays Narayan's desperation in exploiting the comic potential of the

11 "It is borne out by Margayya's own retrospection:

"Later in life Margayya often speculated what would have become of him if he had started back home after speaking to his daughter-in-law a little earlier and missed Dr. Pal's Austin that night, or if he had remained in the shadows and thus allowed Dr. Pal to go off after dropping Balu, whom he might probably have tackled with more circumspection and diplomacy: he might even have shared his property with him as he demanded: that would have saved him at least the rest of it - and prevented the doctor from doing what he did." (pp. 173-74).
mystical jargon:

"There was no other person in the whole country who had meditated so much on the question of interest... the more he thought of it the more it seemed to him the greatest wonder of creation.... Every rupee, Margayya felt contained in it seed of another rupee and that seed in it another seed and so on and on to infinity. It was something like the firmament, endless stars and within each star an endless firmament and within each one further endless.... It bordered on mystic perception." (p. 94).

Margayya thinks himself to be visionary: "He would not yet say what the scheme would be, but he sensed its presence, being a financial mystic." (p. 102).

Margayya's relationship with Dr. Pal is the nucleus of the novel. It is a measure of Narayan's subtlety that Dr. Pal is made both an agent of divine dispensation as well as Western individualism and success-orientation. And Narayan exploits the comic potential of both. Dr. Pal finds him the red lotus prescribed for the Lakshmi Puja and it is he who has fantastic new fangled notions regarding the anatomy of a best-seller and opening sociology clinic and Harmony Home and Tourism Bureau. To bewildered Margayya Dr. Pal explains:

12 "Tourism", said Dr. Pal, "is a very honourable and paying proposition in the West, but here nobody cares. There is not a single person anywhere here, who knows the history and archaeology of the country round about." (p. 155).
"I am going to start a sociology clinic, a sort of harmony home, a sort of hospital for creating domestic happiness, a sort of psychological clinic where people's troubles are set right..." (p. 69).

His unpublished classic, 'Bed Life' when published under the changed title 'Domestic Harmony' inaugurates the phase of good fortune for Margayya. It is under Dr. Pall's influence that Balu takes to dissipation and evil ways. Whether it is Margayya's debacle or his son's degeneration, Dr. Pall is in the dock and all so expeditiously that one suspects the novelist's intention whether he is not going out of the way in search of a scapegoat to establish his thesis regarding the superiority of the perennial, the East unchanging over the ephemeral and fleeting influence of the West. Margayya's wife seems to mouth the novelist's philosophy when she expounds her theory of non-interference and detachment and the unreality of the ephemeral: "She left it all to resolve itself.... She attained thereby great tranquility in practical everyday life.... She watched the trouble brewing between the two as if it all happened behind a glass screen." (p. 113).

THE GUIDE

Introduction of Railway has transformed Malgudi from a pastoral into a going-to-be-industrialized town. The fiscal scene already having changed with
institutionalized banking and spirit of entrepreneurship turns Malgudi into a hub of what Dr. R. had dreamt of, a tourist's haven. Against this scenario buzzing with ordeal of transition, Narayan explores the predicament of human bearings in the welter and flux of change in the context of tradition. In the complex structure of 'The Guide', one can identify the dilemma of 'self realization' in the lives of Baju, Bosie, Marco and the Malgudians from multiple perspectives. This juxtaposition of various perspectives on the theme of self-realization is a new development in Narayan's fiction, and Malgudi, which was a mere background in 'The English Teacher' and the infrastructure of consciousness in 'The Financial Expert', now plunges into the theatre of action staking its claim for survival and redemption. Alive and kicking Malgudi assumes a mythical character and participates now in the ritual of redemption. From a social and psychological space, it becomes a vibrant collective, a sentient emblem of the cosmos. Baju's sacrifice integrates him with Malgudi at the cosmic level of consciousness.

