Mr. Sampath, The Financial Expert and The Guide, written during the mature period of Narayan's career as a novelist, reveal his capacity to fuse fiction and fact in a credible and harmonious way. These novels remain as masterpieces as far as the technique of fictional realism is concerned. All of them deal with a common theme, namely the illusory life of the protagonists. They are not autobiographical like the early novels, though they are based on facts. Facts give place to fabulation, very soon, in these novels and the readers are attracted more by their fabular contents.

These novels follow a pattern in the mixture of fact and fiction. Nearly one half of Mr. Sampath is built on fiction; the proportion increases still further in The Financial Expert. The Guide clearly indicates the novelist's preference to fiction. In both Mr. Sampath and The Financial Expert Narayan starts with facts, moves on to fantasy and comes back to fact. But in The Guide fantasy so overpowers fact that the novelist allows his protagonist to revel too much in the land of fantasy and succumb at
the end. Raju, the hero of The Guide rides on the back of the tiger that he has created and refuses to dismount. And the novelist allows him to become a victim of his own creation. Significantly, The Guide is the only novel of Narayan's in which the hero dies.

In both Mr. Sampath and The Financial Expert fiction is kept well within the framework of reality. Mr. Sampath is built on a character Narayan knows and The Financial Expert on a realistic event that Narayan is aware of. The comparison ends there. With his high imaginative-faculty Narayan builds up the fictional parts in these novels. Sampath's film-world and Margayya's financial wizardry ore Narayan's creations; Ravi, who wrecks Sampath's film-career and Dr. Pal who ruins banker Margayya are also Narayan's creations. With all these fictional creations, both the novels do not end up as fantasies. Both Sampath and Margayya realize that 'home' is the ultimate reality against the lands of their fanciful creation and return to it. Sampath at the end of the novel, moves towards home to get relief and Margayya actually finds solace in it, after the collapse of his financial-world. It is only Raju, in The Guide, who refuses to return to it and so is lost for ever.

Mr. Sampath

Mr. Sampath is built on a real life printer of Narayan's
'Indian Thought' a journal he edited for a short time. But Sampath the film-producer is an imaginative rendering. Narayan's printer was Cheluva Iyengar who died in 1983, in his seventy-second year. His many-sided personality is the basis on which Mr. Sampath is built. Commenting on this aspect T.S. Satyan writes thus: "No wonder that the celebrated author R.K. Narayan wrote a whole book based on the personality."

Narayan himself confesses thus: "I found Sampath, a charming friend, always cheerful, bouncing with enthusiasm, full of plans (although not for printing jobs) and involved in a score of jobs not concerning him."

The novel falls into two parts. The first part deals with Srinivas and his 'The Banner'. Srinivas is a realistically drawn character. He runs his journal 'The Banner' with a missionary zeal. He finds in Sampath a printer suited for his journal. But the novelist develops their relationship in a totally different way. The chance meeting of the two in the hotel Ananda Bhavan is described with an eye on reality. At Ananda Bhavan, where Srinivas takes his morning coffee he notices Sampath who keeps the whole establishment in good humour by his talk. Srinivas is attracted by his voice: "a rich baritone, which hovered above the babble of the hall like a drone."

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impressive is the description of Sampath’s personality.

Srinivas understood little of what he had been saying, since he spoke in Hindi and could be easily mistaken for a North Indian, with his fur cap and the scarf flung around his neck. He sat in a chair next to the proprietor at the counter and seemed to be receiving special attention, by the way waiters were carrying him plates and cups and pressing all sorts of things on him. Apparently he said something amusing to everyone who went near him, since everyone came away from him grinning. He seemed to be keeping the whole establishment in excellent humour, including the fat proprietor.  

When Srinivas learns that Sampath is a printer by profession, he desires to meet him to make use of his service in printing 'The Banner'. Even at the very beginning their relationship is built on a topsy-turvy note. When Srinivas invites Sampath for a talk Sampath condescends. Narayan describes the topsy-turvy situation humorously thus:

He decended from the counter with great dignity. He appeared to take charge of Srinivas immediately, although he had come at the latter's invitation. It was as if he were arranging a grand reception. He cried something to the proprietor in northern Indian accents and then called someone and sent him running upstairs. He sent someone else running in another direction. He kept the whole place spinning around. His voice commanded people hither and thither and held itself monarch above the din. People turned

4. Ibid., p.66.
their heads and stared at them. Presently, he said, with an elaborate note of invitation in his voice pointing at the staircase: 'This way, please.' Srinivas felt embarrassed and uttered a mild protest which the other brushed aside gently and said, 'You will be more comfortable there; we can talk quietly.' Srinivas began to be troubled by an uneasy feeling that he had perhaps given a totally false and grand impression of himself.

