CHAPTER VII

THE SHORT STORIES

Narayan is a prolific writer of short stories. He has written stories on a variety of themes ranging from the ordinary everyday realistic incidents such as quarrels in railway compartments to the extraordinary supernatural events. Quite a few of his stories mix fantasy with fact and they are important from the study of fictional realism in him. Realistic incidents such as failures in examinations, people's craze to change the names of the roads, the black-marketeer's exploitation and school children's dislike for some of their teachers, to mention only a few, are the topics on which Narayan weaves his stories. They are presented in such an artistic way that they no longer remain to be mere day to day incidents. They are presented with such a 'twist' given to them that they easily become delightful stories. It is this 'twist' which is characteristically Narayan's, that presents the mundane incidents as fictionally realistic possibilities. This characteristic quality, therefore needs, more attention in the study of fictional realism in Narayan. Though not all the stories of Narayan make use of fictional realism, a good many of them do it. The short stories of Narayan are brought out in a number of
collections. They can be grouped in the following way:

1. Realistic Stories:
   a) Stories built on single incidents and on human relationship:
   b) Stories that deal with children:
   c) Stories on social and domestic problems:
   d) Stories on animals:
      Chippy, Blind Dog, The Mute Companions.
   e) Descriptive story:
      A Night of the Cyclone.

1. Narayan's stories are included in these collections: Malgudi Days (1941), Dodu and Other Stories (1943), Cyclone and Other Stories (1944), The Astrologer's Day and Other Stories (1947), Lawley Road (1956), A Horse and Two Goats (1970), Old and New (1981) and the re-issue of Malgudi Days (1982).
2. Fantasy-Stories:

a) Pure Fantasies:
   Tiger's Claw, The Snake Song, Cat Within, 
   Engine Trouble, A Horse and Two Goats, Four 

b) Ghost Stories:
   An Accident, Old Man of the Temple, Old Bones, 
   The Level Crossing, Neighbour's Help.

3. Stories in which Realism and Fantasy are blended:
   Lawley Road, Four Rupees, The Astrologer's Day, 
   Attila, Iswaran, The Roman Image, Such Perfection, 
   A Career, Father's Help, The Axe, Crime and 
   Punishment, Naga, God and the Cobbler, Emden, 
   A Breath of Lucifer, Like the Sun, Trial of the 
   Green Blazer, Sweets for Angels, The Antidote, 
   Half a Rupee Worth, The Martyr's Corner, The 
   Doctor's Word, Gateman's Gift, Under the Banyan 
   Tree, The Restored Arm.

4. Others:
   Uncle's Letters, At the Portal, The White 
   Flower, Seventh House, Another Community.

The classification is not precise. It is possible that 
there may be the overlapping of the themes. The purpose 
behind the classification is to concentrate on those stories 
that are important from the point of view of fictional 
realism.
The Realistic Stories of Narayan deal with single incidents such as a quarrel in a railway compartment or a comic situation created due to a snake's entry into a house or even with family planning programme. Narayan himself has confessed thus: "I discover a story when a personality passes through a crisis of spirit or circumstance." Incidents in everyday life have given rise to a number of such stories. The story 'Fellow Feeling' is built on such an incident, that is familiar to all. Indian readers of this story are not unfamiliar with such types of incidents; they are not unaware of the quarrels that take place in the railway compartments. If Nirad Chaudhuri has observed the geniality and informality of the Indian travellers on train, Narayan concentrates on the quarrelsome nature in them. Rajam Iyer gets into a crowded Madras-Bangalore express and manages to secure himself sitting accommodation. His journey up to Katpadi is uneventful. At Katpadi, there enters a new passenger in the already over-crowded compartment and picks a quarrel with someone. Rajam Iyer interferes and a verbal fight ensues between the two, which is described thus:

"What is all this?" Rajam Iyer asked suddenly in a hard tone.
"What is what?" growled back the newcomer, turning sharply on Rajam Iyer.
"Moderate your style a bit," Rajam Iyer said firmly.

''You moderate yours first,'' replied the other.
...
''Shut up,'' Rajam Iyer said.
''You shut up.''
''Do you know to whom you are talking?''
''What do I care who the son of a mongrel is?''
''I will thrash you with my slippers,'' said Rajam Iyer.
''I will pulp you down with the old rotten sandal,''' came the reply.