Whether or not Baju's finale is a sacrifice, an act of redemption, a mishap or a joke getting out of the hand is the thematic core of 'The Guide'. In the tension of the various plausibilities Narayan discovers the vitality of his comic muse. "Baju opened his eyes,
looked about, and said, "Yelan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it under my feet, up my legs, and with that he sagged down" (p. 221). Raining or not is not important but that Raju feels it under his feet and up his legs does induct a note of ambiguity into the situation, but one wonders if it is not a mere stylistic subtlety to set up complex undertones and reverberations—a typical Narayan effect. In a way Raju's finale is a conspiracy of the circumstances. Out from the prison, the stigma of an exconvict had closed Raju's options. We come across Raju for the first time "sitting cross-legged as if it were a throne, besides an ancient shrine." (p. 5). The respectful solicitation of a stranger makes him suspect if 'an apostolic beard had not suddenly grown there' on his face. And the apostolic beard and the complete outfit of a saint he does acquire. If for not doing anything he could live so well due to the courtesy and gullibility of the villagers, he thought it expedient not to disturb their make-believe and when he desparately tried to do it, he couldn't because it had got better of him. To Yelan in an earnest confessional outburst, he said that he was no saint but an exconvict and an extremely ordinary person, it was taken as an exercise in modesty and selfbattering befitting a genuine saint. If the moron, the younger brother of Yelan had not unwittingly
misreported his never-taken-resolve to fast for rains and if it had not spread like wild fire and if he had the guts to nip the evil in the bud, he would have been spared the ordeal of uninvited and unintended martyrdom. And then the naivety of the people - why should people be so susceptible. So exasperated was he that:

"Lying on his mat he brooded. He felt sick of the whole thing. When the assembly was at its thickest, could he not stand up on a high pedestal and cry, "Get out, all of you and leave me alone, I am not the man to serve you if you are doomed. Why do you bother me with all this fasting and austerity?" (p. 211).

How right was he that it wouldn't help. The sight of Velan angered him but to no avail. He could recall that for providing a diversion for the evening he had himself played on their susceptibilities.

"The earnestness with which he spoke brought the tears to Raju's eyes... He had told them, 'when the time comes, everything will be alright. Even the man who would bring you the rain will appear, all of a sudden'. They interpreted his words and applied them now to the present situation." (p. 96).

Narayan shifts the focus on Raju's own complicity with this imbroglio. In order to dissuade

\[13\] About Velan he says "This man will finish me before I know where I am." (p. 209).

When Velan complimented him on his profound wisdom Raju thought: "this single man was responsible for his present plight." (p. 212).
people from touching his feet when he told them that God alone was entitled to that kind of prosteration, he only ensured his saintly stature in the esteem of the villagers. His stay in the prison appeared as a transmigration:

"Raju felt he was growing wings. Shortly he felt he might float in the air and perch himself on the tower of the ancient temple. Nothing was going to surprise him. He suddenly found himself asking, "Have I been in a prison or in some sort of transmigration?" (p. 20)

He had discovered that the essence of sainthood was 'One's ability to utter mystifying statements' (p. 46) and the saintly make up. He was extremely cautious about composing his features for performing his role and so much was he hypnotized by his own felicity that he believed:

"... it was but right that they should touch his feet; as a matter of fact, it seemed possible that he himself might bow low, take the dust of his own feet, and press it to his eyes." (p. 94).

To the people hit by the draught he doles out this bit of prophetic assurance, "Be peaceful; everything will be alright; I will fix up with the Gods." (p. 83).

14 "A clean-shaven close-haired saint was an anomaly. He bore the various stages of his make up with fortitude, not minding the prickly phase he had to pass through before a well-authenticated beard could cover his face and come down his chest. By the time he arrived at the stage of stroking his beard thoughtfully, his prestige had grown beyond his wildest dreams." (p. 47).
Even though Raju is just being facetious and playing on the credulity of his audience, yet the fact remains that his audience did not even have a ghost of a doubt that he couldn't and the novelist's irony buttresses and abets this kind of faith despite its comic overtones. Drawing his fingers across his forehead Raju says: "whatever is written here will happen. How can we help it?" (p. 20) or "It is written on the brow of some that they shall not be left alone." (p. 49). Raju may think that he is playing sharp, merely indulging in a manner of speech, yet he is unconsciously summing up the beliefs and values of a whole ethos.

