CHAPTER V

THE LONE EXPERIMENTS

Waiting for the Mahatma is Narayan's lone experiment on the theme of Gandhi's freedom-struggle; and The Painter of Signs is his solitary experiment on the theme of the alarming population growth in India. Both these novels stand apart from the other novels for they deal with national themes. Though written at two different periods—Waiting for the Mahatma in 1955 and The Painter of Signs in 1976—they have some common points. Both of them deal with love stories. In both these novels the action strays out of Malgudi for most of the time. Both of them offer very little scope for fictionalizing facts. Therefore, the technique of fictional realism which is found at its best in the mature novels of Narayan has not been fully exploited in these novels.

Waiting for the Mahatma

Though, chronologically speaking, Waiting for the Mahatma falls between The Financial Expert and The Guide it does not compare well with them in the matter of fictional realism. The novel makes use of Gandhi and his influence to such an extent that the love story of Sriram and Bharati
recedes to the background. It does not fictionalize Gandhi's greatness; rather it gives a calm and exact picture of him as he appeared to his disciples. It deals with the last few years of Gandhi's work. Significantly the novel ends with Gandhi's assassination. It depicts it thus:

As the Mahatmaji approached the dais, the entire assembly got up. At this moment a man pushed himself ahead of the assembly, brushing against Bharati, and Sriram cried petulantly, 'Why do you push like that?' Unheeding, the man went forward. 'I'm sorry to be late today,' murmured the Mahatma. The man stood before the Mahatma and brought his palms together in a reverential salute. Mahatma Gandhi returned it. The man tried to step forward again. Mahatmaji's granddaughter said, 'Take your seat,' and tried to push him into line. The man nearly knocked the girl down, and took a revolver out of his pocket. As the Mahatma was about to step on the dais, the man took aim and fired. Two more shots rang out. The Mahatma fell on the dais. He was dead in a few seconds.¹

Sriram-Bharati love story fades into insignificance against this.

The plot of the novel is based on a dual theme, Sriram's love for Bharati and Mahatma Gandhi's freedom struggle. Narayan succeeds in building the Mahatma-myth more effectively than in treating the romance of the lovers. Hence the novel suffers as far as fictional realism is concerned.

Sriram is an young man of twenty. After inheriting his father's property, which his grandmother has carefully protected, he does not know what to do in life. A chance encounter with Bharati - Bharati the volunteer of Gandhi's ashram approaches him for funds - makes him to fall in love with her. The infatuated Sriram drifts into Gandhi's camp not out of patriotic zeal as out of love. He desires to be nearer Bharati. In so doing, he deserts his granny. The usual Narayan comedy, irony and fictionalization of facts are totally absent here. Even in a scene where granny and Sriram confront each other, the usual Narayan-touch is not present. The talk between them goes on in a matter-of-fact way. It is depicted thus:

She said: 'Oh! He is your God, is he?'
'Yes, he is, and I won't hear anyone speak lightly of him.'
'What else can I know, a poor ignorant hag like me! Do I read the newspapers? Do I listen to lectures? Am I told what is what by anyone? How should I know anything about that man Gandhi?'
'He is not a man; He is a Mahatma!' cried Sriram.2

Granny does not put up any resistance, which is an unusual feature in Narayan's novels. Sriram deserts her with the belief that it is no use talking to her anything more about Gandhi. He decides it is 'best to leave in the morning without any fuss.'3 Narayan pushes his hero Sriram into

2. Ibid., p.55.
3. Ibid., p.57.
Gandhi's camp without much ado.

Sriram, the lover is easily converted into Sriram the ardent Gandhian. The chance for fictionalising events is lost, thereby. Sriram becomes an accredited member of Gandhi's group and forms a trio with Bharati and Gorpad. Part two of the novel deals with Sriram's extensive tours - 'a mission of mercy' - to the famine affected villages. Once again, Gandhi becomes important. History overpowers fiction.

It was a mission of mercy; Mahatmaji had set out to study the famine conditions at first hand, and to put courage and hope into the sufferers. It was a grim, melancholy undertaking. The Mahatma attached so much value to this tour that he had set aside all his other engagements.  