A fictional twist is given at this juncture of quarrel. Rajam Iyer threatens the adversary of disfiguring his face with a simple trick called ju-jutsu and the man is taken in. The story ends with the silent departure of the new comer, at Jalarpet Station.

'A Snake in the Grass' reveals the story-telling gift in Narayan. A realistic incident such as the entry of a snake into the compound of a house, is fictionally represented here. It has a striking beginning, an arresting middle and a satisfactory end, which, in fact, are the characteristic features of a Narayan-story. The story begins thus:

On a sunny afternoon, when the inmates of the bungalow were at their siesta a cyclist rang the bell at the gate frantically and announced, ''A big cobra has got into your compound. It crossed my wheel.'' He pointed to its track under the gate and resumed his journey.

4. Ibid., p.100.
This striking beginning sets the action of the story in motion. There ensues a debate among the members of the family and they start their operation to hunt the reptile to finish it off. Their action is described in an engaging way:

They tucked up their dhoties, seized every available knife and crow-bar and began to hack the garden. Creepers, bushes, and lawns were laid low. What could not be trimmed was cut to the root. But they do not come across the snake. They become tired of their operation. Though they take rest their minds are not at rest.

It is at this juncture Narayan gives his usual twist. Dasa, the servant, who is also as tired as the others are, plays a nice trick on the other members. He desires to prove that he is not useless as they think him to be. He brings a sealed water-pot and assures the people that the snake is in it; he has caught it. The members of the family extol him to the skies and Dasa makes his departure to deposit the snake with the snake-charmer. The moment he has gone, the snake appears and makes its return-journey. The ending is quite satisfactory. The youngest member of the family murmurs thus: 'I wish I had taken the risk and knocked the water-pot from Dasa's hand; we might have known what it contained.' It remains a fantastic wish only.

5. Ibid., p.101.
6. Ibid., p.103.
Sometimes, the events are presented as they are, without any mystifying effect added to them. 'The Shelter' is a story that illustrates this point. A husband and wife, who have separated, chance to meet under a banyan tree while they are seeking shelter on a rainy day. They make their efforts to come closer, mentally, but their old habit of disagreement lets them down even at this juncture. Unable to put up with the man's overbearing nature, the woman runs away from him unmindful of the heavy rain.

There are certain other realistic stories of Narayan that are merely descriptive. 'A Night of Cyclone' serves as an example. The Talkative Man goes on describing a particular cyclonic-night only to end with the remark that his first child was born then. The story is nothing but a description of that horrible night.

The fantasy-stories of Narayan are the creations of his imagination. 'The Tiger's Claw' is a story that deals with incredible events. The Talkative Man's so called encounter with a tiger is the central theme of this story. He takes shelter in a railway station on a particular night. The station is nothing but an old, worn-out railway carriage. When he is safely inside it, a tiger happens to enter it. And the man and tiger face each other. Their encounter ends fantastically thus:
I was more or less in a stockade made of the legs of furniture. He sat on his haunch in front of me, wondering how best to get at me. Now the chair, table, and stool had formed a solid block with me at their heart, and they could withstand all his tricks. He scrutinized my arrangement with great interest, espied a gap, and thrust his paw in. It dangled in my eyes with the curved claws opening out towards me. I felt very angry at the sight of it. Why should I allow the offensive to be developed all in his own way? I felt very indignant. The long knife from the station-master's table was lying nearby. I picked it up and drove it in. He withdrew his paw, maddened by pain. He jumped up and nearly brought down the room, and then tried to crack to bits the entire stockade. He did not succeed. He once again thrust his paw in. I employed the long knife to good purpose and cut off a digit with the claw on it. It was a fight to a finish between him and me. He returned again and again to the charge. And I cut out, let me confess, three claws, before I had done with him. I had become as blood-thirsty as he. (Those claws, mounted on gold, are hanging around the necks of my three daughters. You can come and see them if you like sometime.)