"If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?" For the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him a new strength to go through with the ordeal.... Lack of food gave him a
peculiar floating feeling which he rather enjoyed, with the thought in the background, this enjoyment is something Velan cannot take away from me." (pp. 213-14).

There is no more wavering no sense of being duped by others or by himself. It may be self-hypnosis but Narayan wouldn't have it that way. It may appear rather intriguing particularly when he shifts the focus on the T.V. team which appears on the spot for shooting a thriller for the delectation of the American audiences. And also when he describes the hubbub the choking traffic, the devotional songs, telegrams, press reporters and filming of Ali Baba on that spot to contain the excitement of the crowds. When the T.V. interviewer asks him: "Tell me, how do you like it here?" "I am only doing what I have to do, that's all. My likes and dislikes do not count." (p. 218) Narayan wouldn't like us to take it as a glib answer but an expression of spiritual maturity and a sense of self-abnegation. Raju, the railway guide

15 Introducing himself the TV producer says: "I'm James J. Malone, I'm from California. My business is production of films and T.V. shows. I have come to shoot this subject, take it back to our country and show it to our people there." (p. 217) One wonders if James J. Malone does not represent Narayan the storyteller as well.

16 The roads were choked with traffic, country carts buses and cycles, jeeps and automobiles of all kinds and ages. Pedestrians in files with hampers and baskets crossed the fields, like swarms of ants converging on a lump of sugar." (p. 216).
threatens to become and is projected as a spiritual guide.

Against Raju’s mis-adventure which ultimately turns out to be self-defeating and in fact a mode of self-realization, Narayan sets up the course of Rosie’s and Marco’s adventure in self-realization. Marco, he makes out to be the protege of Western individualism. So self-centered and lost is he, in his scholarly pursuits, that he is shown to be an atrophied human being. Irritated by his mannerisms Raju remarks:

"I felt suddenly irritated at the speed of his walk, as if he knew the way, swinging his cane and hugging his portfolio. If he could show half the warmth of that hug elsewhere... Dead and decaying things seemed to loosen his tongue and fire his imagination, rather things that lived and moved and swung their limbs." (p. 72).

Earlier in his relationship with Rosie he is described as a ‘monkey picking up a rose garland’ (p. 71)... pursuit of scholarship is his way of working out his salvation which makes of him a one-dimensional man. Emotionally starving his wife, he drives her into a romantic liaison with the first man who helped her recover the feel of being human. Narayan’s crude portrayal of Marco is his way of rejecting the lopsided individualism of the western style of living.

The central attack, however, is on Raju Rosie collaboration under the new fangled western style of
entrepreneurship. Described as a 'snake woman' by Raju's mother, Rosie is a dreamer suffocated with her unrealized dancing talent. It provides Raju an opportunity to play upon her susceptibilities.

"I'll make the world recognize you as the greatest artist of the age". (p. 135). A shrewed judge of men and matters, he had discovered the clue to Rosie's affection. So he started cultivating the dancing jargon, besides, of course, going in for Western fashionwear and perfumes. Their collaboration - the marriage of art and show-buzz shoots them into instant success and recognition. Rosie's dances her way to the pinnacle and Raju becomes a celebrity, a cynosure in the glamour world. It is not without significance that during this phase Raju and Rosie shift to a stylish house at New Extension befitting their newly acquired status. And then the crackdown of what Rosie describes as their 'circus existence'. (p. 198).

What is outrageous in bringing about this kind of unceremonious debacle is that Narayan holds the Western

17 "I found out the clue to her affection, and utilized it to the utmost. Her art and her husband could not find a place in her thoughts at the same time. One drove the other out." (p. 108).

