CHAPTER II

THE EARLY NOVELS

There is a steady growth in the technique of fictional realism, in Narayan. The early novels such as *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The English Teacher* and *The Dark Room* contain in them more fact than fantasy, because they are concerned with depicting day-to-day realities such as school-life, college-days and domestic events. They draw their material from the basic experiences, physical as well as psychological, of the author. Though Narayan introduces the element of fantasy, he intersperses it only here and there in these novels. He does not quite succeed in compounding fantasy and realism as he does in his mature novels.

With the exception of *The Dark Room*, the early novels are autobiographical. It can be said that Narayan recapitulates his boyhood and youth in these novels. *Swami and Friends* treats school-life with an emphasis on mischief, *The Bachelor of Arts* deals with college-days and youthful infatuation and *The English Teacher* depicts the blissful married life of a couple. Though *The Dark Room* is not autobiographical it remains as realistic as the other three for in it we notice Narayan's minute observation and graphic presentation of people around him.
Largely as a result of the autobiographical elements in them and due to the author's preoccupation with the realities of life, these novels remain significant for the note of realism in them. However, the novelist makes his attempt in mixing fantasy with fact and thereby reveals the growing consciousness of fictional realism in him.

Swami and Friends

Swami and Friends begins Narayan's career as a novelist. It is a hilarious account of boyhood. It appears Narayan is more interested in depicting realities than fictionalizing them. The novel is significant for two reasons. The school-scenes that are depicted are so realistic that a reader lives through the pages of the novel while reading it. It also introduces Malgudi, the fictionally created locale. The school-scenes are so realistic that a reader is bound to recapitulate his own boyhood days spent in school. It appears as though, "everyday actuality has taken Narayan's pen and written out this universal epic of all our boyhood yesterdays that are now no more."¹ However, we cannot ignore the fact that Narayan makes his first attempt of introducing a few fantastical elements, though occasionally, in the book. In fact, it is through such fictionally realistic events the novelist sustains the interest of his readers, throughout.

By hopping into the region of fantasy in the midst of realistic events he achieves success in making his readers feel that fiction creates 'a real' and not 'the actual' world.

The novel opens with the strikingly realistic note of a school-boy's hatred for school.

It was Monday morning. Swaminathan was reluctant to open his eyes. He considered Monday specially unpleasant in the calendar. After the delicious freedom of Saturday and Sunday, it was difficult to get into the Monday mood of work and discipline. He shuddered at the very thought of school.²

Equally realistic is the scene in which Swami is taken to task by his teacher. Since he is found restless in the class, the teacher intends punishing him, of course in the usual school-teacher's fashion. He hurls a question at Swami. The scene goes on thus:

'What is Lisbon famous for' asked the teacher. Swaminathan hesitated and ventured, 'For being the capital of Spain'. The teacher bit his moustache and fired a second question, 'What do you know about the Indian climate?'

'It is hot in the summer and cold in the winter'. 'Stand up on the bench!' roared the teacher. And Swaminathan stood up without a protest.³

Nothing in the scene is fictional: rather, there is

3. Ibid., p.16.
in it a tinge of irony that makes for authenticity.

There is yet another scene in the book which is as universal as it could be as far as children are concerned. Swaminathan is friendly both with Mani and Rajam who are in the beginning of the novel at least, rivals. Hence he gets the nickname 'TAIL'. And the matter is carried to the class-room. The word 'TAIL' is written on the blackboard. When Swami enters the classroom there is an unusual giggle. He feels that he may not be the cause of it. When his eyes fall on the blackboard he becomes agitated. He realizes that it is the mischief of either Sankar or the Pea. In Narayan's words:

Without a word Swaminathan approached the Pea and gave him a fierce slap on his cheek. The Pea burst into tears and swore that he did not do it. He cast a sly look at Sankar, who was absorbed in some work. Swaminathan turned to him and slapped his face also.

Soon there was a pandemonium, Sankar, Swaminathan and the Pea, rolling over, tearing, scratching and kicking one another. The bell rang. Rajam, Somu and Mani entered. The teacher came in and stood aghast. He could do little more than look on and ejaculate. He was the old Tamil Pandit, the most helpless teacher in the school.

Somu and Mani parted the fighters. The teacher ascended the platform and took his seat. The class settled down.4

4. Ibid., p.40.
The scene is presented with an eye on details but without any exaggeration. It compares favourably with the scene in which Tom Sawyer fights with the new arrival to the town. Narayan successfully captures the child-consciousness. Better than being a mere account it helps the reader to move immediately into the spirit of the occasion. It is an example to prove what language could do to realistic details.

In a similar manner Narayan presents the examination scene, which is equally realistic.

With his left shoulder resting against the wall, Sankar was lost to the world. Rajam, sitting under the second ventilator, between two Third Form boys, had become a writing machine. Mani was still gazing at the rafters, scratching his chin with the pen. The Pea was leaning back in his seat, revising his answers. One supervisor was drowsing in his chair, another was pacing up and down with an abstracted look in his eyes. The scratchy noise of the active nibs, the rustle of papers, and the clearing of the throats, came through the brooding silence of the hall.5

Narayan remains a serious realist in his description. But to rule out the fictional aspect in the presentation of the scene is to miss the artist in him. A realist is concerned only bringing upon the scene a large number of characters for all they are worth. As a fictionist Narayan selects the odd contrast and piquant variety of human experience. Sankar, the studious boy, is 'lost to the world'.