Yet another Talkative-Man story - 'The Snake's Song' - is a pure fantasy. While practising 'Bhairavi Ragā' on his flute, the Talkative Man is interrupted by a sadhu who expresses his desire to stay on to listen to the music. The musician does not wish for any listener, and the sadhu is

7. Ibid., pp.72-73.
sent away. Strangely, when he plays the 'Punnaga Varali' — the snake's song — a black cobra appears before him, opens its hood, and sways ecstatically at the song. The musician is dazed. He understands that he has no other choice than continuing the music. He plays the raga again and again and the cobra continues to sway its head. But as this could not go on for ever the musician appeals to the snake, "Oh Naga Raja you are a god. You can kill me if you like, but I can play no more..." And the snake disappears. According to this master's version, on the next day, the sadhu might have taken the shape of a cobra to listen to the Talkative Man's music. Further, 'Punnaga Varali' must not be played during night. The story is a pure fantasy and is built on this hallucination:

And I came to the snake-song in 'punnaga varali'. I saw the serpent in all its majesty: the very venom in its pouch had a touch of glory: now I saw its divinity as it crowned Shiva's head: Parvathi wore it as a wristlet: Subramanya played with it: and it was Vishnu's couch... The whole composition imparted to the serpent a quality which inspired awe and reverence.

Another story, written in recent times — 'Cat Within' — is a fantasy built on man's innate fear of ghosts. A cat stalking a mouse amidst the grain bags in a shop, notices a brass jar and thrusts its head out of curiosity. Its head

8. Ibid., p.138.
9. Ibid., p.137.
is neatly stuck up in the jar. It is puzzled at first, but very soon becomes desperate. It jumps and runs around to release its head and in this process creates a pandemonium. And, the shopkeeper imagines that a ghost has entered his shop. He summons an exorcist. The exorcist makes his vain attempts and incidentally draws out the truth from the shopkeeper, that he is a murderer of his friend. The story comes to an end with the cat leaving the shop with the jar on its head and with the shopkeeper's remark that after all it is a cat. Narayan ends the story with the cryptic remark of the exorcist, "Yes, it may appear a cat. How do you know what is inside a cat?"  

Narayan has written a few stories on supernatural events without any basis on reality. The ghost stories such as, 'An Accident', 'Old Bones', 'Level Crossing' and 'Old Man of the Temple' compel on the part of the readers 's willing suspension of disbelief'. Reality is given a holiday in these stories. They are highly incredible and can be called escapist fantasies. These ghost stories do not deserve much attention, from the point of view of fictional realism. So also, stories such as 'Uncle's Letters', 'At the Portal' and 'Other Community', do not merit consideration for they are hardly stories. 'Uncle's Letters' is a series of letters tracing the life of man from birth to

eightieth birthday. 'Another Community' is a lone attempt of Narayan depicting the holocaust after the partition of India. These pieces are virtually 'failures'.

Narayan's gift as a story-teller lies in his other set of stories — stories that mix fantasy and reality in a harmonious way. In fact, these stories compare themselves favourably with his mature novels, in their use of fictional realism. Stories such as 'Lawley Road', 'Astrologer's Day', 'Naga' and 'Such Perfection', to mention a few only, are built on fact and fiction.

'Lawley Road' satirizes the ways of municipalities. Narayan writes a delightful story on Malgudi municipality. The members of this municipality vie with one another in rechristening roads, immediately after the Independence of India. So, Coronation Park becomes Hamara Hindustan Park. Every councillor wants a road in his ward to be named after Mahatma Gandhi. This craze does not stop with the roads only. The councillors desire that all the statues of the Englishmen must be removed, from their wards. The Municipal Chairman fixes his attention on Sir Frederick Lawley's statue. Narayan capitalizes on this, in his story. The municipality falls for tenders but to no avail for the lowest tender is placed at fifty thousand rupees to remove a statue. As no one comes forward, the Chairman takes the other extreme step of asking the Talkative Man to remove it, free of cost. The
story then moves on fanciful lines. With great difficulty the Talkative Man removes the statue, takes it home and lodges it there. He says:

In due course, he was safely lodged in my small house. His head and shoulders were in my front hall and the rest of him stretched out into the street through the doorway. It was an obliging community there at Kabir Lane and nobody minced this obstruction.  