Sampath creates the impression that he is not a mere printer, but much more than that. Narayan gets a clue to develop his personality on imaginative lines. Srinivas's association with Sampath, during the period of 'The Banner' days, is much more than a editor-printer relationship. Sampath considers the journal as his own. During the period of the so called strike in Truth Printing Works, Sampath and Srinivas work like devils to bring out the last issue of the journal. Sampath assures Srinivas that he 'can do every bit of work myself, including gumming and pasting — '6 Sampath acts up to this principle. The episode connected with the last issue of 'The Banner' is an interesting story in itself. Sampath feels helpless at the so called strike of his men and he confesses that he is unable to print the journal. When Srinivas pleads for the issue of it Sampath in his characteristic style assures him 'Well Sir, I will do my best, if it costs me my life.' He keeps up his promise. Narayan

5. Ibid., pp.66-67.
6. Ibid., p.21.
7. Ibid., p.74.
describes Sampath the printer thus:

Downstairs the printer flung off his coat and took out a blue overall which had lain folded up in a cupboard. With elaborate ease he put it on and tied up the strings, rolled up his sleeves, smiled, and without a word parted the purple-dotted curtain and passed in.\(^8\)

He not only prints the journal but carries the bundles to the railway station and requests the station-master to send the bundles. When the station-master protests Sampath tells him:

Have pity on us and don't add to our troubles. You are at perfect liberty to throw these out. But please don't. You will be making hundreds of people suffer; just tell the guard to put these down at the stations marked and they will be taken charge of.\(^9\)

Not only Sampath lives up to his word but also takes the liberty of ending the life of 'The Banner'. He tells Srinivas that he has inserted a slip in the middle page of every copy which carries this note: 'Owing to some machine breakdown and general overhauling, 'The Banner' will not be issued for sometime.'\(^10\) With this, Sampath's realistic life as a printer ends. Narayan launches him into the imaginary film-world, very soon.

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8. Ibid., p.75.
9. Ibid., p.77.
10. Ibid., p.77.
Just as Sampath the printer is a neatly drawn realistic character, his domestic life is equally a realistic picture. He lives in an outhouse of a bungalow. When Srinivas pays a visit he at first mistakes the bungalow to be Sampath's but later on learns that Sampath lives in the backyard in an outhouse. Sampath plays a good host to Srinivas. He not only treats him with a nice breakfast but overwhelms him with the histrionic talents of his daughters. The entire picture, though a realistic presentation is filled with the characteristic humour of Narayan. The scene goes on thus:

"Well, we will have some entertainment now," he said. He called: 'Radhu!' and the young child came up. He said: 'Come on, darling, this uncle wants to see you dance. Call your sisters.' She looked happy at the prospect of a demonstration and called immediately: 'Sister! Chelli—' and a number of other names till all the four gathered. She said: 'Father wants us to dance.' ... The children assembled on a mat and asked: 'What shall we do, Father?' darting eager glances at their visitor. He thought it over and said: 'Well, anything you like, that thing about Krishna—' He pressed a couple of keys to indicate the tune. The eldest said with a wry face: 'Oh, that! We will do something else, Father.'

'All right, as you please. Sing that—' he suggested another song. Another child said, 'Oh, Father, we will do the Krishna one, Father.'

'All right.' And the printer pressed the keys of the harmonium accordingly. There were protests and counter protests, and they stood arguing till the printer lost his temper and cried arbitrarily:
''Will you do that Krishna song or not?'' And that settled it.¹¹

Instead of being entertained Srimvas is saddened by the performance. He feels unhappy. But, two more songs and dance acts follow in the same strain and Srimvas feels an oppression in his chest and wishes for the performance to stop. But it goes on and on. "There was another song, describing the divine dance of Shiva: the printer's voice at its loudest, and the thin voice of the children joined in a chorus."¹² Fortunately, to Srimvas's great relief a person interrupts the performance with the warning that the owner is dissatisfied with the terrible noise created by Sampath. Even then the performance goes on for another fifteen minutes. The entire scene is characteristically realistic. But Narayan ends the realistic note of the novel with the remark of Sampath "A friend of mine is starting a film company and I'm joining him."¹³ With this the novel moves on to the region of imaginative fantasy.