Uma Parameswaran feels: "Technically, Sriram is the hero of the novel and the plot revolves round him, but the predominant figure, even though he is seldom on the stage, is Gandhi and the theme is Gandhism."  

Sriram and Bharati plunge themselves into the 'mission of mercy'. And Gandhi's tour comes to an end with his visit to Koppal a tiny station at the foot of Mempi hills. He leaves Sriram to the care of Bharati. Gandhi's journey to Koppal is at least the fictional touch the novelist gives to the otherwise realistic plot. Sriram takes up his residence

4. Ibid., p.59.
in a deserted shrine on the slope of Mempi hills and goes on with his usual routine. Bharati is happy that Sriram can spin 40 count. Narayan for the first time in the novel makes an attempt to treat the theme of Bharati-Sriram romance, but does not exploit it fully. What could have been a romantic episode turns out to be a dreary affair. Sriram, unable to consider Bharati as his 'Guru' waits for her to come to his arms, as his wife. But when she appears before him, with a new task on hand Sriram forgets about his romance. Both of them decide to spread Gandhi's new message that Britain must Quit India. Though minor, an event that happens now adds a fictional touch to the novel. Sriram, in his zeal to economise on paint, cuts short the tail of the letter 'Q' and the message reads like 'Quit India'. But compared to Narayan's use of such incidents in other novels, this is only a poor specimen of his humour.

At least, two incidents described in this section of the novel are fabular in nature. The first is an incident connected with a village-school. Sriram teaches the school children to cry 'Quit India'. The teacher becomes angry. He puts on his spectacles and looks at Sriram. The children enjoy the sight and cry 'Quit India'. And the teacher advises Sriram: "Add if possible one 'e' before 't'; what we need in this country is not 'Quit India' programme but a 'Quiet India'."6

6. Waiting for the Mahatma, p.70.
Sriram writes the slogans on every wall. A villager advises him to write the slogan where it can be seen by those to whom it is meant. And this brings him to Mathieson Estate. The episode connected with Sriram-Mathieson is highly fictional. While he is writing the slogan, Mathieson the Englishman meets him. And unlike Edward Shilling of The English Teacher, he doesn't cry 'Damn, Damn'. On the other hand he invites him for a talk and an unrealistic but not improbable scene takes place.

Mathieson and Sriram talk on Sir Stafford Cripps' Mission to India. When Mathieson offers him sherbet Sriram gets excited. For a moment he forgets "politics, Quit, Bharati, strife and Mahatmaji." However, he asks Mathieson not to erase the slogan. Surprisingly, Mathieson considers it a 'Souvenir'. He assures he would retain it on the wall of his bungalow. A talk ensues between the two:

'But won't you be leaving this country, quitting, I mean?' asked Sriram.
'I don't think so. Do you wish to quite this country?'
'Why should I? I was born here,' said Sriram indignantly.
'I was unfortunately not born here, but I have been here very much longer than you. How old are you?'
'Twenty-seven, or thirty. What does it matter?'
'Well, I was your age when I came here and I am

7. Ibid., p.76.
sixty-two today. You see, it is just possible I am as much attached to this country as you are.' 'But I am an Indian,' Sriram persisted. 'So am I!', said the other, 'and perhaps I am of some use to the people of this country seeing that I employ five thousand field labourers and about two hundred factory hands and office workers.'

The entire episode remains fictional for Mathieson is an interesting character and the episode ends abruptly. However, it is in such scenes as these Narayan uses fictional realism at its best.

Bharati-Sriram meeting is handled in a fictional manner. But fiction here has been handled with the blunt edge of reality. When Bharati meets Sriram, with Gandhi's letter in hand, he behaves in a passionate manner. When he hears the anklet sound of his lover, he springs into action. He calls here 'Devta'. Bharati is surprised. When she shows Gandhi's letter to him, Sriram misreads Gandhi's blessing them both in their endeavours. He conjures up the picture of their marriage. Throwing himself on Bharati, he mutters, 'You will write to him that we are married... No one can stop me and you from marrying. This is how gods marry.'