But very soon things take a different turn. The Historical Society is upset at the dishonour shown to Lawley, a benefactor of India. It comes out with the fact:

This Frederick Lawley (of the statue) was a Military Governor who settled down here after the Mutiny. He cleared the jungles and almost built the town of Malgudi... He established this, he established that and he died in the great Sarayu floods while attempting to save the lives of villagers living on its banks.  

The Chairman decides to reinstall the statue in its place. The Talkative Man, a lover of old statues, refuses to part with it. A very funny compromise is struck between the two. It goes like this:

I called on the Chairman and said, 'You will have to do something grand now. Why not acquire my house as a National Trust?'

12. Ibid., p.11.
'Why should I?' he asked.
'Because,' I said, 'Sir F. is here. You will never be able to cart him, to his old place. It'll be a waste of public money. Why not put him up where he is now? He has stayed in the other place too long. I'm prepared to give you my house for a reasonable price.'

The story ends delightfully, with the newspaper announcement:

'The Chairman of Malgudi Municipality has been able to buy back as a present for the nation the statue of Sir Frederick Lawley. He proposed to install it in a newly acquired property which is shortly to be converted into a park. The Municipal Council have resolved that Kabir Lane shall be changed to Lawley Road.'

'A Horse and Two Goats' is built on a fantastic theme namely the American's craze for a stone-horse. It is inspired by a real incident in which a foreign diplomat visits Narayan in Mysore, 'with an enormous clay horse squeezed into the back of his station-wagon.' The gap that exists between supposed and real understanding and the incomprehension in human relationship fascinates Narayan so much that he builds an imaginative story on this theme. Excepting for the reference to the foreign diplomat and the clay horse, the story 'A Horse and Two Goats' is purely imaginary.

13. Ibid., p.12.
An American who is crazy of buying a stone-horse and transporting it to his country to decorate the drawing-room of his house happens to see Muni sitting by the side of a stone-horse of his liking. Muni sits there because his two goats are grazing in a nearby field. Believing Muni to be the owner of the horse, the American desires to strike a bargain with him. Believing the American to be a police officer, who has come to capture the thieves, Muni tries to circumvent him in his talk. The American presents his card to Muni and Muni tells him some stories from the Mahabharata. He tells him about Kali-Yuga, Krishna-Avatar and a host of other things. Incidentally he points the mounds nearby and the American takes it for granted that it is a reference to the statue of the horse. He tells Muni about the mode of transportation of that statue. Their thoughts do not meet, their languages are two different poles. As a shrewd observer of human nature Narayan knows that money is a great means of understanding. When the American flaunts a hundred rupee note Muni tries to understand the commerce behind their meeting. He assumes that the American is interested in his two goats and readily he accepts the money. The business is over much to the satisfaction of both the parties. But when the goats return home, in the evening, Muni is at a loss.

Throughout the story the readers mind is kept alert by the misunderstanding between the two people. The craze for a stone-statue is a fantastic thing; more fantastic is the
way the transaction takes place. The reader does not question the story's credibility for he is very much preoccupied with the working of the two minds. Narayan uses the craze on the part of the American and the loquaciousness on Muni's part to build up the incongruity. Just as the craze of the American for the stone-statue in a far off country is fantastic, Muni's proficiency in Hindu mythologies is only fictional realism.

'Engine Trouble' is yet another story built on the fantastic notion of offering a road engine as a prize article in an exhibition. The Talkative Man, the narrator of the story, tells his audience, 'Don't ask me how a road engine came to be included among the prizes.' 16 The fictive nature of the story depends on the assumption of its possibility. Aristotle's dictum of the improbable possibility comes to the rescue of the writer.

