CHAPTER - IV

CROSS-CURRENTS OF WOMEN'S CULTURAL AWARENESS IN EARLIER AND LATER NOVELS

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In ordinary parlance, culture is often thought of as something which is associated with refinement and the aesthetic, the end-product of human behaviour transmitted by tradition. Viewed as such, cultural activities are those which enhance the quality of life by endowing it with truth, beauty, and goodness. When culture is used in a broader sense, it is not restricted to things of aesthetic value alone, but also includes various aspects of the people's lives.

Culture constitutes the essence of a people. It reflects both ideological base and material level of the society. This means that, while culture may be perceived as an abstract quality characterising a people, it is tangibly related to the social structure. Thus, while culture refers to the totality of behaviour and modes of thought of a people who make up a particular society, it may express itself in various forms. Art, craft, folklore, music, religion, literature, and symbols serve as important idioms through which the culture of a people finds expression.

The word "cross", as an adjective, means interchange. Thus cross-cultural means an interchange of two or more cultures, or interaction between ideologies and modes of thought and behaviour within a single
culture. The interaction between one culture and another or others in an example of cross-culture. In this case, the cultures influence each other or one another qualitatively and quantitatively. The quality and quantity are visible in individuals or sections of society, but they cannot be measured precisely. The coexistence between tradition and modernity in a particular culture is an example of culture at rather cross purposes. In Narayan's novels, however, sometimes tradition and modernity run parallel to each other, and sometimes cross and re-cross each other.

For example, The Guide shows not only a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity but also a part of Indian culture in conflict with another part of Indian culture. Examples of the harmonious blend of tradition and modernity are (i) Malgudi being connected with the railway and (ii) the expansion of the town on account of modernisation. Examples of conflict are (i) classical dancing and research in the ancient history of South India (Rosie versus Marco); (ii) classical dance by one who was once a Devadasi and traditional living (Rosie versus Raju's mother and his maternal uncle); and (iii) the tragic consequences of imposed sainthood from which there is no way out (that is, the torture of starvation leading to Raju's death).

For the quality of its contents and the style of its narrative, the novel has been translated into as many as eight languages - French, Italian, Dutch, German, Polish, Swedish, Russian, and Hebrew. It won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1961. A successful Hindi film bearing the same title "The Guide" was made in Bombay with Dev Anand as Raju and Wahida Rehman as Rosie. The book was published simultaneously by William Heinemann in London and by Viking Press in New York in 1958. The Indian Thought publications, Mysore, sold 1,38,000 copies of its reprint till 1985. By 1999, many more copies must have been sold.
The publisher's blurb says:

Raju, formerly a tourist guide, has just been released from prison and has taken refuge in an old temple by the river. A peasant takes him for a priest and asks his advice on a domestic problem. By uttering a few platitudes, Raju helps him to find a solution and soon acquires a reputation as a holy man. When a drought comes to the district, the peasants turn to him for help, and he reluctantly undertakes a fast to propitiate the rain gods. It is at this point that he confesses he is an imposter, and recounts to one of his followers the tragi-comedy of his love for Rosie the dancer, and the rise and fall of his fortunes as guide, lover, and impresario. The Christian Science Monitor considers the novel "a masterpiece" on account of its "unhurried pace, unfailing good humour, kindliness, gentle satire".

**Building a railway track**

Raju noticed much activity in the field in front of his house. A set of men arrived every morning and were busy in the field all day. The men were building a railway track. They came to the shop of Raju's father for refreshments. Work was going on briskly. Most of the lorries brought red earth which was banked up on the field. More lorries came bringing timber and iron.

**The station building**

One fine day, the station building was ready. The steel tracks gleamed in the sun. The signal posts stood with their red and green stripes and their colourful lamps. Malgudi was divided into this side of the railway line and that side. Everything was ready. All the spare hours of Raju and other boys were spent in walking along the railway track up to the culvert.
half a mile away. A gold mohur sapling was planted in the railway yard. The boys passed through the corridor, peeping into the room meant for the station master.

**The first train**

One day the boys were given holiday. People said excitedly: "The train comes to our town today. The station was decorated with festoons and bunting. A piper was playing. Bands were banging away. Coconuts were broken on the railway track. An engine steamed in, pulling a couple of carriages. Many of the important folk of the town were there. The collector and the Police Superintendent and the Municipal Chairman, and many of the local tradesmen who flourished green invitation cards in their hands were assembled at the station. The police guarded the platform and did not allow the crowds in.

Tables were laid and official gentlemen were sitting around, refreshing themselves, and then several men got up and lectured. There was a clapping of hands. The band struck up, the engine whistled, the bell rang, the guard blew his whistle, and the men who had been consuming refreshments climbed into the train. The train moved and was soon out of sight. A big crowd was now allowed to come on to the platform. Raju's father had record sales that day.

**The shop at the railway station**

By the time a station master and a porter were installed in their little stone house at the back of the station, facing Raju's house, Raju's father had become so prosperous that he acquired a jutka and a house in
order to go to the town and do his shopping. Raju's father and his family became the talk of the town with the horse and the carriage. Raju's father was given the privilege of running a shop at the railway station. The shop was paved with cement, with shelves built in. It was so spacious that, when my father had transferred all the articles from the hut shop, the place was only one-quarter filled; there were so many blank spaces all along the wall that he felt depressed at the sight of it. For the first time, he was beginning to feel that he had not been running a very big business after all. (The Guide, 36-37)

The station master advised Raju's father not to display too much rice and other things, because railway passengers would not be asking for tamarind and lentils during the journey. And so presently there hung down from nails bigger bunches of bananas, stacks of Mempu oranges, huge troughs of fried stuff, and colourful peppermints and sweets in glass containers, loaves of bread, and buns. The display was most appetising, and he had loaded several racks with packets of cigarettes. He had to anticipate the demand of every kind of traveller and provide for it.

Two trains each day

As soon as a certain bridge near Malgudi was ready, regular services began on the rails. It was thrilling to watch the activities of the station master and the blueshirted porter as they "received" and "line-cleared" two whole trains each day, the noon train from Madras and the evening one from Trichy. Raju became very active in the shop.
Raju in bookselling business

Raju's father died during the rainy season. With his mother's consent, Raju closed down his father's hut shop outside the railway station. He began to concentrate on the shop at the railway station. He stocked old magazines and newspapers. He bought and sold school books. The train brought in more and more school-going population. The 10.30 local was full of young men going off to Albert Mission College which had just been started at Malgudi.

Students gathered at Raju's shop while they waited for the trains. Gradually books appeared where there were coconuts before. People dumped old books and stolen books, and all kinds of printed stuff on Raju who bargained hard. He showed indifference while buying and solicitude while selling. The station master was a friendly man who enjoyed the privilege of drawing his reading material from the stock growing in front of his shop. During the intervals between trains, when the platform was quiet, there was nothing more pleasing then picking up a bundle of assorted books. Lounging in his seat and reading. He read the stuff that interested him, bored him baffled him. He read stuff that pricked up a noble thought, a philosophy that appealed. He gazed on pictures of old temples and ruins and new buildings and battle ships, and soldiers, and pretty girls around whom his thoughts lingered.

Railway Raju

Raju came to be called Railway Raju. Perfect strangers having heard of his name, began to call for him when their train arrived at the Malgudi railway station:
Man who had just arrived always stopped at my shop for a soda or cigarettes and to go to the book-stack, and almost always they asked, "How far... is...?" or "which way does one go to reach...?" or "Are there many historical places here?" or "I heard that your river Sarayu has its source somewhere on those hills and that it is a beauty spot." (The Guide, 49)

**The source of Sarayu**

The man who had gone to the source of the river spoke all night about it - how there was a small shrine at the peak right at the basin:

It must be the source of Sarayu mentioned in the mythological stories of goddess Parvathi jumping into the fire. The carving in one of the pillars of the shrine actually shows the goddess plunging into the fire and water arising from the spot. (The Guide, 51)

Sometimes someone with a scholarly turn of mind would come and make a few additions to the facts, such as the dome of the shrine must have been built in the third century before Christ or the style of drapery indicated the third century after Christ.

**Raju the guide**

While eating his later dinner, Raju explained to his mother why he had adopted the new profession:

I was seeing a lot of places and getting paid for it. I go with them in their car or bus, talk to them, I am treated to their
food sometimes, and I get paid for it. Do you know how well-known I am? People come asking for me from Bombay, Madras and other places, hundreds of miles away. They call me Railway Raju and have told me that even in Lucknow there are persons who are familiar with my name. It is something to become so famous, isn't it, instead of handing out matches and tobacco? (The Guide, 51)

**The development of tourism in Malgudi**

The tourists stand for modernity in traditional Malgudi. The touris sector contributed to the economic development of the town, as is evident from the following passage:

In a few months, I was a seasoned guide. I had classified my patrons. They were very varied, I can tell you. Some were photographer. These men could never look at any object except through their view finders. The moment they got down from the train, even before lifting their luggage, they asked, "Is there a place where they develop spools?"

"Of course, Malgudi Photo Bureau. One of the biggest..."

"And if I want roll-films - I have, of course, enough stock with me, but if I run out... Do you think super-panchro three-colour something or the other is available there?"

"Of course. That's his special line."

"Will he develop and show me a print while I wait?"

"Of course, before you count twenty - he is a wizard. (The Guide, 55)
Different tastes in sightseeing

The places of interest in Malgudi - historically, scenically, and religiously - are parts of a variegated culture. If one came as a pilgrim, Raju could take him to a dozen temples all over the district within a radius of fifty miles. He could find holy waters for him to bathe all along the course of the Sarayu, starting with its source on Mempi peaks. Raju says:

Some people want to be seeing a waterfall, some want a ruin (oh, they grow ecstatic when they see cracked plaster, broken idols, and crumbling bricks), some want a god to worship, some look for a hydroelectric plant, and some want just a nice place, such as the bungalow on top of Mempi with glass sides, from where you could see the horizon a hundred miles away, and observe wild game prowling around. Of those again there were two types, one the poet who was content to watch and return, and the other who wished to admire nature and also get drunk there. I don't know why it is so: a fine poetic spot like the Mempi Peak House excites in certain natures unexpected reactions: I know some who brought women there: a quiet, wooded spot looking over a valley one would think fit for contemplation or poetry, but it acted only as an aphrodisiac. (The Guide, 55-56)

Trapping elephants

There were special occasions, such as the trapping of an elephant herd. During the winter months, the Forest Department put through an elaborate scheme for trapping elephants. They watched, encircled, and drove a whole herd
into stockades, and people turned up in great numbers to watch the operation. On the day fixed for the drive, people poured in from all over the country and applied to Raju for a ring-side seat in the spacious bamboo jungles of Mempi. Raju was supposed to have special influence with the men who were in charge of the drive. When the time came to arrange for the viewing of the elephant-drive, only those who came with Raju were allowed to pass the gates of the special enclosures. Raju escorted visitors in bunches and went hoarse repeating, "You see, the wild herd is watched for months......." (The Guide, 57)

**Seeing or shooting a tiger**

If someone wanted to see a tiger or shoot one, Raju knew where to arrange it. He arranged for the lamb to bait the tiger. He had high platforms built so that the hunters might pop off the poor beast when it came to eat the lamb.