18 "She was about to shut the door on me because I was not modern enough for her. This made me run to the tailor to make a few dashing bush-shirt and corduroys, and invest in hair and face-lotions and perfumes of all kinds." (p. 102).
ethos responsible for it rather than the depravity of human beings which would have boomeranged in any other situation as well.

Rosie attributes Raju's lack of ordinary character to 'the law of Karma'. A go-getter basically, Raju has a streak of a crook in him which Narayan indulgently describes as living on one's wits. As against him, Rosie is an innocent dreamer who stumbles upon the snare of 'circus existence' through Raju's clever coaxings. It is peace with her husband which she desired and not dancing (p. 133). Rosie in fact was happy in Raju's old house (p. 173) and despite riches and fame is rather unhappy. Showing solicitous concern for her,

Raju says:

"... as far as I can see, there is nothing for you to be sorry about - you are famous, you have made money, you do what you like you wanted to dance; you have done it." (p. 181).

Rosie is smitten with a sense of guilt for her extra-marital living and a thwarted affection for her husband which Raju never could understand. Raju, of course, understood it rather late that Rosie was sheer vitality,

19 "After all, after all, he is my husband." (p. 179).

20 "She allowed me to make love to her, of course, but she was also beginning to show excessive consideration for her husband." (p. 105).
Baju says: "Neither Marco nor I had any place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she herself had underestimated all along" (p. 199). Baju had no less of this 'sustaining vitality' and he cannot be accused of having underestimated as well. Vitality, in fact, is not enough unless it is imbued and integrated with the spirit of one's ethos. Both Rosie and Baju recoil from their alienated vitality seduced by the 'the circus existence' which indubitably is the westernised style of living for Karayan. Both seek asylum, Rosie in her dancing-girl-tradition and Baju in the Sacred. And enviable is the lot of the Malgudians symbolized by Vejan on whom Narayan bestows indulgence of his art and an unqualified admiration.

Affirmation of Hindu ethos and style of living is the thematic axis of Narayan's novels. This affirmation is achieved within and through the comic mode. The comic in the novels of Narayan acquires a different connotation from that in the West. Mere incongruity is not the source of the comic. Narayan's comedy draws sustenance from the Hindu faith in gods and goddesses. "... If chesterton's Bishop had slipped on a banana skin in an Indian street, people might attribute it to demoniac possession, but they would laugh, before
rushing to help him up. The terms of relationship between the human and the divine - how the Malgudians indulge their gods and goddesses woo, quarrel and frolick with them is an unfailing source of the comic. The comic here reinforces rather than undermine the reality of The Sacred.

Narayan's handling of the sacred which is the ground of Hindu sensibility, the nucleus of social and cosmic order, is extremely shrewd. Any change or disturbance in Narayan's universe is seen not a fact of history but a play of shadows, an illusion, an unreality which must dissipate itself for the cosmic order to prevail ultimately. Unlike Raja Rao, Narayan's pre-occupation with the Sacred is not metaphysical, but depicting the sacred in action, of how it enters the deepest centre of consciousness of people, manifests in the social and moral institutions, and informs their thoughts and feelings. In Anand's novels, the sacred is merely insinuated as an impregnable frame. But in Narayan's fiction, it imbues and permeates the entire range of personal and social awareness. It is the ultimate jostling in their consciousness with the immediate and the contingent.

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The most prominent feature of Narayan's fiction is the inalienable supremacy of the moral universe. There is a balance of power in the cosmic scheme and the good which is the off-spring of the sacred, always triumphs over the evil. Evil in Narayan's fiction is essentially self-destroying and is always characterized in black and white. Despite a perpetual conflict between the forces of Tamas, Rajas and Sattva, a precarious balance maintains the primacy of the Sattva. This is the dynamic and cohesive principle of Narayan's universe and is never considered problematic. This kind of faith constitutes the infra-structure of the consciousness of Malgudians and provides them an anchorage in their moments of distress. In his novels, cosmic morality, which is the quintessence of the sacred, is the supreme reality which ultimately prevails despite transgressions which are utterly inconsequential. His characters unfailingly vouch the omnipotence of the cosmic moral law. There are unsettling circumstances and disruptive contingencies which threaten to undermine this faith, but it triumphs ultimately.