Luck brings troubles to the Talkative Man. His lucky number in the lottery makes him the owner of a road engine. Removal of the engine from the Gymkhana Grounds proves to be a big botheration and loss to the lucky owner. The credibility of the story rests on the graphic presentation of the various stages of botheration and loss. The first one evokes pity. The Talkative Man narrates the loss thus:

I left it alone for a few days, not knowing what to do with it. I received a notice from the municipality ordering that the engine should at once be removed from the ground as otherwise they would charge rent for the occupation of the Gymkhana Grounds. After deep thought I consented to pay the rent, and I paid ten rupees a month for the next three months. Dear sirs, I was a poor man. Even the house which I and my wife occupied cost me only four rupees a month. And fancy my paying ten rupees a month for the road engine. It cut into my slender budget, and I had to pledge a jewel or two belonging to my wife.17

The Talkative Man approaches the Secretary of the local Cosmopolitan Club and then the Chairman of the municipality to help him, by buying it. But they do not want a road engine. The second stage of the botheration is one of humour. The Talkative Man says:

I saw the priest of the local temple and managed to gain his sympathy. He offered me the services of the temple elephant. I also engaged fifty coolies to push the engine from behind... The coolies wanted eight annas per head and the temple elephant cost me seven rupees a day and I had to give it one feed... I also took into service one Joseph, a dismissed bus-driver who said that although he knew nothing of road rollers he could nevertheless steer one if it was somehow kept in motion.18

17. Ibid., p.195.
18. Ibid., p.197.
The outcome of this is a delightful situation, a feast for the eyes of the beholder and a treat of humour for the readers. It is Narayan's special gift. The imaginative reality of the picture is so convincing that 'Engine Trouble' remains as a fine example of the fictional realism.

It was a fine sight: the temple elephant yoked to the engine by means of stout ropes, with fifty determined men pushing it from behind, and my friend Joseph sitting in the driving seat. A huge crowd stood around and watched in great glee. The engine began to move. It seemed to me the greatest moment in my life. When it came out of the gymkhana and reached the road it began to behave in a strange manner. Instead of going straight down the road it showed a tendency to wobble and move zig-zag. The elephant dragged it one way, Joseph turned the wheel for all he was worth without any idea of where he was going, and fifty men behind it clung to it in every possible manner and pushed it just where they liked. As a result of all this confused dragging the engine ran straight into the opposite compound wall and reduced a good length of it into powder.19

The ending of the story is much more fantastical. A fire-eating Swamiji wishes to display his strength to the mighty crowd. He wants a road roller to run over his chest. The Talkative Man's road roller is offered for that purpose, on condition that after the fete it would be driven to a place prescribed by its owner. When everything is ready

19. Ibid., pp.196-197.
a police inspector appears with the order from the magistrate prohibiting the engine from running over the Swamiji's body. And so the Talkative Man is left helpless.

Narayan uses 'deus-ex-machina' to solve the problem.

However, Nature came to my rescue in an unexpected manner. You may have heard of the earthquake of that year which destroyed whole towns in Northern India. There was a reverberation of it in our town, too... Next morning I went over to take a last look at my engine before leaving the town. I could hardly believe my eyes. The engine was not there. I looked about and raised a hue and cry. Search parties went round. And the engine was found in a disused well near by, with its back up.²⁰

If these stories are fabulous, built just on the face of reality, the other stories such as 'Attila', 'Iswaran', 'The Astrologer's Day', 'The Doctor's Word', 'The Roman Image', 'The Martyr's Corner', 'Half a Rupee Worth', 'Sweet for Angels', 'Trails of the Green Blazer', 'The antidote', 'Emden', 'A Career' and 'A Father's Help' are built on realistic incidents and are made fabular by a twist given at the end.

'Attila' is a good for nothing dog who unwittingly becomes a hero, because of an accident - fictional contrivance - that takes place. The notion that Atilla becoming a great

²⁰'Ibid., p.201.'
friend of Ranga the part-time burglar is quite funny. Not only Attila follows him wherever he goes but also betrays him, though unwittingly, by making him to stumble upon him, thereby dropping the stolen-jewellery pieces. Attila indirectly is responsible for the recovery of the stolen jewels. The lady of the house admits that Attila is a very 'cunning detective'. Really speaking, he is the laziest of dogs.

'Iswaran' once again tells of a realistic incident that is given a fantastic twist at the end. Iswaran fails in his Intermediate — as the author himself did — a few times. Everytime when the results are announced his register number is left out in the list, for he fails. Even the present attempt is no exception. As usual Iswaran goes to the University to look for his number, 501. In the Third Class, the successful number before is 498 and after that is 703.