The highly romantic scene ends with a whimper when Bharati tells Sriram that they should get Bapu's sanction, for their marriage. Sriram is filled with despair. He wails: 'Bapu,

8. Ibid., p.77.
9. Ibid., p.89.
Bapu... He is too big to bother about us. Don't trouble him with our affairs.'10 Though this episode raises hopes of fictional touch to the story, the expectations are belied when Gandhian influence is introduced. The lovers are made to wait for a period of five years to get Gandhi's sanction. Neither the political theme nor the conventional love story is exploited fully in Waiting for the Mahatma. M.K. Naik feels that, 'Narayan's experiment with political fiction fails for two reasons; first, his treatment of the political theme is superficial, sketchy and uninformed by a meaningful vision; and secondly, he cheapens the theme still further by making it a peg on which to hang a conventional story.'11 One can add that Narayan also spoils the love story by placing it in the background of politics. Much more than politics and love-theme, the technique of fictional realism suffers greatly in this novel. The historical truth of Gandhian movement does not lend itself conveniently for fabrication of truth.

Sriram drifts into the terrorists' camp, in the absence of Bharati. Part three of the novel deals with Sriram's association with Jagadish. The terrorist activities in this novel, unlike the terrorist activities in Malgonkar's A Bend in the Ganges are not the integral part of the novel. The name of Subash Chandra Bose is mentioned but not with

10. Ibid., p.91.
any significance, as it is done in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. In the company of Jagadish, Sriram carries on these terrorist activities: "he set fire to the records in half a dozen law courts in different villages; he derailed a couple of trains and paralysed the work in various schools; he exploded a crude bomb which tore off the main door of an agricultural research station."\(^{12}\) A good catalogue, but it is an unconvincing fictional device. Malgonkar builds the entire Debidayal story on the basis of terrorist activities, but in *Waiting for the Mahatma* it remains as a detached piece. Sriram once again becomes a Gandhian. Neither the patriotism in him nor his romance is exploited thoroughly. A.N. Kaul says: "This happens to be the weakest of Narayan's novels, a pointless work... neither a successful political novel nor a good comedy."\(^{13}\) 

But to dismiss the novel as the weakest work in fictional realism is to do injustice to it. A scene such as granny's supposed death reveals fictionalization of facts. Sriram comes to know about granny's illness through Bharati. He comes in disguise to his house only to witness the funeral rites that are going on. He breaks into sobs. Kanni reminds him of the next things to be done. Granny's body has to be cremated. At the burial ground preparations are made for the cremation:

\(^{12}\) *Waiting for the Mahatma*, p.113.  
All the rites before the lighting of the pyre started. The old lady lay stretched out on the cow-dung fuel. The priest placed a small vessel in Sriram's hand and asked him to pour the milk in it over the lips of the dead. Sriram poured the milk, chanted some 'mantras', and finally dropped the fire over Granny's heart, which was actually below a layer of fuel. The fire smouldered and crackled. 'Now it is all over with her,' Sriram said.14

Narayan gives a fictional touch to the whole episode thus:

The Fund-Office Manager suddenly cried, 'See there, see there.' He was excited. They looked where he pointed. The big toe on the left foot of the lady was seen to move. 'Pull out the fire, pull out the fire....' Someone thrust his hand in and snatched off the burning piece... Now with the fire out, they stood around and watched. The toe was wagging. 'She is not dead, take her out,' cried Sriram.15

The Manager finds fault with the doctors for their ignorance. He feels that they can't say, "whether a person is alive or dead!"16 All of them nurse the old woman.