22 Sastri in *The Man Eater of Malgudi* expresses his faith in the invincibility of The Sacred thus: "Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the rakshasas that were born. Every demon carries within himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction, and goes up within air at a most unexpected moment, otherwise what is to happen to humanity." (p. 250).
Another striking feature of the world-view of Malgudians is the organic relationship between the cosmic and the social order. How the cosmic order manifests itself in society, community and family? Narayan does not expostulate the relationship between the cosmic and human order like Raja Rao, in his preromations and interminable reflections. He works it out in the very texture of thinking and feeling of his characters, irrespective of the role they have to enact in the fictional scheme. There are occasions when some of the characters under the spell of individualism success and glamour defy this congenital awareness, but they are ultimately driven to a sorry pass. There is no platitudinizing, no jargon mongering regarding the sacred, it is taken as something settled and inviolable at the deepest level of awareness. In each novel of Narayan, the community of Malgudi is the central protagonist. In all the novels, Malgudi's strength and cohesion ultimately gets reinforced despite disruptions. Except in 'The English Teacher' the personal survival in Narayan's universe is held a dereliction and violation of the community norm. Individualism is held suspect, a kind of overreaching of the self-centered will, a demoniac trait in the ethical scheme of the sacred. It is associated with the new egoism of the western persona which is the byproduct of the post-renaissance Europe.
The central situation in Narayan's novels is a brief dislocation precipitated by the overweening ambition of the egocentric individual who in his excessive aberrant self-seeking shoots into the glare of the extraordinary but is made to shoot back to where from he started. The clash between the sacred and the western ethos is always worked out in terms of disruption of the moral and social order, and the disruptive influence is made to exhaust itself and the restoration of order and equilibrium is imminent through the repentance, penitence and chastisement and illumination of the erring individual. The west is projected as touching the traditional Indian life at many points without really penetrating anywhere. In novel after novel, Narayan plays upon the recurring pattern of disruption and inevitable restoration of equilibrium in terms not only of the lives of the individuals but also of the community. In this context A.N. Kaul rightly points out "For his focus he takes the point that is really important in the equation - India - for the social and cultural impingement in the other direction has been negligible. Of this impingement, moreover he

23 Brinivas Iyenger also interprets Narayan's themes in terms of "a flight an uprooting, a disturbance of order - followed by return, a restoration of normalcy: the miracle of transcendence and the renewal of life, love, beauty, peace..."
shows the true extent as well as the absolute limitation, remembering again, of course, that it is not of a few intellectually or emotionally adventurous persons he is talking, but of a more sizeable and static section of Indian Society." In the circumambience of community, an individual imbibes the precepts of the sacred and grows into an awareness of the supremacy of the impersonal over the individual.

This organic sense of community is worked out at a microcosmic level in the framework of family. An individual is portrayed in terms of his filial, marital and familial relationships. Relationships are defined in terms of obligations towards others consequent upon one's role in the family. The existence of Krishan in 'The English Teacher' is centred around his family. Even though the teaching of English breeds in him a sense of living a 'second-hand existence', his relationship with his wife, alive or dead, with his daughter, and his mother, in fact, circumscribes the contours of his identity. Margayya, even while he shoots into phenomenal success and prominence remains anchored in his family. While at the peak of success, he can afford to be worried