'Truth Printing Works' becomes the town office of the film corporation, when Sampath launches his 'Sunrise Pictures'. A comparable distinction exists between Sampath the printer and Sampath the film producer. Sampath of the

¹¹ Ibid., pp.86-87.
¹² Ibid., p.88.
¹³ Ibid., p.89.
film industry is a transformed person. He no longer appears in his faded tweed coat with the scarf flung around his neck. He flaunts a silk shirt and muslin dhoti and lace-edged upper cloth. Even his personality seems to have undergone a change. He parts his hair in the middle and takes a lot of care of his personal appearance. He drives an old Chevrolet and comes to his office precisely at three o'clock. Srinivas also notices a visible change in Sampath's character. He is no longer the usual loquacious Sampath. He is deeply involved in the production of a film and is madly in love with Shanti, a girl whom he calls his cousin and wishes to make her a super-star. Srinivas is worried over the disturbances in the hitherto peaceful domestic life of Sampath and expresses his concern over it. Sampath brushes it aside thus:

"Some people say that every sane man needs two wives — a perfect one for the house and a perfect one outside for social life... I have the one. Why not the other? I have confidence that I will keep both of them happy and if necessary in separate houses. Is a man's heart so narrow that it cannot accommodate more than one? I have married according to Vedic rites: 'let me have one according to the civil marriage law...'."

The writer's imagination has certainly translated Sampath's character. The vocabulary is not Sampath's. It is the author's. If Sampath of the 'Truth Printing Works' is..."
a realistically drawn picture, Sampath of the 'Sunrise Pictures' is a fictionally realistic one.

At the studio Sampath talks of only money. He talks in terms of thousands of rupees. He is ready to act the role of Shiva if the actor meant for it refuses to do it. He even wears a tiger's skin — the dress of Shiva and surprises Srinivas. The fictionally contrived Sampath's character reaches its nadir in 'The Burning of Kama' a film he desires to produce. M.K. Naik feels that 'Narayan is out of his depth in dealing with the pixilated film world as he is at home with ordinary middle class Malgudi life.'

The film world is superficially presented. Narayan is forced even to fall back on horseplay in his imaginative rendering of the plot. The characters, including that of Sampath are presented sketchily. The episode remains only as a pleasing imaginative construction. Sampath's infatuation for Shanti, Ravi's so called love for her and his made act, Srinivas's share in writing the script for the film, Sampath's role of Shiva and the final disaster of the film in a trice are all fictional stuff. Yet they are not false pictures of life. They are, rather, additions than comments on life. Fiction is added to facts of life to make the events fictionally realistic.

One of the merits of Mr. Sampath is that it ends on a note of realism. It ends with a note of faith in the

15. The Ironic Vision, p.34.
'predictable and relatively sane world of the common man.'  Srinivas returns to his old routine of 'The Banner'. The groans of the treadle in the Truth Printing Works is relatively saner than the shouts of 'cut', 'lights off', 'music', 'ready' and 'start' of the Sunrise studios. The film-world is only a temporary affair in Sampath's life. What remains permanent is the printing press with which he is associated. After the collapse of the film-world Sampath meets Srinivas to confess the truth, "I am a printer, when all is said and done." The reader does not suspect Sampath's credentials as a printer of Malgudi.  

The novel has a few eccentrics who serve the purpose of establishing the fictional connection with reality. Srinivas's landlord, a peevish miserly old man, who calls himself a sanyasi but is extremely materialistic, Ravi the poor clerk who is love-lorn and even Shanti the dream-girl of the film world who in real life is a widow with a son growing up are the eccentrics who contribute their experiences and oddities to make their fantastic world seem as realistic as our own.  

Mr. Sampath remains a comic extravaganza, if not a pure fantasy. But in the next novel, The Financial Expert, Narayan gets rid of this extravaganza. In it, he mixes fantasy and fact in a more harmonious way.  

17. Mr. Sampath, p. 215.  
The Financial Expert

Fictional realism is used at its best in *The Financial Expert* and the novel remains a masterpiece as far as the technique of fictional realism is concerned. The story of Margayya's meteoric rise in fortune and the sudden fall is nothing more than a fantasy. But to consider it as "unreal and incredible",¹⁹ is to remove the realistic aspect containing in it. Narayan bases his story on an event he has witnessed in his life. Such a financial magnate as Margayya did exist in the 1940's who wrecked the fortunes of others and wrecked his fortune too. P.S. Sundaram elaborates it thus: "There was in the 1940's a financial expert in Bangalore who like Margayya took huge deposits paying interests at high rates... Narayan of course must be knowing this real-life story."²⁰

The realistic scenes are only very few in the novel. Though the novel opens with the highly realistic scene of Margayya under the banyan tree, which is '"the settled norm - the stable background of the novel';²¹ it very soon passes into the land of imagination. Margayya, under the banyan tree and his domestic life are the only realistic pictures in the novel. Banker Margayya is a fictional contrivance.