Under their nursing, the movement in the toe gradually spread. All the toes showed signs of revival, then her leg, then her arms. The old lady seemed to be coming back to life, inch by inch.17

15. Ibid., p.122.
16. Ibid., p.124.
17. Ibid., p.123.
Narayan fictionally makes a really dead person to come to life. The credibility of the event is better explained in the doctor's words:

'Well, freaks like this just happen. We can't say why or how. Last night she was practically dead. I don't know. This is enough to make one believe in soul, 'karma' and all that.' 18

Granny's revival is a good example of fictional realism. Her death has its own significance, in the plot of the novel. It is because of this, Sriram falls into the hands of police and is sent to jail. As Jagdish later puts it: ''If it hadn't been for your grandmother, you would not have gone to jail at all.' 19

Part four of the novel deals with Sriram in jail. Once again this part compares itself poorly with the imprisonment of Debidayal in A Bend in the Ganges. The Manager meets Sriram to inform him of granny's journey to Benares. Granny is forced to undertake this trip because Malgudians do not allow her to live in their midst. She is after all a woman who had returned from the grave. In the meantime, Sriram is released from prison.

Part five deals with Sriram's homecoming. After saying for a long period outside Malgudi, Sriram returns to it.

18. Ibid., p.124.
19. Ibid., p.156.
He notices a few changes in Malgudi. Kanni's shop is no longer there. Jagdish has started a photographic studio. He is a different man now. Sriram feels puzzled. It is at this juncture he receives a letter from Bharati asking him to go to Delhi. At Delhi Sriram seeks Gandhi's consent for the marriage. Gandhi not only gives his consent but adds:

'Very well. Tomorrow morning, the first thing I will do is that. I will be your priest, if you don't mind. I've been a very neglectful father; I'll come and present the bride. Tomorrow, the very first thing; other engagements only after that. I already have here all the fruits and flowers ready, and so after all you can't say I have been very neglectful.'

A little later he adds, 'I have a feeling that I may not attend your wedding tomorrow morning... I seem to have been too rash in promising to officiate as your priest.'

The novel ends with the death of Gandhi leaving an impression that it is a Gandhi-story.

Waiting for the Mahatma is not a representative piece for fictional realism, for it is a Gandhian novel. Gandhi-theme does not lend itself for fictionalizing events and characters. Whenever Gandhi or Gandhism is mentioned readers expect only a truthful rendering of facts. Fables that play a vital role in the other novels of Narayan have no

20. Ibid., p.172.
place in a Gandhian novel. Unlike The Man-Eater of Malgudi, Waiting for the Mahatma does not tell a beautiful story. Sriram-Bharati love-theme is not built as a story at all. Moreover, the theme is overshadowed by Gandhi myth. As the majority of events take place outside Malgudi Narayan loses the chance for his characteristically realistic descriptions of Malgudi scenes. The usual eccentrics of a Narayan novel are missing in Waiting for the Mahatma. This removes the fabular element in it. Love, the supposed central theme of the novel is handled in such an unimaginative way - as it is being done in The Painter of Signs - the novel loses its charm. However, scenes such as Granny’s death are entertaining. The Painter of Signs lacks such scenes and therefore remains less attractive.

The Painter of Signs

The Painter of Signs like the Waiting for the Mahatma is a poor specimen as far as fictional realism is concerned. Once again, it is a novel on love and love is placed against a social problem namely population growth. Fact plays a vital role than fiction and hence the novel appears to establish a truth than tell a story. It is a brilliant piece but lacks in imaginative scenes. It does not give credit to fantasy.

The novel aims at two things: it deals with the real population problem and the fictional love-theme. The first
is too prosaic for an imaginative treatment in a fiction. The second is not Narayan's forte. So the novel suffers. Speaking from the point of view of technique, it does not exploit the use of fictional realism as much as the mature novels do. The merit of the novel lies in its interpretation of a social problem rather than handling it fictionally. Fantasy which goes hand in hand with realism in the major novels of Narayan, is relegated to the background in The Painter of Signs. Even interesting situations such as the cart-accident scene are treated in a matter-of-fact way.

The Painter of Signs written after something like ten years' silence is "obviously a novel which is thematically a light-weight." There is an unusually long gap between The Vendor of Sweets and The Painter of Signs. During the intervening years Narayan was preoccupied with non-fictional works such as his shortened version of The Ramayana, Reluctant Guru, a collection of essays, and his autobiography My Days. Prof. Naik feels that the return to fiction after a long gap, "has not however, proved to be a return to the halcyon days of the masterpieces."