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about his lost son only when he has a respite from his crowded hectic routine. He and his wife observe a diplomatic indifference towards his brother's family, but recrudescence of the family bond keeps asserting itself over the ephemeral tensions in their relationship. Due to escalation of tension the ancestral house is divided and everything 'that could be cut in two with an axe or scissors or a knife' was divided between them but one thing then could not cut up or divided is 'the backyard of the house with its' single well'. Balu comes to grief when he breaks away from the family under the subversive influence of Dr. Pal who represents the egocentricity and the recklessness of the western style of living. The equilibrium is restored with the coming of the prodigal son back to the family fold. In "The Guide", however, the equilibrium is restored through return to the cosmic fold which in the context of the sacred is emanation as well as organic extension of the family. Raju's as well as Rosie's problem begin when they venture out of the precincts of the family and even though Rosie does not like Raju graduate into perception of one's relationship with the cosmic consciousness under the aegis of the sacred, she also is disillusioned with the breakaway adventure and seeks to recover her identity through penitent resort to art. Throughout
her extramarital liaison with Raju, she is afflicted with a sense of guilt for having violated the sanctity of family. In her unguarded moments, she is always invaded with a sense of blight—'is this right'... I thought it best... back to him'. Despite everything, she remains a Hindu wife—always a wife, by her doggedness, perseverance, patience... invoking mythology in favour of establishing a case against herself. What she cannot forget at any cost in any situation is 'after all he is my husband'. The family remains in Narayan's novels the nucleus and emblem of the cosmos. Whenever an individual breaks through it he is deemed as a defaulter and has to pay for it. An individual posting himself as an entity against it is in for disaster and personal suffering.

Affairs of the individual are worked out not merely in terms of the relationships of the family and the community but also of the cosmos. There is a grand alliance between the human and the divine. Human is conceived as a divine-double. There is no superimposition of the one upon the other, but they are in such close proximity and intimacy that the divine and the human are deemed as organically bound in a complementary relationship. Not merely a regular visitor/the divine
is a frequent participant in every day affairs. It has not to be invoked or invited but lies so close to everyday living of the Malgudians that it is taken as a part of their mental furniture. How does Narayan confer this familiarity of mental furniture of divine is a measure of his skill as a novelist. Always there around the corner and hovering over their consciousness, Divine encounters them in most unsuspected ways. Krishnan in "English Teacher" encounters it in a romance with his dead wife. Mildly sceptical, at first, about the reality of his dead wife and communications with her in her astral existence, he is most doggedly convinced of it towards the end of the novel.

Margayya unexpectedly runs into the priest astrologer who launches him into the project of winning divine goodwill, and Velan also finds Kaju unexpectedly sitting besides an ancient shrine. The unexpected seems to have a schedule of its own with which the Malgudians seem to be quite familiar. In the midst of growing altercations between father and son, Margayya's wife claims to salvage her peace of mind considering it all as illusory. "Now she watched the trouble brewing between the two as if it all happened behind 'a glass screen'. Margayya's wife's perception of the differences between the father and son as a happening behind the glass screen,
provides an overall perspective on the affairs of men in their worldly scramblings. The English Teacher recognizes this and switches over to communion with his dead wife. Margayya bids good-bye (rather has to) to his glorious career and Raju sags down murmuring its premonitions. It is only Raju who is inflicted with a sense of doubt about what he is going to achieve at the cost of his life. But Margayya and the English Teacher are not prepared to entertain any doubt or reservations about it. Seeing through the 'wall of glass' or 'glass screen' is a necessary condition for 'growing into maturity' in Narayan's schema.