5. Ibid., p.61.
Rajam the intelligent is 'a writing machine'. Mani the dunce, gazes. And the Pea the mediocre revises because he has nothing else to write. One examiner is 'drowsing'; the other has an 'abstracted look. The scene ends with the contrasting 'silence' and 'noise'. Though there is nothing fantastic, the description of the scene is a fillip to our imagination.

Swaminathan completes his Tamil paper before time. But he doesn't hand over the answer scripts to the examiner for fear of being misunderstood. Narayan very beautifully brings out child-psychology in a scene like this:

Half an hour more! What had he to do for half an hour? But he felt awkward to be the first to go out. Why should not the others be as quick and precise as he?

He had found it hard to kill time... He had seen a supervisor observing him, and had at once pretended to be busy with the answer paper... He set his pen to work. He went on improving the little dash under the last line indicating the end... It was only ten minutes past four-thirty. He saw two or three boys giving up their papers and going out, and felt happy. He briskly folded the paper and wrote on the paper the elaborate inscription:

'Tamil Tamil
W.S. Swaminathan
1st Form A Section
Albert Mission School
Malgudi
South India
Asia'.

Swaminathan represents the reaction of many an average student. Little boys in their desire to exhibit their knowledge even might add the words 'The World' after 'Asia'.

The episode is not a fictitious narration but it doesn't lack a main ingredient of a well-made novel — the 'dramatic'.

P.S. Sundaram reads a spiritual issue in it. He says, "the spiritually minded Indian may look upon all life as 'maya', time and place of no consequence." 7 It is better to regard the episode for its psychological interest and humour.

Narayan's Swami is a boy following certain conventions without any meaning attached to them, but with a desire to 'show off'.

Graham Greene feels that, "Swami is the story of a child written with complete objectivity, with a humour strange to our fiction." 8

The section dealing with the boys' involvement in cricket team and match reveals the fact that Narayan is interested very much in presenting the children's world as it is and not with any illusion of reality.

Sometimes Narayan even transmutes his own experience into the fiction. The episode connected with Swami and Scripture Classes is an example that deserves consideration. Swami dislikes the Scripture Classes for the Scripture Master Ebenezar is a fanatic. In his hands the class serves as a weapon against Hinduism. His words are:

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As a school boy Narayan did not like the Scripture Classes for they were 'mostly devoted to attacking and lampooning the Hindu Gods.'

The novel treats the episode fictionally. Swami not only counteracts but even carries the matter to his father, who in turn writes a letter — it is treated as the subject matter of Narayan's story 'Father's Help' in An Astrologer's Day. As a humorist Narayan seizes the opportunity to parody Swami's father, who is a lawyer by profession. His letter to the Headmaster reads:

'I beg to inform you that my son Swaminathan of the First Form, A Section, was assaulted by his Scripture Master yesterday... I regret to inform you, I shall be constrained to draw the attention of the higher authorities to these Unchristian practices.'

There are a few other incidents that are fictionally rendered. There is a humorous scene pertaining to cart-episode. During holidays, Swami, Rajam and Mani spend their time outside their houses. On one such occasion while they

are sitting on a culvert they notice a bullock-cart coming in their direction. Posing themselves as policemen they play a practical trick on the innocent cart-driver. They can issue a pass only after examining the cart and the bullock. Swaminathan, in his ignorance, mistakes a birth-mark on the bullock to be a dirty spot. He objects to the cart-driver's carelessness in not giving a wash to the animal. Rajam, in the manner of Pickwick interrogates the cart-driver thus:

What is your name?' asked Rajam.
'Karuppan' answered the boy.
Swaminathan took it down.
'Age?'
'I don't know, Sir'.
'You don't know? Swami write a hundred', said Rajam.
'No Sir, no sir, I am not a hundred.'
'Mind your business and hold your tongue. You are a hundred. I will kill you if you say no. What is your bullock's name?'
'I don't know, sir'.
'Swami, write Karuppan again'.
'Sir, that is my name, not the bullock's'.
They ignored this and Swaminathan wrote Karuppan against the name of the bullock.12

The episode is quite fantastical. It resembles Mr. Pickwick's interrogating the cab-driver on his way to Dingley Dell or even Dogberry in Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing, conducting, humorously, the trial of the culprits Borachio and Conrade. This scene can be regarded as the beginning of fictional realism in Narayan.

12. Ibid., pp.81-82.
Most of the incidents connected with Rajam are fictionally rendered. When he arrives at Malgudi he poses a threat to the supremacy of Mani. Their strength has to be tested and so in the manner of the Knights of the Middle Ages, they agree to have a fight at Nallappa's Grove at an appointed hour. Swaminathan acts as a medium of communication. Narayan depicts it delightfully:

 Have you the courage to prove that you are a man? asked Mani.
Swaminathan turned to Rajam and repeated it.
'How?'
'How?' repeated Swaminathan to Mani.
'Meet me at the river, near Nallappa's Grove, to-morrow evening.'
'Near Nallappa's Grove,' Swaminathan was pleased to echo.
'What for?' asked Rajam.
'To see if you can break my head.'
'Oh, to pieces,' said Rajam.  