It is the story of the relationship between Raman, the sign painter of Malgudi and Daisy of the Family Planning Centre. Raman leads an undisturbed life till Daisy comes

23. Ibid., p.86.
into his life. Raman falls in love with her. Their relationship passes through mixed reactions. Raman is attracted to her but Daisy is concerned with Family Planning Programme. When Raman is despondent Daisy meets him to kindle lust in him and when a time arrives that they could marry, she leaves him abruptly and the novel ends in a queer way.

Part one of the novel deals with Raman's attraction to Daisy. The novel opens with a realistic setting:

Raman's was the last house in Ellaman Street; a little door on the back wall opened, beyond a stretch of sand, to the river. He would lay out a plank of wood brushed over with black or white base and leave it out to dry, on the sand... occasionally, however, if he was careless, a strong breeze blowing from the river sprayed sand particles on his wet board.²⁴

This contrasts with the opening in The Financial Expert. Margayya under the banyan tree with his bawdy jokes is more poetically represented than Raman.

Raman's relationship with his customers, unlike Margayya's, is prosaic too. 'He has nothing but quarrels with them. A lawyer, who has graduated through correspondence course, wishes to have a signboard made. Influenced by astrology he wishes to have the letters of his name slanted to the left but Raman the 'rationalist' laughs at this idea. He

confesses, "I want a rational explanation for everything."\(^{25}\)
He emphasizes, "I don't do anything unless I see some logic in it."\(^{26}\)
Logic does not help him in his business. The lawyer finds fault with the signboard and disposes him with "two idlis and a coconut and no money."\(^{27}\) Even with another customer, a bangle seller, Raman has a bad business. The bangle seller is displeased with the words 'strictly cash' painted in red paint. He wants the words in blue colour. Raman has to take back his board. He feels sorry that three days' labour is lost. He says, "Sometimes it's a bad day all through in every way."\(^{28}\) Narayan seizes the opportunity to make it a bad day for Raman even in his love-affair. The readers lose a fine treat by the author. The story decomposes into various scenes on family-planning programme.

Raman meets Daisy in connection with sign-board painting. The family planning centre needs a board. Raman undertakes the work. This brings them together. The first meeting of them is unromantically presented.

Raman goes to Daisy's house. She opens the door and stands like a vision before him. Not only she invites him into her house but also offers a cup of tea. And they talk.

25. Ibid., p.5.
26. Ibid., p.5.
27. Ibid., p.12.
28. Ibid., p.23.
Raman explains to her his philosophy of letters: 'You see madam, whatever the language the letters must have backbone and stand up to deliver the message, in unmistakable terms.' The word 'message' catches the attention of Daisy. She asks him, 'Do you think you could be so assertive and firm in conveying a message for population control?' Raman accepts to do it. By making the first meeting of the so-called lovers a strictly business affair, Narayan loses a chance for the imaginative rendering of the scene. As a contrast to this scene, one has to recollect Raju-Rosie scenes in The Guide.

The next meeting also passes off in an unromantic way. Raman takes the board to Daisy. He arms his mind with equanimity and covers his eyes with coloured glasses - the eye is really the source of mischief - so that he would not be tempted. Once again their talk is business like:

'Good,' she said, 'the letters are big enough to be seen from the street.'

'From fifty feet; this size lettering is meant for it, though it's somewhat more expensive per letter - more paint and more time are consumed...'

She stepped back and viewed the board. 'It seems all right to me, very clean work, I must say...'

'This is only a proof. When it is finished, it'll look perfect.'