Journey from the inauthentic to the authentic does not necessarily mean crossing over. Narayan depicts the even the course of journey and the crucial turnings over in the lives of his characters. But for Krishnaraj meeting the man who had sent through his son a message from his dead wife and becomes a medium of his initiation into the mysterious communion with her, he would not have his prospect of so-called 'self-development' realized. But for Margayya's meeting with the priest astrologer there would have been no turning point in the course of his uneventful existence. The sign-posts of the journey from inauthentic to authentic are a subtle device on the part of Narayan to lend plausibility to the struggle of
journey. But the sense of struggle stands sabotaged because the characters, except Raju in "The Guide," are never unsure about the outcome of their faith in the divine. Their faith is so unflinching that what Narayan tries to make out as struggle turns out to be a settled transaction. Narayan displays ample awareness of the contractual and transactional nature of relationship of his protagonists with the divine, he even occasionally affords a dig at it in his humorous sallies, yet his exercise in humour and irony invariably is self-defeating since he seeks to reinforce ultimately what he tactically ridicules. Does his irony not become inoperative against Krishnan's claims of 'self-development'? Does he not insinuate that Margayya's fall from fortune is the outcome of his quarrel with Dr. Pal, who is represented as an agent of divine dispensation for Margayya. His irony becomes double edged since he Dr. Pal's failure is seen as an inevitable outcome of his emulating the evil ways of the west. Narayan does, however, provoke fun at the Puja Therapy performed by the priest to win over Yama (God of death) to save young Markandya from death and his living in a sense of timelessness. All the same, does he also not suggest that Balu's marriage went to rocks because of Margayya's arrogance towards the stars? About the headmaster in "The English Teacher" who declares
himself dead even though his death does not come off as predicted by the astrologer, he can raise a scintillating laugh. Over Raju's sagging down in utter exhaustion, Narayan seems to resist the facile temptations of declaring him as spiritually arrived but, in fact, he leaves no doubt whatever that Raju had realised himself so far as he and the naive villagers' faith were concerned despite the American television treating it as a thriller. Throughout the course of the unforeseen and unexpected, Raju is shown struggling with his bad faith in living up to the mistaken and naive faith of the villagers in response to the misreporting of a moron regarding the 'Swami's resolved', which he never made. He is a passive victim and not capable of the hazardous search and exploration despite his occasional self-doubting and self-ridiculing. He is not capable of and does not go deep into himself. He is so passive that his exclaiming 'if God has given me the sense... to make an attempt to understand'... (p. 176) invites comparison with Krishnan in 'The English Teacher'.

Strangely enough, Narayan's irony/treating Raju's redemption in the vein of comedy of manners/bows out as an obeisance gesture towards the end. All the same the dialectic of faith and doubt with all its reservations is worked out in terms of situation motif nexus of novel
only in *The Guide* even though Raju's claim to self-realization is not held suspect in the ultimate reckoning. The vindication of the sacred, therefore, in *The Guide* becomes all the more subtle for it can survive the self-questioning and self-doubting not only of Raju but also of the Western bias for the exotic and the sensational towards the spiritual mystique. It is doubtful though, whether Raju can be credited with sensibility or daring for genuine doubt and search.

Impact of the West on the sacred is worked out in terms of achievement-orientation and self-seeking of Western individualism. It is not incidental that all those who snap their bond with the collectivity are shown to zoom into limelight for a short while, but are disenchanted after being cut to their size in the long run. The repercussions of the Western impact are visible on Malgudi itself not only in the changed landscape but also in the new constructions, the railway station, the central cooperative mortgage bank, Lawley extension, the courts, Kabir Street, Nallapa's Grove etc. All these new constructions and changes, Malgudi seems to have absorbed, without compromising its character.\(^{25}\) The

\(^{25}\) "... Malgudi is an Indian small town, and stands at a nicely calculated comic distance between the East and the West.... The Indian small town, one can say, is the perfect comic product or byproduct of the colonial situation—in everything, that is, except the essentials." Kaul, A.N. "R.K. Narayan and The East-West Theme" in *Considerations* ed. by Meenakshi Mukherjee, pp. 50-51.
new construction, in fact, marks the inroads which the exposure to West has made in the life of Malgudi. In the environment changed by the westernization Malgudians always feel cramped and caught, in for some trouble. They have a sense of being at home only in their traditional surroundings, by the riverside, in the open, against the unchanging landscape. It is not without significance that at the Lawley Extension Sushila is bitten by the fly which proves fatal, Margayya shifts his business at Market road to meet his doom, and Raju and Rosie rent a stylish house at New Extension where the glamour of circus existence recoils on them. The new construction in Malgudi, for Narayan, is the area of mischief - the source of all trouble as it were. And it is again not incidental that Krishnan feels a new 'lease of life' through a dip in the Sarayu river, Margayya stumbles upon the red-lotus in a garden in the wilderness and Raju achieves his redemption only by the riverside.