**The king cobra and dancing to the music of the flute**

There was Rosie, a girl who had come all the way from Madras. She asked Raju the moment she set foot in Malgudi,

"Can you show me cobra - a king cobra it must be, which can dance to the music of a flute?" Raju found out a sanke charmer in a remote village who had a king cobra. The girl stood under the shade of a tree, while the man was prodding a snake to come out of its basket. It was fairly large, and hissed and
spread out its hood. The girl suggested "You must play on the flute, make it rear its head and dance". The man pulled out his gourd flute and played on it shrilly, and the cobra raised itself and darted hither and thither and swayed. This seemed to fascinate the girl. She watched it swaying with the rappest attention. She stretched out her arm slightly and swayed it in imitation of the movement. She swayed her whole body to the rhythm - for just a second, but that was sufficient to tell Raju what she was, "the greatest dancer of the century." (The Guide, 61)

Marriage by advertisement

Both marriage by advertisement and a Devadasi receiving higher education are modern trends which have been assimilated in Indian culture. The following dialogue between Rosie and Raju is self-revelatory:

"I belong to a family dedicated to the temples as dancers; my mother, grandmother, and, before her, her mother, even as a young girl I danced in our village temple. You know how our caste is viewed?"

"It's the noblest caste on earth", I said.

"We are viewed as public women", she said plainly, and I was thrilled to hear the word. "We are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilised".

"All that narrow notion may be true of old days, but it's different now. Things have changed. There is no caste or class today".

"A different life was planned for me by my mother. She put me to school early in life; I studied well. I took my
Master's Degree in Economics. But after college, the question was whether I should become a dancer or do something else. One day I saw in our paper an advertisement - the usual kind you may have seen: "Wanted: an educated, good-looking girl to marry a rich bachelor of academic interests. No caste restrictions; good looks and university degree essential". I asked myself, "Have I looks?"

"Oh, who could doubt it?"

"I had myself photographed, clutching the scroll of the University citation in one hand, and set it to the advertiser. Well, we met, he examined me and my certificate, we went to a registrar and got married." *(The Guide*, 75)

**Raju: making himself modern enough for Rosie**

Raju was obsessed with thoughts of Rosie. He revelled in memories of the hours he spent with her last or in anticipation of what she would be doing next. He was obsessed with the thought that perhaps he had not shaved his chin smoothly enough, and that she would run her fingers over his upper lip and throw him out. Sometimes he felt he was in rags. The silk jibba and the lace-edged dhoti were being overdone or were old-fashioned. He felt he was not modern enough for her. This made him run to the tailor to make a few dashing bush-shirts and corduroys, and invest in hair and face lotions and perfumes of all kinds. His expenses were mounting. The shop was his main source of income, together with what Marco gave him as his daily wages.
Conflict between two roles: sweetheart versus wife

At times, Rosie is painfully conscious of her contradictory roles—one as Raju's sweetheart, that other as Marco's wife. This contradiction is evident in their inconsistent behaviour. AS Raju, admits:
She allowed me to make love to her, of course, but she was also beginning to show excessive consideration for her husband...

"After all, he is my husband. I have to respect him... He has been so good to me, given me comfort and freedom. What husband in the world would let his wife go and live in a hotel room by herself, a hundred miles away. Is it not a wife's duty to guard and help her husband, whatever the way in which he deals with her.(The Guide, 106)

Nataraja, the god of dancers

Raju found out the clue to Rosie's affection, and utilised 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. She was full of plans. A five in the morning, she would start her practice and continue for full three hours. She would have a separate hall, long enough and wide enough for her to move in. It must have a heavy carpet, which would neither be too smooth under the feet nor too rough, and which will not fold while she practised her steps on it. At one corner of the room, she would have a bronze figure of Nataraja, the god of dancers, the god whose primal dance created the vibrations that set the worlds in motion. She would have a long incense-holder, in which at all times she would have incense sticks burning.
"Natya Shastra of Bharat Muni"

Rosie would then spend an hour or two in the forenoon studying the ancient works on art, Natya Shastra of Bharat Muni, a thousand years old, and various other books, because without a proper study of the ancient methods, it would be impossible to keep the purity of the classical forms. All the books were in their uncle's house, and she would write to him to send them on to her by and by. She would also want pundit to come to her and to help her to understand the texts, as they were all written in an old, terse style.

Ideas for new compositions from "Ramayana" and Mahabharata"

Rosie asked Raju:
"Can you get me Sanskrit pundit?"
"Of course, I can. There are dozens of them."
"I shall want him to read for me episodes from Ramayana and Mahabharata, because they are treasure-house, and we can pick up so many ideas for new compositions from them."(The Guide, 108)

The old Sanskrit song written on a palm leaf

Rosie told Raju that her uncle had with him a very old song written on palm leaf:

No one has seen it. My mother was the only person in the whole country who knew the song and could dance to it. I'll get that song from my uncle. I'll show you how it goes. Shall we go back to our room? (The Guide, 110)
She went into the ante-room and came back with her dress tucked in and tightened up for the performance. She was not doing it under the best of conditions. She needed at least a drummer. She sang the song lightly, in a soft undertone, a song from an ancient Sanskrit composition of a lover and a lass on the banks of Jamuna. It began with such a verve, when she lightly raised her foot and let it down, allowing her anklets to jingle, that Raju felt thrilled. He felt moved by the movements, rhythm, and time, although he did not quite follow the meaning of the words. She stopped now and then to explain:

Nari means girl - and Mani is a jewel... the whole line means: it is impossible for me to bear this burden of love you have cast on me. (The Guide, 110)

She panted while she explained. There were beads of perspiration on her forehead and lip. She danced a few steps, paused for a moment, and explained, "Lover means always God", and she took the trouble to explain the intricacies of the rhythm.

A parrot on a maiden's arm

Raju could see the magnificence of the composition, its symbolism, the boyhood of a very young god, and his fulfilment in marriage, the passage of years from youth to decay, but the heart remaining ever fresh like a lotus on a pond. When she indicated the lotus with her fingers, one could almost hear the ripple of water around it. She held the performance for nearly an hour. It filled Raju with the greatest pleasure on earth. He could honestly declare that, while he watched her perform, his mind was free from carnal thoughts. He viewed her a a pure abstraction. She could make him forget his surroundings. He sat with open-mouthed
wonder watching her. Suddenly she stopped, flung her whole weight on me, and said:

You are giving me a new lease of life... There is a small piece about a parrot on a maiden's arm. I'll dance it for you some time. (The Guide, 121)

Malgudi since the 10th century A.D.

A fat man, his wife, and two children engaged Raju for three days. Raju hired Gaffur's old car, sat in the front seat, and took the party about:

While passing the New Extension, I pointed without even turning my head, "Sir Frederick Lawley-". When we passed the statue, I knew exactly when the question would come, "Whose is this statue?" and I knew when the next question was coming and had my answer ready, "The man left behind by Robert Clive to administer the district. He built all the tanks and dams and developed this district. Good man. Hence the statue." (The Guide, 121-122)

At the tenth-century Iswara temple at Vinayak Street, Raju reeled off the description of the frieze along the wall: "If you look closely, you will see the entire epic Ramayana carved along the wall". Raju took them to the source of Sarayu on the misty heights of Memphi Peak, watched the lady plunge in the basin, the man avowing that he did not care and then following her example. Raju then took them into the inner shrine, showed them the ancient stone image on the pillar, with Shiva absorbing the Ganges in his mattersed locks.
Meeting between a modern girl and a conservative woman

After about a month, Raju's mother said, "Someone is asking for you". She went into the kitchen. Raju got up and went to the door. There stood Rosie on the threshold, with a trunk at her feet and a bag under her arm. Raju carried her trunk in. He cried, "Mother: Here is Rosie: She is going to be a guest in our house." Raju's mother came out of the kitchen formally and smiled a welcome. "Be seated on that mat. What's your name?" she asked kindly, and was rather taken aback to hear the name "Rosie". She expected a more orthodox name. She looked anguished for a moment, wondering how she was going to accommodate a "Rosie" in her home.

A guest was a guest, even though she might be a Rosie. So Raju's mother sat down on a mat with an air to settling down to chat. The very first question she asked was, "Who has come with you, Rosie?" Rosie blushed and looked at Raju who replied, "I think she has come alone, Mother".

Raju's mother was amazed, "Girls today! How courageous you are: In our days, we wouldn't go to the street corner without an escort. And I have been to the market only once in my life, when Raju's father was alive". Then she said, "Water is boiling. I'll give you coffee. Do you like coffee? Where do you come from?"

"From Madras", I (Raju) answered promptly.

"What brings you here?"

"She has come to see some friends".

Are you married?"

"No", I answered promptly.

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"Do you understand Tamil?"
I knew I should shut up now. I let Rosie answer in Tamil. "Yes. It's what we speak at home".

"Who else have you in your house?"
"My uncle, my aunt, and...
"What is your father's name"
"I have - no father".

Raju's mother was at once filled with the greatest sympathy, and cried "Poor one, without father or mother. I am sure your uncle must be looking after you well. Are you a B.A.?

"Yes", I (Raju) corrected. "She is an M.A."

"Good, good, brave girl. Then you lack nothing in the world. You are not like us uneducated women. You will get on anywhere. You can ask for your railway ticket, call a policeman if somebody worries you, and keep your money. What are you going to do? Are you going to join Government service and earn? Brave girls."(The Guide,126)

Raju's mother was full of admiration for her. She got up, went in and brought her a tumbler of coffee. The girl drank it off gratefully.