"So I have a few friends on either side,"'21 Iswaran consoles himself thus. The grim reality of failure makes him to think of the river to drown himself as planned before. A freak hope in him compels him to look at him at the notice board again. His number is found in the Second Class list. "'Five nought one in Second Class. Can it be true?'"22 he shrieks. The rest of the story is a fabular twist. Iswaran

21. Ibid., p.89.
22. Ibid., p.89.
imagines that he has become a king. His horse is ready for him to ride. But he is dissatisfied with it. He asks his Prime Minister to bring him Five hundred and one horses - his register number is the same - and he wishes to cross the river with the help of them. "He came to the water's edge, hesitated for a moment and whispered to his horse: 'Are you afraid of water? You must swim across, otherwise I will never pay five nought one rupees for you.' He felt the horse make a leap."23 Actually he commits suicide. The story is in the order of reality-fantasy-reality that the reader is left in ambiguity. Fantasy, that is Five nought one in Second Class - passes so nicely for reality that the reader is at a loss to believe what is true.

In 'The Astrologer's Day', the astrologer's job is so realistically presented that the reader does not for a moment think that Narayan would take him by surprise with his fantastic ending. Once again, in 'The Doctor's Word' something like a near miracle happens in the case of a patient who is in the throes of death. The Doctor, his close friend does not want to tell the truth that the patient would die anytime. He tells his friend "Don't worry about the will now. You are going to live. Your heart is absolutely sound."24. The patient recovers just because of his deep conviction in the doctor's words: "If it comes from your lips it must be true."25

23. Ibid., p.91.
24. Ibid., p.22.
25. Ibid., p.23.
'The Roman Image' is still more a plain story. No supernatural things are evoked to give the story its desired end. A twist at the end does the trick. A whole theory on the Roman connection with India is built by an Archeologist on the basis of a discovery of a mutilated image of God, in the river Sarayu. But it merely turns out to be an image of the temple, thrown into the river by a madcap of a priest, because he could not stand the stares of the statue.

Without resorting to any fabular element, but by being more imaginative, Narayan creates the delightful story 'Father's Help'. Swaminathan of Swami and Friends, carries a letter of complaint, from his father to the headmaster. The complaint is against Samuel, his teacher. As the headmaster is on leave, and Samuel the senior teacher acts as the headmaster, Swami does not deliver the letter at all. 'Half-a-rupee Worth' reads like a satire on the black-marketeers. Subbiah, the gloated shopkeeper sucks the blood of his customers by selling rice at exhorbitant price, that too secretly, during war time. It is in one of these secret transactions, poor Subbiah is killed by the weight of rice bags that fall on him.

Appearance and reality are two things. People are deceived by appearances. This is the basis for the story 'Sweets for Angels'. Kali, an illiterate takes a liking to school-children and distributes sweets free of cost.
As he has a rugged look he is mistaken for a kidnapper of children and is thrashed. Kali, learns a lesson for life: "Hereafter, I'll turn and run as if a tiger chased me, if I see the tiniest tot ahead of me in a street." The fictive quality in the story lies in its transformation of Kali's character. The realistic attitude on his part is mistaken for treachery by the fictitious minds of the people around. Fiction passes for fact because of the 'maya' in man. The serpent seems to be a rope, and a rope seems to be a serpent, to his fictitious mind. 'Trail of the Green Blazer' deals with a reversed incident. But unlike the 'Sweets for Angels' it is highly incredible. The pickpocket Raju intends depositing the things he has picked in the pocket of the owner for he learns that the purse he has picked contains a balloon intended for the owner's motherless child. In real life pickpockets know only one thing - to pick the pockets of others and not to replace the stolen things in their original place. It is this abnormal act on the part of Raju that betrays him. Like Kali, he learns a lesson: "If ever I pick up something again, I shall make sure I don't have to put it back... Those fingers were not meant to put anything back."27

There are certain stories that are mere improbable possibilities. 'Four Rupees' is an example of that kind.