29. Ibid., p.37.
30. Ibid., p.38.
31. Ibid., p.42.
When Raman is about to leave Daisy stops him, and invites him for a talk. But once again it is not the lovers' talk. Daisy only removes the coloured glasses from Raman's eyes and asks him to throw the glasses or else he would become squint-eyed. It appears as though to compensate the lack of love-talk between them, Narayan describes Raman's conditions that night:

He lay tossing in bed that night. She had touched him, and that had sent his blood-pressure up so high that he had felt giddy, and her perfume had nearly stunned him. He had stolen a glance at her when she was fumbling with the glasses on his nose... He lay tossing all night. All kinds of dreams bothered him...

But Raman does not want to lose his bachelorhood so easily. So he determines: 'Finish the work completely and forget her, finish the transaction without raising my gaze to her.' He finishes the board, takes it to her and even fixes the board in its place. And when she asks for the bill, he only says it would come by post. He is proud of his behaviour: 'He congratulated himself especially on the smart and clipped manner in which he had spoken about the bill coming by post, and he could see that she was shaken by his stern manner.'

32. Ibid., p.44.
33. Ibid., p.46.
34. Ibid., p.50.
Part two of the novel deals with the still more prosaic theme of family planning mission. Daisy comes to Raman's house to talk on family planning and seek his help in propagating the message. Daisy presents a bluntly honest feeling in her talk with him. The scene that ensues is plain to the point of drabness:

"I have now come to ask if you are prepared to do a little work outside in some of the villages. We have an intensive campaign in rural areas."

"What would you expect me to do?"

"I am going on a tour of the surrounding villages for an initial survey, and to look out for places where we can write our message on the walls permanently. The headquarters want a picture of a family - a couple with two children, with the message 'We are two; let ours be two; limit your family' - in all the local languages."

The whole idea seems comical for Raman. Daisy then gives her lecture on the need to limit one's family. It is a brilliant piece of oration, but poor fictional stuff:

'Don't you see how horrible it is with everything crowded, and an endless chain of queues for food, shelter, bus, medicine, and everything, with thousands of children coming with nothing to eat, no clothes to wear, no roof, no civilized existence being possible on such a mass scale - each one of us has to do our bit in the corner of the country allotted to us.'

35. Ibid., pp.55-56.
36. Ibid., p.56.
Such a persuasive speech naturally evokes a positive reply from Raman: "Of course, it's all very sad and thoughtless..."\textsuperscript{37} From this point onwards, the novel runs on ordinary lines. Daisy concerns herself with events which are baldly realistic. Fiction crumbles into a document:

At every place, she had the same routine. She had a perfect time-table between her arrival and departure. Settled down at the local school or on the veranda of a hospitable home or hut or in the shade of a tree. Sent Raman out to select a wall for their inscription, met the local official or the village headman and with his help collected data and statistics, called for the register of births and deaths, and took notes in her diary. Summoned an audience of men, women, and children under the big tree, and spoke to them quietly, firmly, with conviction. Explained to them the process of birth and its control.\textsuperscript{38}

Daisy follows a steel-framed itinerary. They travel by bus, taxi, train and even lorry to reach a particular village and complete their work. The novelist conveniently forgets the romantic side of the story. Like Bharati in \textit{Waiting for the Mahatma}, Daisy never thinks of love when she is engaged on her mission.

Two incidents in this section of the novel have at least the fictional quality. The first one is connected with the

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p.56.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p.59.
old man of the temple. When Daisy and Raman are inspecting
a location in the shrine to inscribe their message on family
planning, a priest joins them. The episode is narrated in a
truly fictional way:

Unnoticed by them, at this moment another person
had joined their company. He silently followed
Daisy and Raman and closely watched their talks
and discussions. As they were studying the blank
wall for its possibilities, the new addition to
company silently slid forward and addressed Daisy:
'Why are you gazing on this wall?' She was taken
aback, and stepped away as if attacked personally.
He said, 'Every brick of this wall and every inch
of it was built by me and belongs to me.'...
'I built this temple and installed the Goddess of
Plenty, long before anyone came here and built these
houses. The Goddess came to me in a dream and
commanded and I made it my mission in life. For a
hundred miles around there is no temple like this.
Barren women come and pray here for three days, and
conceive within thirty days.'