**Marital maladjustment**

The marriage of Rosie and Marco through an advertisement proved to be one of maladjustment since its very beginning. As Rosie confesses:

> When we are alone and start talking, we argue and quarrel over everything. We don't agree on most matters, and then he leaves me alone and comes back and we are all right.(The Guide,74)
There are not emotional ties between Marco and Rosie: each lives in a different world of his or her own. As Narayan prepares us for the final parting between husband and wife, we are no surprised, but he does so in such a manner that the reader is more sympathetic to the woman than to the man:

"This is my last word to you. Don't talk to me. You can go where you please or do what you please".

"I want to be with you. I want you to forget everything. I want you to forgive me", I said. Somehow I began to like him very much. It seemed enough if he forgave me and took me back.

But he said, "Yes, I'm trying to forget - even the earlier fact that I ever took a wife. I want to get out of here too - but I have to complete my work; and I'm here for that. You are free to go and do what you please".

"I'm your wife and I'm with you".

"You are here because I am not a ruffian. But you are not my wife. You are a woman who will go to bed with anyone that flatters your antics. That's all, I don't want you here, but if you are going to be here, don't talk. That is all."

At train time, he went with the baggage to the railway station. I followed him mutely. I knew he was going back to our home at Madras. I wanted very much to go back home. The porter carried out trunks. He pointed at my portion of the baggage and told the porter, "I don't know about these - not mine". So the porter looked at me and separated my box. When the train arrived, the porter carried only his baggage, and he took his seat in a compartment. I didn't know what to do. I picked up my trunk and followed.
I tried to step into the compartment, he said, "I have no ticket for you", and he flourished a single ticket and shut the door on me. The train moved. I came to your home. (The Guide, 134-135)

"A tainted woman"

Within a short time, Raju's mother understood everything. She said, "This cannot go on long, Raju, You must put an end to it... You can't have a dancing girl in your house. Every morning with all that dancing and everything going on: What is the home coming to?"

Encouraged by Raju, Rosie had begun to practise. She got up at five in the morning, bathed, and prayed before the picture of a god in his mother's niche, and began a practice session which went on for nearly three hours. The house rang with the jingling of her anklets. She ignored her surroundings completely, her attention being concentrated up her movement and steps. After that, she helped Raju's mother, scrubbed, washed, swept, and tidied upon everything in the house.

Raju asked his mother, "What has come over you all of a sudden?"

My mother paused. "I was hoping you would have the sense to do something about it. I can't go on like this for ever. What will people say?"

"Who are 'people'?" I asked.

"Well, my brother and your cousins and others known to us."

"I don't care for their opinion. Just don't bother about such things."

"Oh: That's a strange order you are giving me, my boy. I can't accept it." (The Guide, 136)
Raju's mother began to stiffen inside. She had been listening to gossip. She could not accommodate the idea of living with a tainted woman. Whenever she could get a Raju, she hissed a whisper into his ear: "She is a real snakewoman, I tell you. I never liked her from the first day you mentioned her."

Raju grew anxious lest his mother should suddenly turn round and openly tell Rosie to quit. He changed his tactics and said:

"You are right, Mother. But you see, she is a refugee, and we can't do anything. We have to be hospitable."

"Why can't she go to her husband and fall at his feet? You know, living with a husband is no joke, as these modern girls imagine. No husband worth the name was ever conquered by powder and lipstick alone." (The Guide, 137)

How wives bring their husbands round

After a few days, Raju's mother began to allude to the problems of husband and wife whenever she spoke to Rosie. She filled the time with anecdotes about husbands - good husbands, mad husbands, reasonable husbands, unreasonable ones, savage ones, slightly deranged ones, moody ones, and so on. She said it was always the wife who brought him round by her deggedness, perseverance, and patience. She quoted numerous mythological stories of Savitri, Seetha, and all the well-known heroines. Her motives were clear. Rosie smarted under these lessons, but Raju was helpless. He was afraid of his mother. He was forced to take a more realistic view of his finances. He saw Rosie suffer, and his only solace was that he suffered with her.
"Bharat Natyam": the greatest art-business today

Raju believed that, in the show business, Rosie was a gold mine. But he had no money to launch her career as a performer on the stage. He knew that Bharat Natyam was the greatest art-business. There was such a craze for it that people would pay anything to see the best. One day Raju was rapt in watching Rosie do a piece called "The Dancing Feet". Rosie said she had introduced a couple of variations, and wanted him to give his opinion. Raju watched her critically, but what he watched were the curves that tempted him to hug her on the spot. Whenever he watched her sway her figure, if there was no one about, he constantly interrupted her performance. She pushed him away, saying, "What has come over you?" She was a devoted artist. Her passion for physical love was falling into place, and had ceased to be a primary obsession with her.

Intensification of the cross-cultural conflict

The cross-cultural conflict intensified when Raju's maternal uncle dropped in like a bolt from the blue. The man was six feet. It was a surprise to Raju to know that his mother had written to her elder brother to come. His uncle pulled Raju down by the collar of his shirt and asked, "What is all this one hears about you? You think yourself a big man? I can't be frightened scapegraces like you. Do you know what we do when we get an intracetable bull calf? We castrate if. We will do that to you, if you don't behave?.

When Rosie resumed her song and dance, encouraged by Raju, the uncle came over to watch. His eyes bulged with cynicism and contempt. He said aloud: "So this is what is keeping you busy; Never dreamt that
anyone in our family would turn out to be a dancer's back-stage boy... Your father's spirit will be happy to see you now, literally grovelling at the feet of a dancing girl... Did I not mention a moment ago what we do to recalcitrant bull calves?

He cried to Rosie:

Hey, wench: Now stop your music and all those gestures and listen to me. Are you of our family? You are not of our family? Are you of our clan? No, Do we know you? No. Do you belong to this house? No. In that case, why are you here? After all, you are a dancing girl. We do not admit them in our families. Understand? You seem to be a good, sensible girl. You should not walk into a house like this and stay on. Did anyone invite you? No. Even if you are invited, you should stay where you belong, and not too long there. You cannot go on staying like this in our house. It is very inconvenient. You should not be seducing young fools, deserting your husband. Do you follow? You must clear out by the next train. We will give you money for your railway ticket.

Rosie sobbed and Raju was completely maddened by it. He flew at his uncle, shouting, "Get out of this house." His uncle said:

Who are you, puppy, to ask me to get out?
I'll make you get out. This is my sister's house. You go out if you want enjoyment with dancing girls.

Raju's mother came running out of the kitchen. She flew straight at the sobbing Rosie, crying:

Are you satisfied with your handiwork, you she-devil, you demon? Where have you dropped on us from? Everything was so good and quiet until you came. You came in like a viper, Bah: I have never seen anyone work such havoc on a young fool: What a fine boy he used to be: The moment
he set his eyes on you, he was gone. On the very day I heard him mention the "serpent girl", my heart sank. I knew nothing good could come out of it. (The Guide, 151)

Raju was appalled at the somersault in his mother's nature the moment she got support from her brother. He went over to Rosie, put his arm around her neck, to the shock of the two. His uncle cried, "This fellow has lost all shame:"

**Raju's choice - Rosie or mother?**

Raju's uncle renewed the fight by announcing, "An hour more for the train. Is the passenger ready?" He looked at Rosie sitting below a window and reading. Raju's mother came out of the corner and said to Rosie: "Well, young woman, it has been nice having you, but you know it is time for you to go." She was trying new tactics now - of kindliness and a make-believe. Rosie agreed to leave. "Rosie, girl, you know the train is at four-thirty. Have you packed up all your things? I found your clothes scattered here and there." Raju said, "She can't go anywhere, Mother. She has got to stay here."

And then Raju's mother brought out her trump card. She said, "If she is not going, I have to leave the house". Raju appealed to his mother, "You don't have to go, Mother". His uncle said, "Then throw that wench's trunk out and give her a push towards the railway, and your mother will stay ... Your mother needn't quit really. This house is hers for her lifetime. If I had her cooperation, I'd have shown the world what to do with scapegraces who had no respect for family traditions but tried to enjoy their ancestors' hard-earned wealth."
Raju asked, "Mother, when will you be back?" His uncle said, "The moment she gets a telegram that the line is clear." Raju's mother, going down the steps, said, "Don't fail to light the lamps in the God's niche. Be careful of your health". Uncle carried the trunks and she carried the basket. Soon they were at the end of the street and turned the corner. Raju stood on the step watching.

**From Rosie to Nalini**

Raju and Rosie were a married couple to all appearances. Rosie cooked the food and kept the house. All day long she danced and sang. Raju made love to her constantly and was steeped in an all-absorbing romanticism, until he woke up to the fact that she was really getting tired of it all. Raju said:

"Rosie" is a silly name. For our public purpose, Your name must be changed. For a classical dancer, you should call yourself something that is poetic and appealing... We arrived at "Nalini", a name which could have significance, poetry, and universality, and yet was short and easily remembered. (*The Guide*, 156-157)

With the attainment of a new name, Rosie entered a new phase of life. When the Albert Mission boys and their annual social, Raju mixed in their affairs, and held forth on the revival of art in India so vehemently that they could not easily brush him aside, but had to listen:

Heaven knew where I had found all this eloquence. I delivered such a lecture on the importance of our culture and the place of the dance in it that they simply had to accept what I said. (*The Guide*, 157)
Some members of the College Union watched Rosie who gave a dance rehearsal at Raju's house. When they recovered from the enchantment, one of them said:

I must admit I have never cared for Bharat Natyam, but watching this lady is an education. I now know why people are in raptures over it. (The Guide, 160)

Raju said:

We must make it a mission to educate the public taste. We must not estimate the public taste and play down to it. We must try to raise it by giving only the best... You must provide the drummer and accompanists. (The Guide, 161)

He thus acquired at last the accompanists Rosie had been clamouring for all along. The Union function was the start. Rosie soared rocket-like.

The name Nalini: a public property

Raju's activities suddenly multiplied. Rosie became known because she had the genius in her, and the public had to take notice of it. Raju watched her in a hall with a thousand eyes focused on her. In every show, Raju took the middle sofa in the first row, as a matter of right. When he met her eyes, he smiled familiarly at her on the stage. Sometimes he signalled her a message with his eyes and fingers, suggesting a modification or a criticism of her performance.