This fictional matter is brought to a head in the actual scene of fighting, when Rajam carries a gun to threaten Mani. After firing a shot in the air he tells Mani, 'You heard the shot?... The next is going to be into your body, if you are keen upon a fight.'

Rajam is endowed with the maturity of an adult. He talks as philosophically on sin, friendship and peace as adults do. Occasionally he behaves too big for his age. This is revealed

in his encounter with the Headmaster of the Board High School, where Swami is a student. Rajam wants him every evening for cricket practice. The school conducts drill classes only in the evenings. When Swami expresses his helplessness Rajam assures him that the matter can be settled by meeting the Headmaster. Accordingly, he not only meets the Headmaster but asks him to release Swami from the drill classes. The Headmaster is taken by surprise at the temerity of Rajam. At last when he turns down Rajam's demand, Rajam calls him a 'madcap'. It is this unusual behaviour of Rajam that endows the scene a fictional touch.

Throughout the novel Rajam's character is presented with a 'heightened' effect. His arrival in the school itself is a landmark. It is with his departure the narrative ends. It appears as though Rajam is created to play his own game of fantasy, in the novel. As for instance, his behaviour with the cook in his house reveals slightly a falsity in his character. Rajam invites his friends for a tea-party. When the cook places the plate full of eatables, on the table, Rajam orders for its removal from that place. The cook in turn places it on the chair. Unable to endure it Rajam shouts at the cook calling him a 'scoundrel'. Unmindful of Rajam's anger, the cook returns to the kitchen only to be followed by Rajam. A little later Rajam returns to his friends carrying the plate himself, but with his remark: "I had to bring this myself. I went in and gave the
Sometimes he is endowed with the characteristics of an adult. In the manner of the adults, Rajam does not forgive Swami for his absence in the cricket match. He maintains a calculated indifference towards Swami, after the incident of the cricket match. Even at the time of the final parting—Rajam's family goes to Trichy for his father is transferred—Rajam remains tight-lipped as far as Swami is concerned. When he condescends to open his mouth his words are lost in the noise of the engine and the guard's blast. Rajam remains different from the others. In fact, Narayan gets a clue for his later eccentricities, from the character of Rajam. It is Rajam's character that adds a fictional touch to the otherwise realistic novel.

With *Swami and Friends* Narayan makes a beginning in his use of fictional realism. It is only in his next novel, *The Bachelor of Arts*, he gains command over his technique, with the introduction of the romantic theme of love.

**The Bachelor of Arts**

Narayan's second novel, *The Bachelor of Arts* is cast in the same mould as his first novel. From the theme of boyhood, Narayan passes on to the theme of youth. This novel is also

15. Ibid., p.28.
as realistic as the first for it celebrates college life with an emphasis on its routine. It can be said that Swami of the first novel grows into Chandran of The Bachelor of Arts.

Chandran's college life, his preparation for the examination, graduation and unemployment are dealt with in the first two parts of the novel and they are realistically presented. Through Chandran's infatuation for a girl Narayan leads him on to a land of fantasy - namely Chandran's brief spell as a Sanyasi, and this is dealt with in the third part of the novel. Virtually, this part is fictional and in this Narayan reveals an expansionistic design in fictional realism.

The novel introduces the first-ever bogus Sanyasi of Narayan, which is a fictional creation. Sanyasa is the fourth stage of life according to Hindu Dharma - the other three being Brahmacharya or Studenthood, Grahasthya or the stage of a householder and Vanaprastha or retired life in forest. Sanyasa is a life of complete renunciation. Chandran attempts it and makes a farce of it. Narayan actually reserves this stage to a tiger in his novel A Tiger for Malgudi. The scenes connected with Chandran the Sanyasi are farcical.

However, the novel carries more realistic scenes than fantastical. Fictional touches are added by the use of irony as for instance in the presentation of Gajapati, the Assistant
Professor of English, who asserts that there are serious lapses even in Fowler's Modern English Usage. This teacher does not like his students to stare at him in the classrooms. Therefore, he wants them to be busy with their pencils. His characteristic remark is: 'Listen to me with your pencils, gentlemen.' Through Chandran, Narayan recollects his own college days and becomes nostalgic about his college life. Professor Rollo's lectures on Shakespeare, Professor Venkateswara's on Indian History and Professor Toby's parting remark, 'I hope your interest in literature will not vanish with the examinations,' are all recollected and presented in the pages of the novel. Narayan's days of unemployment after obtaining his B.A. degree correspond with Chandran's days of unemployment. Narayan narrates it thus:

Nineteen thirty, when I obtained a belated graduation, became a year of problems. What should one do with oneself now? Different suggestions came in from different quarters. One could become a lawyer or a minor civil servant or what not.

Chandran receives suggestions from his relatives and friends.

There was his uncle in Nellore who wrote to him that he ought to do something and try to settle in life. There was his mother's cousin who advised him to study Law. There was his Madras uncle who said that staying in Malgudi would not lead him anywhere but he ought to go to a big city and see people.