26. Lawley Road, p.32.
27. Ibid., p.17.
Ranga doesn't know swimming. Neither has he entered a well to bring out the thing that has fallen in it. In the story he is forced into such a situation because of the offer of sumptuous food and four rupees. "His brain kept drumming 'Four rupees, four rupees'... He then dived into the water muttering 'Four rupees, four rupees'. His fingers combed the sandy bed and finally clutched a piece of rope. He dragged it up, and attached to it was the brass pc."28

In stories like 'Annamalai' and 'Breath of Lucifer' we see Narayan himself appearing as a character. They present his experiences in a fictional way. William Walsh writes thus on them:

It seems that at this late stage of his career the whole of his experience including himself has entered the universe of fiction, which now encloses some reality, some truth, possibly harder to get at but quite certainly more obviously there than commonplace reality itself.29

Both these stories deal with simple, hardworking and faithful servants. 'Annamalai' is an exact account of the relationship of Annamalai and the author. There is nothing of fantasy in this narrative but 'Breath of Lucifer' is a compound of fact and fantasy. Narayan himself confesses that an attendant of his who took care of him during the period

28. Ibid., p.45.
of his eye-operation inspired him to write this story. The author undergoes an operation for 'Lentil opacity'. His eyes are bandaged: "When the outside world is screened off thus, one's vision turns immediately inward." The author is interested in 'rocks, monuments and ancient sculptures'. So he watches through the bandaged eyes, "breathtaking friezes, cornices, pillars and carvings..." It is this visual memory that helps him construct his story 'Breath of Lucifer'.

The author is convalescing in the hospital after the operation. Sam, the male nurse - he hates the term nurse - takes the utmost care of him. Things go on well until one night a weird experience befalls the author. Sam appears in the middle of night to warn the author that the bathroom is on fire and he has come to save the patient, in the manner of Lucifer - the part he used to play in his schooldays. He wishes to take the author to a place of safety. After taking him to an open place he warns him that the area is mined and the patient shouldn't touch anything or move. The author spent the entire night helplessly beside a bush. In the morning he is helped into his room by another attendant of the hospital. William Walsh remarks: "The terror of the experience, the impotence of the blind patient, the peculiar blend of benevolence and menace in Sam, are conveyed with the

31. Ibid., p.113.
sparest, lightest and surest touch."

But the stories in 'A Horse and Two Goats' are not as appealing as the stories in 'An Astrologer's Day' for the mere reason Narayan is not as much concerned with the technique of fictional realism as he is in the latter book. These stories are pointers to the fact that Narayan leans towards facts than fantasy for his stuff.

A point to note in these stories is that quite a few of them provide the author with wonderful chances to build delightful episodes on them, in his novels. In the story 'The Watchman', the watchman comes across, during his rounds, a woman who is ready to commit suicide. He tries to educate her but when she is obstinate he leaves her to herself. Fortunately, she does not die. The same is wonderfully developed in The Dark Room where Mari not only saves Savitri but helps her in the hour of her need. 'Crime and Punishment', a story between a richman's son and his tutor has its echoes in Balu and Murthi episode in The Financial Expert.

The short stories of Narayan are remarkable for their technique rather than for their realistic rendering of everyday life. Though the stories are presented realistically, the author is mostly satisfied with the 'twist' that he gives to make them delightful. Even in his very recent short story

Narayan exhibits this unique characteristic. The story 'Other Word' written recently makes use of the characteristic Narayan twist in an effective way. The confusion between the two Tamil words 'Seelai' meaning Sari and 'Silai' meaning an idol or image, is the theme on which the story 'Other Word' is built. A Police Inspector arrests a man suspecting him to be the thief of a costly 'seelai' (sari). When being interrogated and punished, the truth that emerges from the culprit's mouth is that he has stolen a 'silai' (idol or image) of a Hindu God. The unexpected conclusion of the story bears the stamp of the characteristic 'twist' that is distinctly Narayan's. It is this 'twist' that makes Narayan a pleasant short story writer. In this respect he resembles O. Henry, the celebrated short story writer. As M.K. Naik puts it, "the ending of Narayan's short stories show a strong influence of O. Henry's celebrated technique of the trick finale." It can be concluded that it is this twist that adds a touch of fiction to the realistic incidents.

Narayan's stories by and large make use of fictional realism. In the major novels Narayan rises to the fullest stature as a master of fictional realism; in the short stories he remains only a practitioner of this technique.

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