No show started until Raju nodded to the man peeping from the wings, and then the curtain went up. He never gave the signal until he satisfied himself that everything was set. He enquired about the lighting, microphone arrangements, and looked about as if he was calculating the velocity of the air. They paid for the dance, and the public was there, after
paying for their seats. When he thought that the programme had gone on long enough, he looked at the watch on his wrist and gave a slight nod of the head, and Nalini would understand that she must end the show with the next time. One minute before the curtain came down, Raju looked for the Secretary, and nodded to him to come over. He asked him:

Is the car ready? Please have it at the other door, away from the crowd. I'd like to take her out quietly."

The Guide, 164)

It was a false statement. Raju really liked to parade her through the gaping crowds. After the show, there were still people hanging around is catch a glimpse of the star. At the end of the performance, They presented her with a large garland of flowers, and they gave Raju one too. He slung it carelessly on his arm or in the thick of the crowd dramatically handed it over to Nalini with "well, you really deserve two."

The world of showmanship

On programme days, Nalini cooked supper in the afternoon. She said, "I must not lose touch with my womanly duties." In a few months, Raju had to move out of his old house. The stylish house at New Extension was more in keeping with their status. It was two-storied, with a large compound, lawns, garden, and garage. In the upper floor, they had their bedrooms and a large hall where Nalini practised her dances. They had now a permanent group of musicians - five of them, a flutist, a drummer and others, besides a dance master. All kinds of people were always passing in and out of their house. Raju had a large staff of servants - a driver for their cars, two gardeners for the garden, a Gurkha sentry with a dagger at his waist, and two cooks because their entertainments began to grow. On
the ground floor, Raju had an office with a secretary - in - waiting who dealt with his correspondence. Raju felt vastly superior to everyone. The higher grade of visitors were those who approached Raju with genuine offers of engagement. He received them on the hall sofa, and rang the bell for coffee. He offered his inner circle of visitors coffee day and night. The appointments in the hall were all expensive - brass inlaid trays, ivory knick-knacks, group photographs of Nalini in the middle. Sitting in the hall and looking around, Raju had the satisfaction of feeling that he had arrived.

The inner circle

Formerly, Raju had no friends. Now his friendship was sought after by others. He was on back - slapping terms with two judges, four eminent politicians of the district whose ward could bring 10,000 votes at any moment for any cause, and two big textile millowners, a banker, a municipal councillor, and the editor of The Truth, a weekly, in which an appreciation of Nalini appeared from time to time. These men could come into Raju's hall without appointment, demand coffee and ask loudly, "Where is Nalini ? Upstairs ? Well, I think I'll see her for a moment and go". They could go up, talk to her, order coffee, and stay on as long as they pleased. They addressed Raju as "Raj" familiarly. Raju had to hobnob with them because they were men of influence and money.

From coast to coast

Nalini and Raju had calls from hundreds of miles away. Their trunks were always packed and ready. Sometimes when they left Malgudi, They did not return home for nearly a fortnight. Their engagements took them to all corners of South India, with Cape Comorin at one end and the
border of Bombay at the other, and from coast to coast. Raju studied
invitations and suggested alternative dates, so that a single journey might
combine several engagements. They were out of town for about twenty
days in the month, and during the ten days they were in Malgudi they had
one to two dates nearer home, and whatever was left over could be counted
as rest. Raju's secretary kept him informed of the mail arriving each day,
and received instructions by phone. Raju was committed three months
ahead. He promoted Nalini's career:

> When I told her to get ready for the train, she got ready.
> When I asked her to come down, she came down. She got in
> and out of trains at my bidding. I don't know if she ever
> noticed what town we were in or what sabha or under whose
> auspices a show was being held. (The Guide, 171)

The instrumental players had to be kept in good humour, otherwise they
could ruin a whole evening and blame it on mood or Fate. Raju did not
like to see Nalini enjoy other people's company. He liked to keep her in a
citadel.

**The radiant existence**

Raju needed all the money in the world. He said to himself, "If
we don't work and earn when the time is good, we commit a sin. When
we have a bad time, no one will help us." Sometimes Nalini said, "Spending
two thousand a month on just two of us. Is there no way of living more
simply?" Raju replied, "We have to maintain our status," Raju describes
his status:

> I could get a train reservation at a moment's notice,
> relieve a man summoned to jury work, reinstate a dismissed
official, get a vote for a cooperative election, nominate a committee man, get a man employed, get a boy admitted to a school, and get an unpopular official shifted elsewhere.

(The Guide, 175)

**Macro's "The cultural History of South India"**

The post one day brought Raju a book. His secretary held the book open. It was a book by Marco, a book of illustrations and comments. At the head of the chapter entitled "Mempi Cave Pictures", there was brief line, "The author is obliged to acknowledge his debt to Sri Raju of Malgudi Railway Station for his help." It was a gorgeous book costing twenty rupees, full of art plates, a monograph on The Cultural History of South India, Raju wondered what he should do about it. Should he take it upstairs to Nalini?

I thought it would be best to put the book away. I carried it to my most secret, guarded place in the house - the liquor chest, the key of which I carried next my heart, stuffed the volume out of sight, and locked it up. Nalini never went near it. I never mentioned the book to her.(The Guide, 177)

**Sudden interest in her husband**

Three days later, Marco's photograph appeared in the middle page of the Illustrated Weekly of Bombay, a paper that Nalini always read. The photograph was published along with a review of his book which was called "an epoch-making discovery in Indian cultural history". Nalini said, "I want so much to see the book: Can't we get it somewhere?" She suddenly called the secretary and said, "You must get me this book. Later,
Raju noticed that she had cut out the photo of her husband and placed it on her dressing mirror.

On the third day, while in bed, the very first question, Nalini asked Raju was, "Where have you kept the book?" Raju answered, "I will show it to you tomorrow". She asked, "Why did you want to hide it from me? ... I'm pleased he has made a name now."

I switched on the light, and there she was quietly crying. "What has come over you?"

"After all, he is my husband... He tolerated my company for nearly a month, even after knowing what I had done... I may be mistaken in my own judgement of him. After, all, he had been kind to me."

**Period of moodiness**

Raju did not understand Nalini's sudden affection for her husband. Her career was at its height. She compared herself and Raju to "the bulls yoked to an oil-crusher":

> Do you know the bulls yoked to an oil-crusher - they keep going round and round and round, in a circle, without a beginning or an end?"
> "You are famous. You have made money. You do what you like. You wanted to dance. You have done it."
> "I feel like one of those parrots in a cage taken around village fairs, or performing monkey." *(The Guide, 180-181)*

Nalini was passing through a period of moodiness, and Raju thought it safest to keep out of her way.

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Raju forges Nalini's signature

One day a registered letter addressed to "Rosie, Alias Nalini" was received at Raju's office which said:

Madam, under instruction from our client, we are enclosing an application for your signature, for the release of a box of jewellery left in safe custody at the Bank of -, in the marked place. After this is received, we shall proceed to obtain the other signature as well, since you are aware that the deposit is in your joint names, and obtain the release of the said box, and arrange to forward it to you under insurance cover in due course. (The Guide, 183)

Raju took the letter to his liquor casket and locked it up. The lawyers said, "per return post", which seemed an important instruction. Raju found a scrap paper and made a careful trial on it of Rosie's signature. He had seen her sign so many cheques and receipts each day that he was very familiar with it. Then he carefully spread out the application form, and wrote on the indicated line "Rosie, Nalini" He folded it and put it in an addressed cover, which the lawyers had enclosed, sealed it, and was the first to appear at the window of the branch post office when it opened.

The snake-dance

That evening, Nalini and Raju had an engagement at Kalipat, a small town, sixty miles away. Nalini began her first movement as usual after a signal from Raju. She entered carrying a brass lamp with a song in praise of Ganesha, the elephant-faced god, the remover of impediments. Her fifth item was a snake-dance. As the musicians played the famous snake-song.
Nalini came gliding on to the stage. She fanned out her fingers slowly. Her upturned palms gave the resemblance of a cobra hood. She wore a diadem for this act and it sparkled.

Lights changed. Nalini gradually sank to the floor. The music became slower and slower. The refrain urged the snake to dance - the snake that resided on the locks of Shiva himself, on the wrist of his spouse, Parvathi, and in the ever-radiant home of the gods in Kailas. This was a song that elevated the serpents and brought out its mystic quality. The rhythm was hypnotic. It was her masterpiece. Every inch of her body from toe to head rippled and vibrated to the rhythm of this song which lifted the cobra out of its class of an understanding reptile into a creature of grace and divinity and an ornament of the gods. The dance took forty-five minutes in all. The audience watched in rapt silence.

This is "Karma"

Raju was watching Nalini when one of the men of the organisation came up to him and said:

"You are wanted, sir".
"Who wants me ?"
"The District Superintendent of Police"

After this act, when the curtain came down, thunderous applause broke out, and I went out. Yes, the District Superintendent was there. We went to a lonely spot under a lamp outside, and he whispered,

"I'm awfully sorry to say this, but I've a warrant for your arrest.
It has come from headquarters.(The Guide ,170)"

It was a warrant for Raju's arrest on a complaint from Marco, the
charge being forgery. Raju whispered: "Please don't create a scene now. Wait until the end of the show, and till we are back home". The moment they reached home, Raju requested the Superintendent to give him a little time, as he wanted to tell Nalini about it. The Superintendent agreed.

I went up the staircase. He followed. He stood on the landings, while I went into her room. She listened to me as if I was addressing a stone pillar. She merely said: "I felt all along you were not doing right things. This is karma". She came out of the landing and told the officer, "What shall we do about it, sir? Is there no way out?"

"At the moment I have no discretion, madam. It's a non-bailable warrant. But perhaps tomorrow you may apply for reconsideration of bond. But we can do nothing till tomorrow, till it's move before the magistrate." (The Guide, 193)

**Nalini: self-sustaining vitality**

Nalini had to scrape a bail bond of ten thousand rupees. Raju was now a sort of hanger-on in the house. Ever since Nalini had released him from police custody, the mastery passed to her. She did not want to dance in public any more. She said:

I am tired of all this circus existence... It does not mean I'm not going to help. If I have to pawn my last possession, I'll do it to save you from jail. But once it's over, leave me once for all. That's all I ask. Forget me. Leave me to live or die, as I choose. That's all. (The Guide, 193)

Nalini was as good as her word. A sudden activity seized her. She sold her diamonds. She gathered all the cash she could. She sold under par
all the shares. She sent Mani, Raju's secretary, to Madras to pick up a big lawyer for Raju. She swallowed he own words, and went through her engagements, shepherding the musicians herself and, with Mani's help, making all the railway arrangements. Raju grew jealous or her self-reliance. But he forgot for the moment that she was doing it all for his sake. Neither Marco nor Raju had any place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she herself had underestimated all along.