18. Ibid., p.74.
19. The Bachelor of Arts, p.52.
Narayan is advised thus by his uncle:

Mysore is no good, a sleepy place. If you want to get on, seek your prospects in a city like Bangalore or Madras.  

Soon after graduation, Chandran like his creator makes 'false starts' in love. The novel acquires romantic interest, because of this. Any girl who seemed to notice Chandran becomes at once his 'sweet-heart'. Narayan recollects a similar feeling in his book My Days. However, Narayan's love for 'the girl drawing water from the street-tap' ends in marriage, which is the subject matter of The English Teacher, but Chandran's love for Malathi, with the disappointment attached to it, drives him on to fantasies. Part III of the novel is built on these fantasies. Two episodes, in this part, reveal the fictiveness of the novel. They are a direct contrast to the other realistic descriptions in the novel. The first incident is connected with Chandran's short association with Kailas, the odd middle-aged man. Chandran's love for Malathi is a one-sided affair. When the marriage plan collapses he becomes so distracted that he runs away to Madras, only to fall into the hands of Kailas the undesirable character. Kailas takes him to the house of Kokilam, the woman of easy virtues. Chandran realising the gravity of the situation runs away from Kailas on the pretext of noting the number of the taxi in which they travelled.

21. Ibid., p.106.
22. Narayan confesses that Kailas is a portrayal of his own uncle. My Days, p.96.
This short episode is done in the spirit of a romantic novel. It is this romantic episode that adds a considerable charm to the novel. Kailas, offers Narayan the fictional possibility of developing Dr. Pal, a rake, in *The Financial Expert*. If Chandran's college-life and infatuation for Malathi are realistic, Kailas-theme is drawn from the imagination of the writer.

Another episode in the novel conclusively demonstrates its fictional quality. This is connected with Chandran's role of a Sanyasi. Narayan knows that if there is nothing else to do, one can become a Sanyasi. In fact, the theme of fake Sanyasi is the central motif in his *The Guide*. It is quite obvious that Narayan does not want to capitalise on this fictional stuff in *The Bachelor of Arts*. As quickly as Chandran falls in love with Sanyasa, so quickly he falls out of it. The change that he undergoes is only a passing bout of emotional feeling. Therefore, Narayan very easily brings him back to his normal self. Chandran feels himself as 'a cad, a fraud and a confidence trickster', and very soon discards his ochre robes, only to return home. Though Narayan does not treat this fictional stuff at length, *The Bachelor of Arts* still remains as an 'artistic seed-pot containing the germinal ideas of the succeeding novels.'

The Sanyasa-theme, though an artistic creation, serves

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23. *The Bachelor of Arts*, p.111.
a literary purpose. Sanyasa cures the infatuation of
Chandran as much as madness cures Lear's mind of its ego.
Chandran realizes that love and friendship are illusions and
wishes to be untouched by them. But at the end of the
novel he is brought back to romantic illusions once again.
He consents to marry Susila. He romanticizes her thus:
"Her name, music, figure, face and everything about her was
divine. Susila, Susila-Malathi, not a spot beside Susila;
it was a tongue-twister; he wondered why people liked that
name."25 Strangely, it is Chandran's hint, namely love,
relationship and friendship are merely illusions, that
becomes the absorbing theme of the subsequent novel,
The English Teacher.

The English Teacher is the most autobiographical of the
early novels and therefore it is more realistic in nature.
It is, in a way, an extension of The Bachelor of Arts for it
treats the theme of married-life that comes after college-
life. Chandran grows into Krishnan of The English Teacher
and Krishnan is none other than Narayan himself. About its
autobiographical contents Narayan remarks thus:

The English Teacher in the novel Krishnan is a
fictional character in the fictional city of
Malgudi; but he goes through the same experience

25. The Bachelor of Arts, p.162.
as I had gone through and he calls his wife Susila and the child Leela instead of Hema. The toll that typhoid took and all the desolation that followed, with a child to look after and the psychic adjustments are based on my own experience.  

As the novel is usually close to and intimate with Narayan's personal life, it offers very little scope for him to bring in the element of fantasy. There is in it a depiction of personal ties and family relationships. Speaking about the thematic content of the book Narayan writes thus:

The book falls in two parts - one is domestic life and the other is spiritual. Many readers have gone through the first half with interest and the second half with bewilderment and even resentment, perhaps feeling that they have been baited with the domestic picture into tragedy, death and nebulous, impossible speculations. The dedication of the book to the memory of my wife should to some extent give the reader a clue that the book may not be all fiction.

Krishnan's hostel-life is a picture of reality. His routine life as a teacher of English, at Albert Mission College is conveyed in unambiguous terms.

I got up at eight every day, read for the fiftieth time Milton, Carlyle and Shakespeare, looked through compositions, swallowed a meal dressed and

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27. Ibid., p.135.
rushed out of the hostel just when the second bell sounded at college; four hours later I returned to my room.  