Malgudi, in fact, assumes the character of a special metaphor for the incursion of the West upon the sacred. This incursion is visible on the landscape and also seems to percolate into the life of the Malgudians. This seeming percolation into the life of Malgudians is worked out in terms of the turbulence and a brief dislocation in the attitudes, beliefs and values caused
by 'the corruption-by-the outsider', but the dislocation is far too short-lived to register itself. It turns out to be inconsequential as well; for it, apart from being superficial, is transitory in nature. This dislocation is there, however, and is precipitated inevitably by the intrusions upon the steady even tenor of life of Malgudi, of a protagonist of the west. In *The English Teacher*, Gajpathi says: 'The whole of the west is in a muddle owing to its political consciousness, and what a pity that the East should also follow suit. It is like a weed choking all other human faculties.' (p. 74). In *The English Teacher*, Krishnan finds teaching of English as an exercise in bad faith, a futile effort on his part to acquire false consciousness, which he ultimately overthrows in order to salvage and seek his true identity. That English education system has rendered us as morons and the English Teaching departments are 'garbage departments' may be an apt description, regarding the teaching of English but the manner in which Narayan seems to blow it up into a catastrophe is rather a facile dismissal of the west. A resolt to occult, as Narayan would have it in all earnestness, is hardly an answer to the alleged hollowness of English Education. The dice is loaded against the English education system even in *The Financial Expert*, when Margayya comments disparagingly on English education. In *The Guide*, Raju confesses to a sense of
achievement in leaving the school, "... all this business expansion in our family helped me achieve a very desirable end -- the dropping off of my school unobtrusively." (p. 38).

The western spirit of entrepreneurship comes up for condemnation and ridicule. The phenomenal success of Margayya through modernizing the banking business ultimately ends up in a crash debacle. The Guide also the spectacular success and glory achieved through the collaboration of Raju and Rosie on the pattern of modern show-business is described as phoney. How is Margayya's success phoney and also Raju-Rosie collaboration, one fails to understand. But Narayan would like to maintain that such a phenomenal success and glory is inherently doomed. What is passed for a discovery seems to be an apriori with Narayan because there is no trace whatever of a sense of exploration or struggle in his novels.  

26 Narayan delineates Margayya's rapid ascent to great wealth as a modern 'descent into Avernus'. Modernization brings Margayya great unhappiness - the alienation of his family and the corruption of his son, both sexually and financially, by Dr. Pal former benefactor turned monster. Margayya's son, Babu, insatiably greedy for his father's wealth, revenges himself on his father by destroying his credit. It is Narayan's ironical comment on modern financial practices that a fortune can be destroyed in a moment and by nothing more substantial than a rumour.

27 It is for this reason that A.N. Kaul finds in Narayan's novels, "... only the East and no East-West Theme..." Kaul A.N., 'R.K. Narayan and The East-West Theme' in Consideration, ed. by Meenakshi Mukherjee, p. 45.
Even though Narayan seems to operate through comic irony and not spare a dig or a laugh at the West and about the sacred, yet one cannot but discern in his novels the vindication of the Hindu view of life. And this vindication is not worked out through the dialectic of the novel for the interaction between the two remains marginal and tangential. Besides, the exposure to the Western ethos is considered a subversion and each one of the protagonists characterised as outlandish and made to recognize his defiant impulse as mere infatuation, delinquency and delusion. The exposure turns out to be remote, unreal and totally fabricated, since the outcome is never in the least doubted. The human drama is so warped by the philosophical, metaphysical and religious precepts of the sacred that it turns out to be no more significant than a mere foil, a peg or an apt illustration.