**Rosie settles down in Madras**

The judge sentenced Raju to two years imprisonment. Raju's star lawyer looked gratified. Raju should properly have got seven years according to law books, but the lawyer's fluency knocked five years off.

In prison, Raju turned the last page of the Hindu. It displayed Nalini's photograph, the name of the institution where she was performing, and the price of tickets.

Now at this corner of South India, now there, next week in Ceylon, and another week in Bombay or Delhi. Her empire was expanding rather than Shrinking. It filled me with gall that she should go on without me. (*The Guide*, 205)

Mani Raju's former secretary, visited Raju in prison and gave him all the news. Nalini had cleared out of the town bag and baggage. She had settled down in Madras and was looking after herself quite well. She had given Mani a gift of one thousand rupees on the day that she left. She had a hundred bouquet of garlands presented to her on the railway platform. A huge crowd had gathered to see her off. Before her departure, she had methodically drawn up a list of all debts and discharged them fully. She had all the furniture and other possessions turned over to an auctioneer. Mani
explained that the only article she carried out of the house was the book, which she came upon when she broke open the liquor casket and had all the liquor thrown out.

**Belief in fate**

Later, Raju explains why he became a guide:

I was a guide for the same reason that someone else is a signaller, porter, or guard. It is fated thus. *(The Guide, 10)*

My troubles would not have started but for Rosie. Why did she call herself Rosie? She did not come from a foreign land. She was just an Indian, who should have done well with Devi, Meena, Lalitha, or any one of the thousand names we have in our country. She chose to call herself Rosie. Don't imagine on hearing her name that she wore a short skirt or cropped her hair. She looked just the orthodox dancer that she was. She wore sarees of bright hues and gold lace, had curly hair which she braided and beflowered, wore diamond earrings and a heavy gold necklace. I told her at the very first opportunity what a great dancer she was, and how she fostered our cultural traditions, and it pleased her.

**Arranged child marriages**

On being released after completing his two-year term, Raju went to the first barber's shop for a shave. The barber said, "It's written on your face that you are a two-year sort". Raju took shelter in a ruined temple beside a river, on the other bank of which was the village Mangala. A man named Velan was returning home after paying a visit to his married daughter. "It is not considered proper to pay too many visits to a son-in-law", he explained.
"I have a problem sir. My father in his lifetime married thrice. I am the first son of his first wife. The youngest daughter of his last wife is also with us. As the head of the family, I have given her every comfort at home, provided her with the jewellery and clothes she needed. My cousin's son is a fine boy. Even the date of the wedding was fixed, but the girl..."

"Ran away from the whole thing", said Raju.

"I searched her for three days and nights and spotted her in a festival crowd in a distant village... She sulks in a room all day. It is possible she is possessed..."

"Bring her over. Let me speak to her", Raju said grandly. (The Guide, 14-15)

**Attaing The Stature of a saint**

Velan rose, bowed low, and tried to touch Raju's feet. Raju recoiled at the attempt.

"I'll not permit anyone to do this. God alone is entitled to such a prostration. He will destroy us if we attempt to usurp his rights." (The Guide, 15)

Next morning Velan brought his sister, a young girl of fourteen. He also placed before him a basket filled with bananas, cucumbers, pieces of sugarcone, fried nuts, and a copper vessel brimming with milk. Raju picked the basket and went into an inner sanctum. The others followed. Raju stood before a stone image in the dark recess. It was tall god with four hands, bearing a mace and wheel, with a beautifully chiselled head, but abandoned a century ago. Raju ceremoniously placed the basket of edibles at the fact of the image and said:

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It's his first. Let the offering go to him first. Then we will eat the remnant. By giving to God, do you know how it multiples rather than divides? (The Guide, 17)

**Obscurantism**

Raju told Velan that he knew what his problem was, but he wished of give the matter some thought.

"We cannot force vital solutions. Every question must bide its time. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir", he said. He drew his fingers across his brow. "Whatever is written here will happen".

Raju declared fixedly looking at the girl, "What must happen. No power or earth or in heaven can change its course, just as no one can change the course of that river." (The Guide, 20)

**The miracle**

Velan was bursting with the news of a miracle. He stood before Raju with folded hands, and said that things had turned out very well. The girl all of a sudden appeared before the assembled family and said:

I have behaved foolishly all these days. I will do what my brother and the other elders at home tell me to do. They know what is best for us. I have been a bother to you all these days. Forgive me, all of you." (The Guide, 26)

The girl was prepared to marry her cousin. Velan had consulted the astrologer already and he said that the time was auspicious.
As Raju would not go to the wedding, the wedding was bound to come to him. Velan brought the girl and her husband and a huge concourse of relatives to the temple. The girl herself seemed to have spoken of Raju as her saviour.

The great soul

Raju's circle was gradually widening. A villager said that Raju had renounced the world and did nothing but meditate. Another said that, on account of Raju, the villager's cousin came round and gave him back the promissory note. A third villager said:

We won't have to fear anything more. It is our good fortune that this great soul should have come to live in our midst. Do you know sometimes these yogis can travel to the Himalayas just by thought? (The Guide, 29)

Raju's role as Swami

Raju lost count of the time. He counted the seasons by the special points that jutted out, such as the harvest in January when his disciples brought him sugarcane and jaggery cooked with rice. When they brought him sweets and fruits, he knew that the Tamil New Year was on. When Dasara came, they brought in extra lamps and lit them, and the women got busy all through the nine days, decorating the pillared hall with coloured paper and tinsel. For Deepavali, they brought him new clothes and crackers. He kept a rough count of time through the year of the seasons - sun, rain, and mist. He kept count of three cycles and then lost count.

His beard now caressed his chest. His hair covered his back. He wore a necklace of prayer beads around his neck. His eyes shone with
softness and compassion, the light of wisdom emanated from them. He came to be called Swami by his congregation.

**Possibilities connected with rain**

The summer seemed to continue. The first rains had not come. The millet crop was all scorched on the stalks. A thousand banana seeds were dead. The cattle went to graze, nosed about the mud and dirt, and came back because there was no grass to eat. The villager's gifts to Raju were shrinking in size and volume.

Someone said, "The astrologer says that we shall have very early rains in the coming year". Another said, "Is it true, Swami, that the movement of aeroplanes disturbs the clouds, and so the rains fall? Too many aeroplanes in the sky". A third villager said, "Is it true, Swami, that the atom bombs are responsible for the drying up of the clouds?" Science, mythology, weather reports, good and evil, and all kinds of possibilities were connected with the rain.

**The nightmares phase**

Cattle were unable to yield milk. They lacked the energy to drag the plough through the furrow. Flocks of sheep were beginning to look scurvy and piebald, with their pelvic bones sticking out. The wells in the villages were drying up. Huge concourses of women with pitchers arrived at the river, which was fast narrowing. They quarrelled at the water-hole for priorities. There was fear, desperation, and lamentation in their voices. The earth was fast drying up. A buffalo was found dead in a foot-track. The people were entering a nightmare phase.

Raju merely raised a hand and waved it as if to say:
Be peaceful. Everything will be all right. I will fix it with the gods. (The Guide, 83)

The granary of the previous year, in most of the houses, remained unreplenished and the level was going down. The village shopman was holding out for bigger prices.

The misinterpreted message

When people asked for a measure of rice, the shopman demanded fourteen annas for it. The man who wanted the rice lost his temper and slapped the shopman's face. The shopman came out with a chopper and attacked the customer. Those who sympathised with the man gathered in front of the shop and invaded it. The shopman's relatives and sympathisers came at night with crowbars and knives and started attacking the other group.

Velan was down with an injured skull and burns. His brother was one of the lesser intelligences of the village. He was about twenty-one and a semi-moron, Raju said,

"Tell your brother to apply turmeric to his wounds and to rest in bed completely." He also added:

"God and tell Velan and the rest that I don't want them to fight. Tell your brother that, unless they are good, I'll never eat".

"Eat what?" asked the boy, rather puzzled.

"Say that I'll not eat. Don't ask what, I'll not eat till they are good." (The Guide, 84-87)
The semi-moron went back to Velan and the others, and said:

"The Swami doesn't want food any more. Don't take any food to him."

"Why? Why?"

"Because, because.. It doesn't rain". He added also, suddenly, recollecting the fight. "No fight, he says." (The Guide, 89)

**Swami the Saviour**

One of the villagers said :

"This Mangala is a blessed country to have a man like the Swami in our midst. No bad thing will come to us as long as he is with us. He is like the Mahatma. When Mahatma Gandhi went without food, how many things happened in India! This is a man like that. If he fasts, there will be rain. He is undertaking it out of love for us. This will surely bring rain and help us. Once upon a time a man fasted for twenty-one days, and brought down the deluge. Only great souls take upon themselves tasks such as this." (The Guide, 19)

The atmosphere become electrified. They forgot the fight and all their troubles and bickerings. They rose in a body, declaring, "Let us all go and pay respects to Swami, our Saviour". Raju looked at his flock. One of them said :

> You are a Mahatma. We should consider ourselves biassed indeed to be able to touch the dust of your feet. (The Guide, 93)
food for their men and children, on both sides of the dried-up river, there were small curls of smoke going up. The place was studded with picnic groups, with the women's bright-coloured sarees shining in the sun.

The little Malgudi station was choked with passengers. Buses stood outside the station, the conductors crying, "Special for Mangala leaving. Hurry up. Hurry up." The Tea Propaganda Board opened a big tea stall. Its posters were pasted all around the temple wall. People drank too much coffee and too little tea in these parts. Shops sprang up overnight, displaying coloured soda bottles and bunches of bananas and coconut toffees.

**The American with a TV projects**

The busiest man was an American. He bent close to the Swami to say:

> I am James J. Malone, I am from California. My business is production of films and TV shows. I have come to shoot this subject, take it back to our country, and show it to our people there. I have in my pocket the sanction from New Delhi for this project. May I have yours? *(The Guide, 217)*

Raju thought over it and serenely nodded.