His domestic life in the company of his wife and child is yet another picture of reality. It is described thus:

I left the college usually at 4.30 p.m., the moment the last bell rang, and avoiding all interruptions reached home within about twenty minutes... My daughter came up and hugged my knees, and held up her hands for my books. I gave her the books. She went up the steps and put them on the table in my room. I followed her in... my wife came out and said: 'Your coffee is getting cold. Won't you come in?...' and we moved off to our little dining room... I sat down on the plank facing the shrine, with the child on my lap. A little plate came up with some delicacy or titbit heaped on it - my tiffin... We left the kitchen, and sat down in the hall... we spent an hour or more, sitting there and gossiping... This talk went on till darkness crept in... My wife got up and went in to light the oven and cook the dinner, while I took charge of Leela and tried to keep her engaged till her food was ready.  

This realistic picture of domestic life holds the attention of the readers for it is "a prose lyric on which Narayan has lavished his best gifts as a writer."  

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29. Ibid., pp.36-38.  
The sick-room scenes, the death of Susila and her cremation are so tellingly told that according to C.D. Narasimhaiah, even a woman in Krishnan's position "could not have told this tale more tenderly, more poignantly."

The second part of the novel deals with Krishnan's psychic contacts with his dead wife. In the initial stages Krishnan communicates with her through the medium of an old man. As his spiritualistic experiments progress the medium is removed. He establishes a direct contact with her. This spiritualistic experiment is based on Narayan's personal experience. He narrates it in his autobiography thus:

After sometime... the medium became unnecessary. I felt able to manage for myself independently... In a few months I became an adept... Following the directions given, I practised psychic contacts, regularly for some years, almost every night.

Krishnan, like Narayan, gives up the experiments after sometime for he realizes that separation is part of life and "a profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life." He therefore feels "grateful to Life and Death."

The English Teacher does not very much advance the technique of fictional realism. Even the supernatural section of the second part is not treated in a fictional...
manner, probably because Narayan wants to give it the authenticity it deserves. It appears that there is no difference between the realistic scenes presented in the first part of the novel and the supernatural scenes. As for instance, there is a scene in which Krishnan returns home, one evening, with a heavy rose and jasmine garland realizing that his dear Susila is not there to cherish it. At home he falls into a drowse thinking only of Susila. Strangely, when he opens his eyes he sees Susila there in her favourite blue saree. The scene is described thus:

I picked up the garland from the nail and returned to bed. I held it to her, "'For you as ever, I somehow feared you wouldn't take...." She received it with a smile, cut off a piece of it and stuck it in a curve on the back of her head. She turned her head and asked: "'Is this all right?'" "'Wonderful'", I said, smelling it. 35

It appears as though the earlier domestic atmosphere pervades this spiritual relationship.

However, the novel does not lack scenes in which there is a fusion of fact and fiction. Two scenes deserve consideration, in this respect. The first one is connected with Krishnan and an eccentric old man who is the owner of a few houses. Krishnan meets him and desires to inspect one of the houses. A lively dialogue takes place between the two and the scene is depicted thus:

A silence fell between us. I broke it by asking: "'Are you the owner of the house?'"

35. The English Teacher, p.213.
"No," he replied, promptly, in his querulous voice, "God is the owner and I am his slave."
"What is the rent?"
"First see the house and tell me if you like it."
...
"Has it a garage?" I asked.
...
"You want everything to be told first," he snapped with disgust, "before you say anything yourself. Go, go away. I am not prepared to talk to you any more. I don't want to give you my house. I have seen hundreds like you who come and ask questions and vanish out of sight."36

A little later, when the old man learns that Krishnan is a teacher in a college, he is greatly impressed. He behaves in a totally different way. Narayan describes it humorously thus:

"College teacher!" He gave a salute with both hands and said, "I revere college teachers, our 'Gurus'. Meritorious deeds in previous births make them gurus in this life. I'm so happy. I only wanted a good, cultured family."37

Krishnan himself behaves in an eccentric way in another situation. It is the occasion of Susila's arrival home. Krishnan is greatly worried about transferring the luggage she brings, from the railway carriage to the platform. He slides into a fantasy.

37. Ibid., p.25.
She was certain to arrive with a lot of luggage, and the little child. How was all this to be transferred from the train to the platform? and the child must not be hurt. I made a mental note, "Must shout as soon as the train stops: 'Be careful with the baby!'" This seemed to my fevered imagination the all-important thing to say on arrival, as otherwise I fancied the child's head was sure to be banged against the doorway....

I wrung my hands in despair. How was she going to get out with the child and all that luggage? The train stopped for just seven minutes. I would help her down first and then throw the things out, and if there any boxes left over they would have to be lost with the train, that was all. No one could help it. 38.

Krishnan even meets a porter and promises three times his usual wages for getting this work done. Even when the porter assures him that whole waggons can be unloaded in seven minutes, Krishnan only thinks that the porter has a wrong notion about seven minutes. Actually, when the train arrives, everything goes off so smoothly, that Susila and her belongings land on the platform in a split second. Krishnan's fear remains a mere flight of fantasy. Narayan makes a departure for a fanciful flight from reality. But for scenes such as these, the novel would have lost its artistic merit.