Daisy feels that this is an antithesis of her mission. The
old man appears like a messenger of disaster. He warns
Daisy not to tamper with God's design. Extolling his
capacities, those in the crowd say: 'He can talk to plants
and mountains and birds and animals and they all obey
him.' Narayan's latest book, A Tiger for Malgudi has an
improved version of this hermit.

39. Ibid., p.70.
40. Ibid., p.71.
Reading the past of Daisy the old man says:

'... You ran away from home, without telling anyone, when you were twelve years old. Your father and mother searched for you, poor things! After months, traced you.' He shut his eyes for a moment and said, 'I see a seashore, waves, huts....'\textsuperscript{41}

This does not happen to be a lie. Daisy in her private conversation with Raman confesses the veracity of the oldman's statements thus:

'... You remember his saying that he saw me in a hut beside the sea and waves falling on the shore? I don't know how he was able to guess it, but that's where my father tracked me finally after searching everywhere...'\textsuperscript{42}

Though this episode has nothing to do with the main theme of the novel it remains interesting for the fictional value it carries.

The second incident is connected with the cart-accident. Daisy and Raman meet with a small mishap during their return journey. Their cart meets with an accident. The cartman leaves them alone, during night, to get his bullock treated for injuries. When they are left alone they become self-conscious. They are embarrassed. After a little while they have their dinner and decide to go to bed. They work out

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p.72.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p.127.
a strange formula. Daisy would sleep in the cart and Raman under it.

It is a trial time for Raman. His pent up desires come up to the surface. He debates within himself whether to dash up, seize her and behave like an aggressive lover. After much debating he crawls to the carriage, flings his arm around where Daisy would be. But she is not there. Fearing one such assault from Raman she spends the whole night sitting on the branch of a tamarind tree.

The episode is farcical. But, on it, the next part of the novel is built. Raman develops a morbid fear that Daisy would report against him in the police-station and he would be arrested.

Part three of the novel deals with Raman's fear. His imagination becomes so overactive that he even once goes to the police-station to find out if there is any complaint against him. Narayan develops an absurd fantastic situation out of this. When Raman goes to the police-station the police inspector desires to tell something to him. But everytime he opens his mouth he is disturbed by something or the other and he leaves the police-station without telling anything to Raman. This scene is a bad example of the use of fictional realism. It is just ludicrous.

Daisy once again meets Raman in his house. The lovers
sit near the river-step holding each other's hand but not expressing love. On the other hand Daisy gives a philosophic discourse on love:

"'I love you,' 'I like you,' are words which can hardly be real. You have learnt them from novels and Hollywood films perhaps. When a man says 'I love you' and the woman repeats 'I love you' - it sounds mechanical and unconvincing... People really in love would be struck dumb, I imagine.""43

Daisy even teases Raman by calling him 'an incurable romantic.'44

The fourth part deals with the physical contacts of the lovers and the abrupt separation of them. The novelist makes both Raman the resolute bachelor and Daisy the strong-willed girl to yield to passion all on a sudden. The illicit relationship of the two breeds anger on the part of Raman's aunt. She is shocked to know of Raman's relation with the girl of another religion. When he announces his intention of marrying her the aunt neither approves it nor tries to prevent it. She is just indifferent. Raman does not expect such a reaction; neither the readers do. A tellingly effective fictional-fight has been built on such an issue in The Guide. Raju's mother invites her brother to tackle him, when he has an illicit relationship with Rosie. Raman's

43. Ibid., p.125-126.
44. Ibid., p.126.
aunt does not create any fuss. She only thinks of escaping from the scene by going on a pilgrimage to Badri. Raman himself finances her trip.

The ending of the novel is unsatisfactory. In the last part of the novel, Raman makes a mention of the ancient king Santhanu, when Daisy lays down the conditions on which she will marry him. The Mahabharata has the beautiful story of Santhanu-Ganga. Santhanu falls in love with a beautiful damsel who agrees to marry him upon a condition that he is not to question any of her actions when she becomes his wife, and she would leave him the moment the condition is broken. Santhanu marries her and suffers to witness the killing of their seven children by his wife. When the eighth child is about to be killed by her, he questions her of her action and the beautiful woman leaves him, revealing herself as Ganga, the deity of the great river. She is thankful to Santhanu for he has released her from her curse.