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A graphic account of Margayya under the banyan tree is given in the beginning of the novel. It is a realistic picture of Margayya the financial expert who earns his bread with his advice and help on financial matters. He is described thus:

He kept more or less parallel accounts of at least fifty of the members of the bank. What its red-tape obstructed, he cleared up by his own contrivance. He carried most of the figures in his head. He had only to sight a customer (for instance Mallanna of Koppal, as it now happened to be) to say at once: 'Oh! you have come back for a new loan, I suppose. If you pay seventy-five rupees more, you can again take three hundred rupees within a week! The bye-law allows a new loan when fifty per cent is paid up.'

Margayya shows the way out to those in financial trouble. He is, in brief, an incalculable gift to them. His business is summed up in a beautiful manner thus:

He advanced a little loan (for interest) so that the little loan might wedge out another loan from the Cooperative Bank; which in its turn was passed on to someone in need for a higher interest. Margayya kept himself as the centre of all the complex transaction, and made all the parties concerned pay him for his services, the bank opposite him being involved in it willy-nilly.

23. Ibid., p.7.
Margayya's life under the banyan tree is as realistic and substantial, as Sampath's at 'Truth Printing Works'. But Margayya is not destined to be only a financial adviser. He aspires for greater heights. And Narayan turns him into a financial wizard. Margayya is disgusted with his lot under the banyan tree. He watches greedily at the huge cars driving towards Lawley Extension and wishes to possess one for himself. He feels that nothing is impossible in this world and Narayan converts this aspect of Margayya into a beautiful fantasy. He creates a few fantastical situations to make his hero succeed in his ambition. Two such incidents deserve observation. The first one is connected with the loss of the account book. The episode connected with it is a delightful stuff. It is built on an exaggeration of truth, and is presented as a fictionally realistic stuff. Margayya is found working with his accounts. Just then, his pet son Balu comes and disturbs him. Margayya shouts, 'Go and play, don't disturb me now,' but it is of no avail. Balu says, 'This is my play, I won't go.' The rest is fantasy. The boy takes possession of the account book, rushes into the street with his prize and finally flings the red book into the gutter that runs in front of houses. Margayya loses his account book and with that loses his realistic existence under the banyan tree. The novel takes a fabular turn.

24. Ibid., p.31.
25. Ibid., p.31.
In the words of M.K. Naik, "The suddenness with which Margayya's fortune changes, the factors responsible for this... have all a quality of something larger than real life, while the lesson all these events forcefully drive home is also typical of a fabular composition." 26

Fable takes control of fact ever since Margayya is evicted from the banyan tree. Margayya meets in quick succession a priest of a local temple, who tells him that wealth comes to those who pray for it single-mindedly. His prescriptions for the prayer include a red lotus among other things. It is in his search for red lotus that Margayya encounters Dr. Pal who unwittingly makes Margayya rich. The incident connected with Pal's selling his book Bed Life or the Science of Marital Happiness, to Margayya is as fantastic as Balu's throwing away the account book in the gutter. Dr. Pal assures Margayya that there is a lot of money in that book. The scene is depicted thus:

'My book Bed Life - you remember you saw it? -'

'Yes'.

'That's only a first step in the scheme... When that book is published, I expect to have at least a lakh of copies sold.'

'At what price?' asked Margayya.

'Say at about a rupee per copy. You must not price it higher than that. After all, our purpose is to reach the common man.'

'You mean to say that you are going to make a lakh of rupees out of it?'

'Yes, what is strange about that? That's only for a start.'

One Lakh of Rupees! One Lakh of Rupees! In Margayya's eyes this man began to assume grandeur. This lank fellow, cycling about and gathering news held within his palm a value of a lakh of rupees. Margayya was filled with admiration.

Narayan successfully hands over the money-crazy Margayya to the eccentric Dr. Pal. The result is a beautiful fantasy. Dr. Pal is the first stage of Margayya's new existence. He offers his manuscript for whatever has Margayya in his pocket. And twenty-five rupees are all the contents of his pocket. The fantastic scene of the bargain is pictured thus:

'This is all I have,' pleaded Margayya.

'I'm giving you all that I have for my part.'
Margayya said: 'I have to buy rice. I have a wife and child.'

'Don't be theatrical. Stick to your bargain. Here is something I'm giving you worth at least a lakh of rupees. In return for it, give me your purse. I will take it whether it contains one rupee or one thousand or none. Isn't it a fair bargain?'

When Margayya hesitates and even wonders at Pal's generosity in offering the manuscript, without he ever thinking of printing it by himself, Pal tells him: 'Everyman must make his choice in life. This is a cross-roads at which you are standing.'