That Narayan is not impoverished of imagination is revealed in the tender dialogue that takes place between

38. Ibid., pp.30-31.
Krishnan and his baby daughter, soon after the death of Susila. The child desires to know why the door of the room in which her mother lay as a patient, is shut. Krishnan tells a lie; the door is closed for they are giving a oath to Susila. Four days later, the child comes out with the discovery that Susila is not there, and the room is empty. Krishnan is at a loss. He only prays God to give him a sensible answer for the child. The whole scene is so surcharged with emotion that it remains almost poetical.

Apart from scenes such as these, The English Teacher, by and large, remains a realistic novel. It is only when we come to The Dark Room we notice the technique of fictional realism taking a better shape.

The Dark Room

For the first time, Narayan fuses fact and fiction in an artistic way in his novel The Dark Room. As it does not depend on autobiographical elements for its material, it offers more chances for the author to make use of fictional realism in a better way.

The central theme of the novel is domestic disharmony. Ramani the self-opinionated and egocentric man bosses over his wife Savitri, to the tune of desperation. Savitri, the meek and tradition-bound wife endures it for long. But when it reaches the breaking-point she runs away from the house, only to return to it again with the admission of her
defeat. Strangely, this novel, which treats the theme of domestic unhappiness has been written, at a time, when Narayan was experiencing domestic bliss, in the company of his wife and child. About its composition he says:

I had also begun my third novel, *The Dark Room*. I had a pad and a pen and disappeared every morning for three hours. I found it impossible to write at home now — there were far too many distractions, and also the baby. She was just a little over a year old, and I found it impossible to remain at my desk when she was around,... Before sending me out, my wife would give me a cup of coffee and sometimes whisper a warning: "Don't make a fuss. Not enough coffee powder at home. Get some at the store when you return." I set out to do my writing at the College Union, where the secretary had given me a room. I shut myself in for three hours, gazed on the green football field outside, across the street, and spun out the fate of Savitri — the heroine of *The Dark Room*.

This novel is not autobiographical like the other early novels. As it has more fiction in it, it has been taken up after *The English Teacher*, in the present study, for it acts as a nice link between the early novels and the mature novels, as far as the technique of fictional realism is concerned. The story of Savitri is a natively 'spun out' story; the mature novels actually provide more scope for the novelist to tell a story. Of all Narayan novels, it is only in this novel we notice the author taking sides with an issue.

He confesses:

I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of Woman as opposed to Man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament of the "Woman's Lib" movement. Man assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning that she herself began to lose all notion of her independence, her individuality, stature and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances. My novel dealt with her, with this philosophy broadly in the background.

The novel is built on three units. The Ramani-episode is partly realistic and partly fictitious. Ramani, as a husband of Savitri is a neatly drawn realistic picture; Ramani, as a lover of Shanta Bai is the imaginative creation of the author. Savitri story is mostly fabular. Both in her extreme submissiveness at home and her escapism to get out of bossism of her husband she remains a fictionally drawn person. Narayan depicts the children's world in a realistic way.

Ramani the branch manager of England Insurance Company at Malgudi is a little dictator at home. His treatment of Savitri, his meek and submissive wife, swings between bullying and blandishment; mostly, it is one of brow-beating. When Savitri, his brow-beaten wife, enters the dark room in the house to express her unhappiness, Ramani treats it with

40. My Days, p.119.
supreme indifference. This sulking on the part of Savitri only increases his ill-treatment of her.

Ramani's arrival home every evening in his Chevrolet car is itself an event. It is depicted thus:

Ramani as a rule sounded his horn at about a furlong from his gate, two long hoots which were meant to fell the household, "Ranga, keep the shed door open when I reach there, if you value your life," while to Savitri it said, "It is your business to see that Ranga does his work properly. So take warning." Some days the hooting would be less emphatic, and Savitri's ears were sufficiently attuned to the nuances and she could tell a few minutes in advance what temper her husband was in. 41

Ramani is always displeased with the food that Savitri prepares for him. He shouts, "Why do you torment me with this cucumber for the dozenth time?" 42 When Savitri is silent he taunts her and when she opens her mouth he reprimands her thus: "Shut up. Words won't mend a piece of foul cooking." 43 He treats his wife as though she is still a child. He tells her: "You are still a child, perhaps a precocious child, but a child all the same." 44 His contention is that Savitri being a woman must only be satisfied looking after the kitchen. Ramani is equally cruel with his children. When his daughter Kamala desires to accompany

42. Ibid., p.2.
43. Ibid., p.3.
44. Ibid., p.12.
her parents to a film, Ramani not only discourages her but threatens to punish her if she persisted. His ill-treatment of his family reaches its climax on a Navaratri day, the day meant for rejoice. Babu, his son, in his overenthusiasm desires to provide light to the pavilion of dolls. In so doing he only blows out the electric fuse and plunges the house in darkness. Ramani arrives home right at this moment to utter the inauspicious words, 'Is everybody in this house dead?'. When he learns that Babu has gone to the electric office he complains that Babu is too small a boy for that job; upon learning that the servant Ranga has accompanied Babu, Ramani remarks sarcastically, 'Why should everybody go to the electric office? Is Babu to be protected like a girl?'. When Babu returns from the electric office, Ramani twists his ears. Not being satisfied, he even slaps him and when Savitri comes forward to protect the child Ramani shouts at her. Savitri only sheds tears and Babu follows suit. Ramani is untouched; rather, he calls it a sentimental show.