"His life is valuable to the country"

A couple of doctors, deputed by the Government to watch and report, went to the Swami, and felt his pulse and heart. They said:

> Blood pressure is 200 systolic. We suspect one of the
kindneys is affected. Uraemia is setting in. We are trying to go
give him small doses of saline and glucose. His life is valuable
to the country. (The Guide, 219)

**Imperative that Swami be saved**

On the morning of the eleventh day, the doctors wrote a bulletin:

Swamis's condition grave. Declines glucose and saline. Should
break the fast immediately. Advise procedure. It was a top Priority Gov-
ernment telegram. It fetched a reply within an hour:

Imperative that Swami should be saved. Persuade best
to cooperate. Should not risk life. Try give glucose and saline.
Persuade Swami resume fast later. (The Guide, 221)

**Starved to death**

Raju asked Velan to bend nearer. He whispered "Help me to my feet." He clung to Velan's arm and lifted himself. He had to be held by Velan and another on each side. He could not walk. He panted with the effort. He went down the steps of the river. He stepped into his basin of water, shut his eyes, and turned towards the mountain, his lips muttering the prayer. Velan and another held him each by an arm. It was difficult to hold Raju on his feet, as he had a tendency to flop down. They held him as if he were a baby. Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said:

Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under
my feet, up my legs." (The Guide, 221)

And with that he sagged down.

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The preceding pages comprise a discussion at some length of cross-cultural awareness leading to the conflict between the educated Rosie the dancer and Raju's mother who is accustomed to the conventional life of the religious-minded, in The Guide which is one of the later novels of Narayan (1958). Raju's mother is supported by her elder brother, because two women brought up in two different cultural traditions, which are at cross-purposes with each other, cannot share the same house. Raju himself supports the sexy dancing girl for two reasons: first, because he is in love with her; and, secondly, he sees in her bright prospects of making money by commercialising her artistic skill. It is his error of judgement that ends Raju's career as a showman, and, later, the simplicity of the credulous men and women of Mangala that a fast-unto-death is thrust on Raju who lacks the boldness to resist it and so loses his life in the futile pursuit to bring rain.

We now discuss cross-cultural awareness between two women in one of Narayna's early novels The Dark Room. Although the novel was published in 1939, the story goes back a few years earlier. Savitri is the conventional wife with three children, who is aware of her rights and who does not hesitate to assert them. Shanta Bai, on the other hand, is a modern woman; but, as compared to Savitri, she plays a less prominent role in the novel. Her story is not a story of complete success, although Ramani's interest in her temporarily creates a fissure in his married life. Besides this, there is a minor conflict between those who like English films and those who like Indian films in Ramani's own family.
Malgudi: into line with the modern age

according to Narayan,

"Malgudi in 1935 suddenly came into line with the modern age
by building a well-equipped theatre - the Palace Talkies." (The Guide, 26)

The new cinema-hall brushed aside the old corrugated-sheet-roofed Variety Hall which had entertained the citizens of Malgudi with tattered silent films.

Ramani: annoying his role as a husband

Ramani sat in a first-class seat with his wife by his side. He was very proud of his wife. She had a fair complexion and well-proportioned features. Her sky-blue saree gave her a distinguished appearance. He surveyed her slyly, with a sense of satisfaction at possessing her. When people in the theatre threw looks at her, it increased his satisfaction all the more. He leaned over her and said, "They are showing Kuchela. It is a Tamil film. I thought you would like it."

Ramani spoke to her because it made him feel important. He enjoyed his role of a husband so much that he showed her a lot of courtesy, constantly inquiring if her chair was comfortable, if she could see the screen properly, and if she would like to have a sweet drink.

The story of Krishna and his classmate Kuchela. The hall became dark and the show began. Savitri, like the majority of those in the hall, knew the story. She had heard it a number of times since infancy. It was the old story from the epics, of Krishna and his old classmate Kuchela, who was too busy with
his daily prayers and meditation to work and earn, and hence left to his wife the task of finding food for his twenty-seven children.

Everything was there: Krishna's boyhood; he and his gawky classmates waylaying curd-sellers and gorging themselves. It was a feat to consume so many pots of curd. An endless procession of rustic women with pots on their heads passed under the trees, in the branches of which a gang was waiting. The women halted under the trees and nearly asked to be robbed of their pots. They wrung their hands at the broken pots and chased Krishna. As the curds spread on the ground, Savitri could not help thinking what a lot of curd was wasted.

Then they saw Krishna's classroom jokes and the various ways in which he tormented his monitor. Nobody was in a mood to question why the monitor, a perfectly timid and harmless man, deserved this treatment. Savitri enjoyed the sight of the troubled monitor and the triumph of the saucy-looking Krishna so much that she laughed aloud and whispered to her husband, "Babu (their son) should have seen this. He would have enjoyed it."

The four-hour picture

Savitri was enchanted by the picture. It ran for nearly four hours. The film people had shown no hurry. They had a slow spacious way of handling a story which gave a film-fan three times his money's worth. There were songs which the characters sang as long as they liked. There were scenes of "domestic humour". Which threatened to last the whole evening. There was a procession, complete with elephants and pipers and a band that took half an hour to pass. There was a storm which shook the entire
theatre. There was a court scene with a dancer which was an independent programme by itself. There were irrelevant interludes which nearly made one forget the main story.

**Savitri immensely pleased**

Savitri was embarrassed by a suggestive conversation between a very fat husband and his wife at bedtime. She was thrilled by the magnificence of the procession. She was immensely pleased when, in the end, Krishna heaped on his old friend wealth and honour. The whole picture swept her mind clear of mundance debris and filled it with superhuman splendours.

Unnoticed by her passed the fumbling and faltering of the tinsel gods and the rocking of the pasteboard palaces in the studio wind, and all the exaggeration, emphasis, and noise. The picture carried Savitri with it. When, in the end, Kuchela stood in the pooja room and lighted camphor and incense before the image of God.

Savitri brought there palms together and prayed. (DR, 30)

The first show ended at ten o'clock.

**Indian films versus English films**

The night air blew on Savitri's face and revived her earthly senses a little. As she sat beside her husband in the car, she felt grateful to him and loved him very much. When she reached home she asked the cook:

Have the children had their food? Babu, you must see this picture. It is very good.

"An Indian films!" sneered Banu.
"You must see the little boy who acts Krishna. How can a small boy act so well: He is wonderful."

Babu smiled indulgently. "That shows you have never seen a Shirley Temple. They pay her one thousand pounds a week to act. If you see *Curly Top*, you will never like any other picture. A friend of mine has seen it twice, and he told me all about it."

"You see this picture and then say. Your father has promised to send you all to it tomorrow."

"I don't like Indian films, Mother. I would like to be sent to *Frankincense*, which is coming next week, " Babu said.

"I don't like English films. Let us go to this tomorrow," Sumati said.

"It is because you don't understand English films", said Babu. (DR, 30-31)

**Women probationers**

In the New Year, the Engladia Insurance Company decided to take a few women probationers into its branches, who were to be trained in office and field work, and later assist the Company in securing insurance policies on female lives.

The Company advertised its new scheme with the maximum noise, and the response was very satisfying. A large number of applicants poured into Ramani's office. They were to be called for interview. Those coming from other towns had to come at their own expense.
Disapproval of the scheme

Pereira said to the other members of the branch office staff that they could have their pick for the harem during the interview days. The Accountant Kantaiengar, strongly disapproved of the new scheme. He asked. "Do they want to convert the Company into a brothel?" To Ramani, too, the scheme appeared novel and fantastic. He went through the interviews in a state of boredom irritated with his Head Office for this infliction. He told the applicants, after a number of questions, that they would hear from him due course. But Pereira made a festival of it. He arranged their accommodation in a spare corner of the office and flirted with them elegantly.

The last applicant: a "houri"

On the very last day, The last applicant entered. At the sight of her, Ramani pushed his chair back and rose - a thing he had not done for anyone till now. Pereira noticed this difference. The name of the last applicant was Mrs. Shanta Bai. She was from Mangalore.

"Mangalore?" Ramani echoed, and added as a piece of courtesy, "Some day I have planned to visit your district."

"Oh", she said, "but it is a pretty dull place. I'm sure you won't like it."(DR,65)

Ramani felt that he had been snubbed, but presently he appreciated the candour and smartness which had released the snub. He smiled and replied briskly that he was grateful for the timely warning, otherwise he would have wasted some money and time in going to Mangalore. She received the remark without interest.
Outside, Perira winked at Kantaiengar and whispered, "Of that houri in there, we shall see a great deal and perhaps hear also a great deal": He was uttering a prediction which turned out to be every bit true.

**Admiration for her manners**

Ramani asked Shanta Bai whether she lived with her people at Mangalore.

"It is a difficult question, and it will take a lot of time in answering."

"I see you are married."

"I am," she said in a pathetic low voice, and Ramani did not dare to put to her further questions about her private life. He said apologetically,

"I'm sorry to trouble you with personal questions, but I have to send report to the Head Office. If they appoint you, they will want to know all about you, whether your family is likely to hinder you in your work- ".

"Oh, of that you can assure them. If I had a family to hinder me, I shouldn't have come here with my application".

"I shall want some more details and facts," implored Ramani. Till now, all the interviewees had been at his mercy, he found himself, to his distress, at the mercy of this applicant. He liked her pluck. Very seldom, he told himself, did such fair lips utter words without affectation or timidity. He admired her manners very much.(DR, 55-56)

"Women's salvation in education : all nonsense"

Shanta Bai said, as if taking pity on Ramani:

Well, here is my life story. I was born in Mangalore.

I was married when I was twelve to a cousin of mine, who was
a gambler and a drunkard. When I was eighteen, I found he wouldn't change, and so I left him. My parents would not tolerate it, and I had to leave home. I had studied up to the Fifth Form, and now I joined a Mission School. After completing my matriculation, with the help of an aunt, I came to Madras and joined the Women's College. I passed my B.A. Three years ago.

Since then I have been drifting about I have had odd teaching jobs and I have also been companion to a few rich children. On the whole, it has been a very great struggle. It is all nonsense to say that women's salvation lies in education. It doesn't improve their lot a bit. It leaves them as badly unemployed as the men."