In The Painter of Signs, Daisy lays down two conditions: 'One, that they should have no children, and two, if by mischance one was born she would give the child away and keep herself free to pursue her social work.' She cautions Raman: 'On any day you question why or how, I will leave you.'

45. Ibid., p.158.
46. Ibid., p.159.
The correspondence between Santhanu-story and The Painter of Signs is close. The Santhanu-Ganga parallel has been consciously used in the novel. But the use of the ancient parallel is not as meaningful as that in The Man-Eater of Malgudi. The Santhanu-Ganga parallel loses its significance for Daisy does not marry Raman at all. Commenting on the futility of the reference of Santhanu-Ganga theme, M.K. Naik says: "The conclusion is thus inescapable that The Painter of Signs makes no serious attempt to exploit an ancient thematic parallel and all its possible implications in a modern context." 47

The fictionally potential Santhanu theme has been treated in a casual way in the novel.

Daisy deserts Raman on the excuse that she cannot afford to have a personal life. Raman is left alone to go to The Boardless - the hotel - that solid, real world of sublime souls who minded their own business. 48

Sign-painting and bachelor's life appear to be the 'real world' for Raman against the seemingly real 'Daisy-ism'.

The Painter of Signs remains a more literal account on population control than a truly representative Narayan novel. Circumscribed by a motif of social concern, the love story in it does not develop as a mixture of the real and the fantastic.

47. The Ironic Vision, p.89.
Even in the matter of presentation of characters, Narayan does not fully exploit his gifts of irony and humour. Raman is presented as a 'rationalist' in the beginning of the novel and Narayan does not work out this aspect in him, later. Raman is rather a divided man. Narayan himself admits that Raman is "a complicated chap who talks audibly and inaudibly at one and the same time." He agrees for Daisy's condition of not having any child, but inwardly he feels like having many from her: "If another baby came the next year, again another gift." Even on the very idea of marriage he has two opinions: "He was perhaps making a fool of himself by this marriage. But it was Gandharva-style marriage, as easily snapped as made." 'Raman is a character,' writes William Walsh, 'who conducts his business with the world on the basis of a double dialogue, one with his interlocutor and another inner, one with himself.' Unlike Raju in The Guide, Raman is not a fictionally developed character.

The case with Daisy is totally different. Her one passion is 'birth control'. Raman does not understand her at all. She remains a great puzzle at every turn. Rather, she puzzles the readers too. Daisy's 'absolute conviction, untramelled modern mindedness, steel-will and practicality'.

50. The Painter of Signs, p.169.
51. Ibid., p.169.
53. Ibid., p.158.
make her a superb missionary in family planning but a poor character for fiction.

Even the eccentrics, such as the Town Hall Professor who lectures on various topics, the Police Inspector, a great hater of monkeys, Raman's neighbour, an accountant who is an 'office-ridden negative man a replica of the Common Man created by the cartoonist Laxman,'\textsuperscript{54} the oldman in the village temple who can tell anyone's past or future at the mention of either a number or a colour and a few others, seem to have 'no thematic connection either direct or indirect, with the main action of the kind their counterparts in The Man-Eater of Malgudi possess.'\textsuperscript{55}

Though the story is set in Malgudi, it is a pretty changed Malgudi. There is seen a lot of progress in it. A family planning centre starts its activities. But the progress does not offer sufficient chances for fictionalization of facts. While in \textit{The Guide} the introduction of railways in Malgudi appeals to the imagination of Narayan, the family planning centre fails to do so in \textit{The Painter of Signs}. The result is there is a poor blending of fantasy and fact in the novel. It shows the signs of the artist losing hold over his technique of fictional realism. No wonder, the next novel to come from his pen \textit{A Tiger for Malgudi} remains more a fantasy. \textsuperscript{...}

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{The Ironic Vision}, p.91.