Ramani in the company of Shanta Bai is a different person. He sacrifices his natural self to please her. This fictitious development in his personality is effected even in the first meeting between the two. Ramani, much to his dislike, interviews women candidates for the post of office assistant in his office. He is dissatisfied with all the candidates.

45. Ibid., p.34.
46. Ibid., p.35.
He feels that "the women would in no way add to the profits of the company, though added considerable colour to the office on the days when they were present." It is at this juncture he meets Shanta Bai. It is described in a truly fictional manner thus:

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.

Ramani becomes her slave from that time onwards. He not only employs her but allows her to convert part of the office into her residence. To fit up her room, he removes the cot, the bench which Savitri likes very much and one or two vessels from his house. In brief, he dotes on her. Narayan spins out a few interesting incidents to present the fictionally contrived Ramani. On one occasion Shanta Bai desires that they could go to a film together. When Ramani hesitates, she taunts him, in the manner of Cleopatra, thus: "Perhaps you don't wish to be seen in public with me; perhaps your wife will object; perhaps...." Ramani asserts with much bravado that he is neither afraid of public opinion nor his wife. He not only takes her to the picture but also follows her, when she comes out of the theatre expressing disgust at the film showing, "a stirring episode from the Ramayana, in which the giant monkey god set fire to Lanka." Shanta Bai

47. Ibid., p.48.  
48. Ibid., p.48.  
49. Ibid., p.67.  
50. Ibid., p.68.
then expresses her fantastic desire to go to the river and stay on its bank till dawn. Ramani is ready to drive the car and she tells him to 'drive round the town once and then go to the river.' Ramani carries out all her commands and returns home early morning much to the chagrin of his wife Savitri.

The Shanta Bai-Ramani episode is a reverse process of Ramani-Savitri story. This process is so easily worked out that it passes for reality, though fabular. In fact, it offers the novelist a chance to fabricate the Savitri-Odessey.

Savitri-story is mostly fictional. In the beginning she is presented as a meek, tradition-bound Hindu wife. All on a sudden she grows into an ardent advocate of feminism. She leaves her house with a bang - in the spirit of Ibsen's Nora - but returns to it very soon as a defeated person.

Right from the beginning of the novel - except on occasions when she is in the company of her children - Savitri is presented as a puppet. Even after fifteen years of married life she remains submissive. There is an exaggerated incidence connected with the removal of a bench on which she used to have her afternoon sleep. She feels unhappy over its removal but does not dare to ask her husband to bring it back. During the Navarathri day, unable to put up with the taunting remarks of her husband she only sulks into a

51. Ibid., p.68.
'dark room'. Ramani does not give credit to her maturity. He treats her as a child, throughout. One wonders whether this is the reaction of all timid wives. Not all Narayan's women characters behave such. In The English Teacher, Susila tackles her husband in a proper manner when he makes a big fuss about the loss of an antique alarm-clock. Nataraj in The Man Eater of Malgudi is mortally afraid of his wife's reaction when Rangi the temple-dancer comes to his house in search of him. Sampath, in spite of his flirtations with Shanti, does not dare to brow-beat his wife. The case with Savitri is different.

The other action of Savitri, namely her spirited talk and subsequent escapade is also a heightened version of her real self. Savitri the weak, whimpering and vacillating creature confronts Ramani thus: 'Don't touch me!... You are dirty, you are impure. Even if I burn my skin I can't cleanse myself of the impurity of your touch.'52 And when Ramani permits her to go away from his house taking her belongings, she bursts out thus: 'I don't possess anything in this world. What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything else that she has is her father's, her husband's or her son's. So take these too....'53 She removes her diamond ear rings, the diamond studs and other pieces of jewels on her body and throws them at Ramani.

52. Ibid., p.84.
53. Ibid., p.84.
When she is asked not to take the children with her, she says, "Yes, you are right. They are yours absolutely. You paid the midwife and the nurse. You pay for their clothes and teachers. You are right. Didn't I say that a woman owns nothing?" What follows next is still more fabular.

Forbidden to take her children, Savitri walks out alone. Her attempt to commit suicide is warded off by the chance-rescue of her by the village blacksmith, Mari. She secures a job in the temple - her job is to sweep and clean the temple - and she earns her bread. She confesses that it is her own bread. "This is my own rice, my very own; and I am not obliged to any one for this. This is nobody's charity to me." But she becomes homesick very soon. A nostalgia for home and accustomed comforts make her feel to relinquish the newly found freedom. Her temporary renunciation of home and hearth corresponds with the temporary renunciation of Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts. Admitting her defeat she returns home. Unlike Nora in 'The Doll's House,' Savitri remains a puppet in the hands of the novelist. A.N. Kaul remarks that "Ibsenism and feminist idea can inspire Narayan's imagination as little as the political idea of Gandhism." The novel has a third aspect, namely the world of children. Narayan is at his best in portraying this world.

54. Ibid., p.84.
55. Ibid., p.138.
He presents them with the full understanding of child psychology.

Sumati does not keep company with her sister Kamala when they return from school. Kamala, a plump little girl with a springy pigtail rushes into the kitchen to have her food. There is an interesting dialogue between the mother and the daughter:

"Where is Sumati?"
"She is coming with her friends."
"Why couldn't you have come with her?"
"She won't allow me in her company. They are in the eighth class."