"I am really surprised to hear it", said Ramani, feeling it was time he said something.

"So must anyone be, most of all we ourselves. We struggle hard, get our B.A., and think that we are the first of our kind. But what happens? We find that there are thousands like us."(DR 67)

**Insurance career**

Shanta Bai's tone was soft and pleasing. Ramani wanted to ask her if she could sing well, but restrained himself and said:

"Yours is a very interesting story. Then I suppose you saw our advertisement?"

"Yes, I did. I sent my application to all the branch offices, but I was called up for interview only by you."

"Where were you at the time?"

"I was in Bangalore, staying with some old college friends and looking for work. Now I am here. If you find me suitable for your office, I will be ever grateful to you".

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A thrill ran through Ramani's being at the thought that this beautiful creature would be grateful to him. He swelled with importance when he said:

"I will do my best for you. Of course, you know the final decision rests with the Head Office. I will do my very best for you."

"Thank you very much", she said.

"I must also tell you now," he began in the orthodox style of the senior to the probationer, "that an insurance career is not all an easy one. It is one of the most exacting professions in the world. I've been in it for a decade and a half now." (DR, 67-68)

"A nuptial chamber in the office"

Ramani learnt that she lived in a hotel. That simply would not do. He called on Pereira next day and asked what he was doing with the room in the passage. Pereira replied that they had thrown in a few old chairs and records in that room. Ramani said:

"Can't you transfer that lumber to some other place and make it habitable? Mrs Shanta Bai is staying in some dirty hotel. Why shouldn't we give her that room till she gets settled in this place. There is no harm in it... It must be rather awkward for a lady to live in a hotel, you see".

"You are right, sir, No decent hotel in the whole town. I will have the lumber turned out and stocked somewhere else. But the records? They are rather important".

"Put them away in some other place".

"All right, sir. You will want the room ready tomorrow?" (DR, 68-69)
Outside, Pereira told Kantaiengar, "I shall have to fix a nuptial chamber in the office". Kantaiengar thought the whole idea absurd. He said, "This will be the talk of the town." The other members of the staff also resented this feminine intrusion, because a lot of lumber was brought into their room. The old office watchman resented it because the passage room had been for years his home.

"An important guest"

Ramani asked his wife what happened to the spare cot they had. Savitri answered that Krishnier's people borrowed it long ago when he was down with rheumatism and they had not returned it. Ramani told her to send for the cot, as he wanted it for the office, which was going to fit up a guest room. The office got a lot of outsiders. Some important people came on business now and then. The office has to provide them with some decent accommodation.

"If it is for the office, buy a cot with your office money. Why should we give ours?"

"But look here, my girl. If it comes to that, everything in this house, including the grain in our storeroom, belongs to the office, bought with the office money."

She argued elaborately that they were not living on the charity of the company, and declined to lend the cot. He pleaded and cajoled her. He said:

I shall want it only for a time. I shall return it as soon as we buy new furniture. There is no time now. An important guest is coming tomorrow. I shall also want your bench, a chair, and one or two vessels."

"Oh, you want everything we have in our house." The
deadwood bench was her favourite piece of furniture. "If you take away the bench, what am I to sleep on in the afternoons?"

"Oh, I will get you velvet couches, my dear", he said, bringing his hands together in a romantic gesture. "There is nothing that I wouldn't buy for you. Only say it." It made her very happy. (DR, 70-71)

**The probationary period**

The Head Office confirmed Shanta Bai's appointment a week later. Ramani's recommendation was so strong that the Head Office had no choice in the matter. Shanta Bai who was to be on probation for six months, provided she did personal canvassing worth ten thousand rupees within the first two months. If she failed, she was to be sent away and the next applicant on the list called up and given a chance. During the probationary period, Shanta Bai was to receive a stipend of sixty rupees a month. After that, she was to have starting salary of a hundred and fifty rupees a month, with commission and work as the chief woman agent of the branch.

**Her artistic chequered jumper**

On the day the confirmation came, Ramani sent for Shanta Bai and dramatically pushed the letter before her. He tried to look casual and unconcerned. He went through some papers while she read it. Thought pretending to look at the letters, he was secretly noting how artistic her chequered jumper was, and awaited regularly her thanks for all his trouble.

"I am rather disappointed", she said. "I thought the starting salary would be two hundred". She remained thoughtful for a moment and added, "I had no business to imagine it, because
the advertisement never mentioned the amount".

Ramani rushed to console her. "You seem to overlook the fact that you will be drawing two hundred in two years. Please read carefully that increment cause. Besides, you will be getting commission over your actual salary."

"Well, I take your word for it. I will do whatever you advise me to do."(DR,72)

**Dressing attractively**

Ramani was pleased with the importance she gave him. He sat reflecting for a moment. How well a simple voice saree sat on her : Why couldn't one's wife dress as attractively ? Shanta Bai said:

"I thought that, if I had a start of two hundred, I could buy a tiny Baby Austin for myself". She added with a sentimental sigh, "But I suppose all one's dreams can never come true."

"I am sure your commission on your personal work will enable you to have even a big Austin with a driver and all. Shall I wire to the Head Office that you accept the terms and ask them to post the agreement immediately"?

"As you please", she said.(DR,73)

"**Exquisite complexion**"

Ramani thought that such an exquisite complexion as Shanta Bai's came only from Mangalore. One could see the blood coursing in her veins. He said:

"I will see if the probationary period can be cut down and if the
stipend can be put up a bit. But that's all by and by. You may rest assured that you interests will have the best support and protection possible."

"Excellent : When do I start work ?"

"Tomorrow. Now you can go home if you like."

Shanta Bai rose and went out. Ramani looked after her and meditated. What a delightful perfume even after she was gone : What an important, boorish beggar that husband must be who couldn't hold this fair creature : What an innovation it would be on the office staff : The town was sure to talk about it. He hoped her presence would not be too upsetting for the office staff to go on with their usual work : they must get used to it. It was all nonsense to keep men and women separate in watertight compartments. Women were as good as men, and must be treated accordingly.

"The fairy" in the office

Ramani informed Pereira that the Head Office had confirmed the lady's appointment, and that he wanted that a table should be arranged for her in the office. Pereira said to Kantaiengar :

"Clean you table and to that corner. I will give you another table. Orders from the boss. The fairy is taking her seat here. She is to be given the best place, and so you have to quit."

"This is atrocious. I shall resign ."

"Wouldn't a fresh rose need a lot of air, light, and this large table, to keep it alive ?"

"What I can't understand is why he is thrusting her here. Why can't he have her in his room, on his lap if he likes ?... Does he take me for a woman-hunter like himself ?"
"Personally, I would rather welcome her. Something to relieve this drabness you know." (DR, 75-76)

**Shanta Bai**: "**I love unconventional things**"

One evening, while returning home from the Club, Ramani passed his office. He had an impulse to stop his car and go in. He told himself that he ought to inspect his office periodically at nights. He found the watchman sleeping soundly. He gave a couple of gentle knocks on the door of the passage room.

"Who is that?"

Ramani said, "Don't disturb yourself. On my way home, I just remembered something and dropped in for a moment."

Shanta Bai recognised his voice and opened the door. "I was rather terrified, you know, wondered if someone had come to abduct me."

"Abduct you? I just began to doubt if I had locked the safe in the evening. A troublesome business having such a responsibility on one's head."

"It must be awful. If anything goes wrong, I suppose you will be taken to task?"

"I shall be sent to jail. Not a paper must be lost, not an anna must escape the account."

She listened to him with her eyes sparkling in the light of the bulb hanging in the passage. She was dressed in a white sarees, and had jasmine in her hair. She asked abruptly, "Why do you stand in the passage? Won't you step in?"

"I thought you might think it a bit unconventional."

"Oh, I love unconventional things," she said. "Otherwise
I shouldn't' be here, but nursing children and cooking for a husband. Some in, come in, see how I have made a home for myself."(DR,78-79)

**Movement of her limbs**

Ramani stepped in, pleasantly excited, marvelling at Shanta Bai's ability to adapt herself. She warmly responded to a little friendliness. She had put up a few khaddar hangings on the door and window, a few group photos of her college days on the wall, a flowery counterpane on her bed, and a silk cushion on the chair. The door of an antechamber was covered with a curtain, where she did her dressing. Ramani looked about and exclaimed:

"What a transformation!"

"Please sit down."

"Not when a lady is standing."

"All right", she said, and went over to her cot.

He sat down on the teakwood bench. She threw up her arms and stretched them, saying, "My joints are becoming stiff. I think I am getting old... Do you mind if I don't sit erect?"

"Oh, not at all, make yourself comfortable." She reclined on her pillows, stretched her legs, and said, "I can't sit up. Even in my college days, I used to lie in bed and study all night."

Ramani's eyes followed every minute movement of her limbs. She tossed her head every now and then, slightly pouted her lips, and raised her brow. Ramani felt now that his stiff aloofness with her during the office hours was a piece of cruelty and that some explanation was due to her :
"I have just remembered to tell you - if you have found me a little different in the office, please don't be hurt."

"Oh no. Nothing can hurt me. In the office you are the chief, and now"

"Your brother, if you permit me to say so."

"You have my fullest consent to think of me as your sister ."

"Oh, it is very good of you." (DR., 81-82)

**Her philosophy of life**

After conferring on him the privilege of brotherhood, she grew intimate in her talk. The account of her life with her harsh husband was really moving. Ramani listened, with absorbing interest, to her account of the struggles after leaving home. He said that men deserved to be whipped when she hinted at a couple of attempts on her honour. He was in complete agreement with her philosophy of life - living today and letting tomorrow take care of itself and honour being the one important possession. He had known all these himself, but they had a new value for him when they issued from those fair lips. He assured her of his best help when she told him what she hoped to achieve in the services of the company.

The office clock's chime meant ten. Ramani rose with a sigh:

"I thought it was just eight-thirty or nine."

She said, "If I had the slightest idea that you were coming, I would have kept some food for you. It is wrong of me to have kept you so long and to turn you out now on an empty stomach." (DR., 82)
"Something poetic"

Shanta Bai went down the stairs and walked up to the car to see him off. He started the car and suddenly asked, "Would you like a drive?" He suggested that a drive around with his sister would be more than food to him. She said she would have loved a drive if he had eaten something. He was deeply touched by her consideration.