Then there is the picture of Kamala refusing to eat properly. She stuffs a few mouthfuls and tries to rise. When the mother coaxes her with the offer of 'three pies' Kamala not only eats the entire food but also narrates an event that happened in the school. Sumati, then arrives. Kamala vanishes with the excuse that she has to do some work at school. Sumati's version of the story of Kamala keeping herself aloof is different. The scene goes on thus:

"... By the way, why don't you keep Kamala with you and see that she doesn't come running through the streets?"
"She doesn't listen to me, Mother."
"But she said you wouldn't allow her in your company."

57. Ibid., pp.5-6.
'She is such a nuisance to my friends. She keeps asking everyone for pencils and ribbons. It is disgraceful.'

''All the same, keep an eye on the girl.'" 58

The reality and concreteness of this scene reveals Narayan's power of observation of the psychology of children. Both Kamala and Sumati desire to maintain their identity. On a different situation, Babu, the eldest of the three children, wishes to show off his superiority as he is a boy. He is a little bit of a snob. When his mother intends that he should see the film 'Kuchela' for in it a boy-actor has played Kuchela's role very well Babu has nothing but contempt for Indian films. The scene goes on thus:

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

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

''It is because you don't understand English films,'" said Babu. 59

Sumati in her turn answers him fittingly: 'As if you are a master of English and understood all that they say in the films! Why do you pretend?' 60 Savitri intervenes to prevent a quarrel between the two. The scene is a delightful representation of the world of children.

58. Ibid., p.7.
60. Ibid., p.24.
The children receive the news of their mother's departure from home - Ramani tells a story that Savitri has gone to see her ailing father at Talapur - without much enthusiasm. Babu, the eldest even suspects the story, but he does not have the courage to put questions to his father. But when the matter reaches its climax, Babu takes it upon himself to talk with his father and find out the whereabouts of his mother. He hears a rumour that his mother has left the house for ever. He therefore meets his sister Sumati and consults her on this. The scene is a lively representation of their reaction:

After they had washed their hands Babu managed to take Sumati aside, and said, "Do you know what Janamma told me this evening?"
"No."
"That Mother has not gone to Talapur. I suspected that there was some such thing."
"Where is she?"
"Who can say? She might have been carried away by robbers or eaten by lions or tigers."
Sumati trembled, and put her hands to her eyes. Babu sternly told her, "None of that. Don't create a scene. If you cry I will never speak to you again."
"What are we to do about it now?" Sumati asked.
"You leave it to me. I will speak to Father and ask him to search."61

Accordingly, Babu meets his father after the dinner is over and with tears in his eyes asks his father if Savitri
is alive at all. This tender but natural feeling of the boy shakes up the artificial smugness of Ramani thus:

While the Strong Man in him said that she couldn't have gone far and that she was bound to return when she regained sense, the Weak Man, so long unnoticed by himself constantly pricked him with the reminder that she had been gone two days and three nights now; and suppose she had done something very rash and foolish or something had happened to her, how was he to answer the children, her people, and everybody?\(^6\)

He assures the boy that he would send a telegram asking Savitri to return home. And Savitri does return home immediately, even without any telegram, for she becomes homesick. A nostalgia for children makes her to say, "I must see them. I must see Babu; I must see Sumati, and I must see Kamala."\(^6\)

She confesses, "This is defeat. I accept it. I am no good for this fight. I am a bamboo pole...."\(^6\) When she arrives home, after the absence of three days, the children receive her with excitement but without any suspicion. The natural reaction of the children in such a circumstance as this is depicted in very clear terms:

It was over an hour since she had arrived. The children's excitement had subsided. She ventured to ask, "Where is your father?"

"Last night he went out to send the telegram

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62. Ibid., p.151.
63. Ibid., p.142.
64. Ibid., p.154.
and he hasn't yet come home. He said that the cook might sleep in the hall. What a fine story the cook told us! He went on till midnight. But Babu wouldn't let him continue...''

''Why did you interrupt the story, Babu?''

''What nonsense, Mother! Were we to keep awake all night?''

''You could have gone away from us and slept somewhere; you needn't have disturbed us.''

''Mother, he has promised to continue the story tonight. We weren't in the least afraid at being without you. We kept the light on all night.''

''Father took us all to a cinema and bought us such a lot of sweets.'',65

Narayan sticks to realism in the presentation of the children's world.

This short novel is characteristic in its close observation of children and in fusing fiction and fact, in a greater measure. It gains its surface tension from the strain, between Ramanı and Savitri, which is realistic. The tension later develops into a contest between the tradition of acquiescence and a spirit of rebellion, which is rendered in an imaginative way. Narayan carries the story to a climax but ends it differently from the anticipation of the readers. Savitri renounces her obligations to Ramanı, in a splendid way; but returns to him without any transformation in her. Savitri-episode thus remains fictional. This in fact, is the author's first serious but not a

65. Ibid., p.154.
harmonious blending of fact and fantasy. It is only in
his mature novels he succeeds in blending the two in a
harmonious way.

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