"Why have you stopped the engine?"
"The car won't start."
"Really? What is wrong?"
"It needs another passenger besides myself to make it go", he said.

She laughed at the joke and asked him if he was going to wait there all night till he could get a passenger. Yes, he said with fervour, even if it was going to keep him there all night, and added:

"I suggest that we go round Race Course Road, and then, if you don't mind, to the river. Have you ever seen it at night?"
"Is it a very lovely sight?"
"Come and see it for yourself", he said.

Shanta Bai went up to lock her room. Ramani took out his handkerchief, dusted the seat lightly, got down, and waited for her. She came back to the car, and opened the door of the back seat.

"No, not there", he said, "Don't you see that the door is open here?"
"I prefer the back seat", she said.
"You do, I am sure, but the engine won't start unless there are two passengers in the front seat. You are not afraid of me, are you?"

"Certainly not", she said, and climbed in. He sat beside her and drove the car. She said, "Aren't the stars in the sky beautiful?"
"Yes, yes", he agreed with her and asked, "Are your fond of moonlit nights or dark nights?" feeling that he wanted to express something poetic himself. (DR, 83-84)

No aptitude for canvassing work

Ramani was beginning to feel worried. Shanta Bai had been in the office now for a month, and yet she exhibited no aptitude of canvassing work. The Head Office seemed to be fanatical in regard to the clause laying down the minimum of work to be done in the first two months. They had just sent a reminder. If Shanta Bai did not complete the amount in a month, she would have to be dismissed. Ramani said to Pereira, "Will you please ask the lady probationer to come in a moment?"

Reminder from the Head Office

Shanta Bai came in. Ramani said: "You have been here for a month now. Do you feel you will be able to do ten thousand rupees' worth of canvassing in another month? I have just received a reminder. I would advise you to reduce your office work and go about with the chief canvassing agent a little more." Pereira said: "Madam, you may succeed better if you see the men themselves and persuade them to insure their wives." (DR, 85-86)

"The temperamental heroine"

On the way home from the Club, halting at the office was threatening to become a daily habit of Ramani. He left the Club early, gave Shanta Bai a drive, and went home at ten at night. Ramani's afternoon talk in the
office had upset her. "What a riddance it will be for you in a few weeks, "she said as soon as he came in and took his seat. She compressed her lips and jerked her head in the perfect Garbo manner: the temperamental heroine and the impending doom. Ramani had to be the soothing lover. He went near her and patted her shoulder gently. Shanta Bai refused to be comforted. She revelled in the vision of a blasted future. "I know my fate, and I will not shirk it." Ramani told her that he would somehow persuade the Head Office to cancel the troublesome clause. "Don't be absurd", she said. "I won't have you do anything special for me."

"Working herself to a breakdown"

Shanta Bai freed herself from Ramani's arms and paced the room up and down. "You shan't make yourself the laughing stock of the compnay", she said. She was steadily, definitely, methodically working herself up to a breakdown. Bamani knew it. He had already experienced it twice. She would start thus, and then sit with her face on the pillow, slight tremors shaking her back. In a moment she would rise, draw herself up, jerk her head, and laugh at herself and at her moods.

"Shall we go to a picture tonight?"

Shanta Bai went through her breakdown act. She was just about to jerk her head and laugh at herself when Ramani rushed at her, locked her in her arms, and implored her to be courageous. She released herself from his arms and said:

"Tonight I feel like pacing the whole earth up and down. I won't sleep. I fell like roaming all over the town and the whole length of the river. I will laugh and dance. That's my philosophy of life. Laugh, clown, laugh. It was a film I saw
years ago, laugh, clown, laugh, though your heart be torn...
Shall we go to a picture tonight?"
This was the first time she suggested this, and Ramani sat more
or less stunned. She repeated with emphasis:
"I said shall we go to a picture tonight?"
"Tonight?"
"Tonight. Answer in a word, yes or no."(DR, 89)
There were already rumours abroad, and now they will be seen in public
Ramani said:
"Certainly, certainly. I was just wondering what the pic-
ture was and if it was worth a visit, what is the picture tonight?"
"Whatever it is, I must see a picture tonight. If you are
not coming with me, I am going alone. If you are coming, I am
prepared to share my food with you. Perhaps you don’t wish
to be seen with me in public. Perhaps your wife will
object."(DR, 89-90)

Ramani repudiated all these suggestions indignantly. He asserted with much
bravado that he cared not a straw for public opinion, and that his wife was
not the sort to question him or dictate to him.

**Films based on "mythological nonsense"**

Ramani dallied till nine-thirty when the picture should have started,
so that he might make an unobtrusive entry into a dark hall and take his
seat inconspicuously. When they reached the theatre, Shanta Bai looked at
the posters and exclaimed:

"A wretched Indain film! I’d have given my life to see
a Garbo or Dietrich now".
"What shall we do?"
"Anything is better than nothing."
She sat in the dark hall beside him, whispering criticisms of the
picture before her - a stirring episode form the Ramayana, in
which Hanuman, the giant monkey god, set fire to Lanka. She said:

"What rubbish the whole thing is! Our people can't produce a decent film. Bad photography, awful acting, ugly faces. Till our film producers give up mythological nonsense, there is no salvation for our films... Let us get out. I can't stand this any more." (DR, 90-91)

"Shall we sit up and chat till dawn?"

Ramani followed Shanta Bai out. In the car, she asked whether they should go to the river. Ramani agreed. She said:

"It is only ten. Let us sit on the bank and stay there till the dawn."

She laughed. Ramani also laughed faithfully and drove the car towards the river. She sat nestling close to him as he drove, and said suddenly:

"Let us drive round the town once and then go to the river."

Ramani stopped, reversed, and drove the dcr into the town and about the streets. She said:

"I'm rather mad tonight. I hope you don't mind it."

"Not at all", he said.

After driving the car along the principal thoroughfares of the town, Ramani asked:

"What shall we do now?"

"To the river, to the river. You have a mad woman beside you tonight."

After about an hour at the river, she suggested going back to her room. As soon as she got down at Race Course Road, she said:

"I can't sleep tonight. Would you care to step in? Shall we sit up and chat till dawn?"

"With pleasure", Ramani said, and followed her into her room. (DR, 91-92)
"I am as wing along the waster

Locking her arms behind her head and leaning back on the pillow,
Shanta Bai said:

"Life is one continuous boredom. I started out in life wanting to do things, but here I am vegetating. All day long I listen to Pereira's humour and to Kantuiengar's rudeness, and then come down here and lie down on the couch. "As wind along the waster". Have you read Omar Khayyam ?"

"Who is he ?" Shanta Bai's literary allusions distressed Ramani.

"The Persian poet."

"I do not know the Mahommedan language", Ramani said innocently, and Shanta Bai began to lecture him on Omar Khayyam and FitzGerald.

"I can't exist without a copy of The Rubaiyat. You will find it under my pillow or in my ga. His philosophy appeals to me. Dead yesterday and unborn tomorrow. "What, without asking whither hurried hence", and so on. The cup of life must be filled to the brim and drained: another and another cup to drown the impertinence of this memory. In this world, Khayyam is the only person who would have understand the secret of my soul. No one tries to understand me. That is the tragedy of my life. Khayyam says: Into this universe and why not knowing, etcetera. I am as wind along the waste."(DR, 150-151)

Putting out the light

Ramani went over to the edge of her cot, sat down there, and tried to hold her hands. Shanta Bai took away her hands and pleaded:

"Please leave me alone. I am in no mood now."

"Are you sure ?"

"Absolutely. You may sit here if you like, but please don't touch me ?.
Ramani folded his arms across his chest. Shanta Bai hummed
a little tune to herself and said, tossing her head:

"I have not brought my violin with me. I am in a mood to play. Have you a violin at home?"

"No. I would have bought one for you".

"Oh, you are so good to me. I don't know how I am ever going to repay your kindness".

Ramani's heart thrilled at these words:

"I have told you not to talk of repayment. When I know a person, I like the person, that is all, and I will do anything for the person. Please don't talk of repayment on any account."

Presently she said:

"Pereira told me that there is a Laurel and Hardy comic at the Palace. Shall we go there tonight?"

"I am so sorry, not tonight, I have to be with my children. My wife has gone to her parents."

Shanta Bai dismissed the picture with a sight. She hummed a few tunes and Ramani said she sung divinely. She said:

"Would you mind putting out the light? I feel that darkness would be more soothing to my should now. I do so hate these electric bulbs."

Ramani put out the light. The Taluk office gong struck nine.

Ramani counted it and jumped up, muttering:

"Goodness! I never thought it was nine. The children will be waiting."(DR, 152-153)

**Summing up**

In this chapter, we have seen how cultural awareness among women in Narayan's later and earlier novels acts as a counterforce, namely, the conventional strongly opposed to the unconventional in the changing Malgudi society. In *The Guide*, the unconventional is represented by Rosie, a Hindu girl, M.A. in Economics, with skill in classical dances, specially Bharat Naryam which alienates her from her husband. In *The Dark Room*,

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the unorthodox is represented by Shanta Bai, a graduate young woman, separated from her husband, who loves unconventionality and is interested in Hollywood films starring Greta Garbo or Marlene Dietrich as well as Laurel and Hardy, the hearthrobs of 1940s.

Such unorthodoxy is firmly resented by Raju's mother in The Guide and by Ramani's wife in The Dark Room so much so that both women have to leave their homes in protest. While Rosie gives herself up sexually to Raju, Narayan is not so explicit about Shanta Bai and Ramani. In Raju's case, overconfidence in himself and Rosie (new professional name Nalini) leads him to two years imprisonment for forging Rosie alias Nalini's signature. In Ramani's case, the tantrums of Shanta Bai are initially tolerated affectionately by Ramani and in the end his wife is restored to him, but their married life is never the same as it was before because, as Savitri herself says, a part of her is dead.

Then, while we are told how Nalini (Rosie) stood on her own, migrated to Madras, and rose higher in fame as well as in income, the story of Shanta Bai is left incomplete by Narayan, as her role in Ramani's life comes to an abrupt end. Narayan has not developed Shanta Bai's character as fully as he does of Rosie, and we are left totally in the dark about what happened to her - whether she continued serving the branch office of Englandia Insurance Company in Malgudi of which Ramani was the head, or whether she was dismissed for nonfulfilment of the canvassing clause, or whether she left the branch office of her own will.