28. Ibid., p. 72.
29. Ibid., p. 72.
He tempts Margayya with the prospective riches on hand and Margayya is tempted. He buys the book. Narayan successfully effects the first stage of Margayya's transformation. William Walsh remarks: "There is a fascinating paradox in this total act of religious faith required from Margayya about so secular an object as a work on the sociology of sex, and by so non-religious a figure as Dr. Pal." The miracle that the temple-priest has promised takes its course. Margayya meets the printer Sohan Lal and hands over the copy of his manuscript Bed Life that comes out in the form of Domestic Harmony combining in it Kama Sutra with Havelock Ellis. The episode connected with the publication of the book, the sale of a number of copies and Margayya's abandonment of it for a lump sum payment, run in quick succession as the events in a fantasy.

Margayya's next stage of life is that of a banker. It is here, Narayan takes up the story of Balu to make the novel more fictitious. Once again he uses Dr. Pal. Dr. Pal is instrumental in Margayya's rise to success and he is equally responsible in Margayya's downfall. He catches hold of Balu to bring the downfall of Margayya.

Balu-story is entirely fictitious. Right from the beginning he is presented as an evil-genius. As a child he remains a nuisance to his parents. He throws Margayya's

account book into the gutter and ironically effects a transformation in his father's life. Balu's eccentricity does not stop with this. When he grows older he remains a nuisance to his teachers. He tears his S.S.L.C. register as easily as he throws the account book into the gutter. He dislikes schools and examinations. And when being questioned by his father he runs away to Madras only to become a servant in a film studio. But he accepts his new role quite willingly. His association with the equally eccentric Madras Madman and the film world is a fabular version of reality. The Madras madman is a man who suffers from inflated ego. He believes that he is a messiah. He confesses: 'I am not god, but only god's agent... I write everyday to every King, Ruler, Viceroy, President and Minister in the world, that their boss is soon arriving and let them get ready for it.' 31

His greatest mission in life is to educate people about death. He says: 'It's my mission in life to inform at least ten mortals about Death each day and educate them. People must learn to view death calmly.' 32 Strangely, this madman owns a theatre and his relations manage it. He has this philosophy: 'Whenever anyone comes to me for employment in any of my businesses, I won't take him in unless he gives me his true address.' 33 Balu not only gives his true address but willingly becomes an employee under him. In fact, it is a

31. Ibid., p.138.
32. Ibid., p.139.
33. Ibid., p.139.
fantastic association of two madmen. The madman on his part writes a letter to Margayya about Balu's supposed death and Margayya goes over to Madras to find out the truth. Equally fictitious is the association of Margayya and the Inspector of Police whom he meets in the railway compartment. This police officer puzzles him with his remark: "Do you know I had to carry a notice of arrest even to Mahatma Gandhi once? I would rather have prostrated before that man, but I had to arrest him." It is this man who helps Margayya to meet Balu. Once again the episode connected with them is fabular. Uma Parameswaran comments on the episode of Balu thus: "The resolution of the mystery of Balu's supposed death is far too simple and implausible to be anything but a fantasy typical of Narayan."

The last section of the novel deals with Margayya's downfall and his return to his original state. The downfall of him is as quickly effected as his rise. Balu falls into bad company of Dr. Pal who spoils him thoroughly. Margayya is so absorbed in making money that he ignores his domestic life. Balu, though married, runs after women, takes to drinking and squanders wealth. He even demands for his share of property, at the instigation of Dr. Pal. Things come to such a pass that Margayya literally fights with Dr. Pal to

34. Ibid., p.135.
take revenge on him. Dr. Pal who is assaulted by Margayya proclaims that Margayya has run mad and any investment with him is a colossal waste of money. He tells Margayya's customers that things are not going smoothly with Margayya. And the customers demand Margayya to return their deposits; he is reduced to bankruptcy. Narayan depicts the scene thus:

By about four o'clock all the cash in the house was gone. All the mail sacks lay about empty and slack; yet peeping through the window, Margayya saw seas and seas of human heads stretching to the horizon, human faces at their most terrifying. The babble of the crowd was deafening... There seemed to be only one theme for all the cries: 'My money! My money gone! All my savings gone—'36

The fabular theme comes to an end with the insolvency of Margayya. He ends up where he begins. He once again becomes Margayya of the banyan tree fame. With all its fabular stuff the novel does not lose touch with reality. Rather, it ends with a note of realism. When Balu returns home, equally broke as his father is, Margayya's advice to him is:

'You see that box there. I have managed to get it out again... Its contents are intact as I left them years ago - a pen and an ink bottle. You asked for my property. There it is, take it; have an early meal tomorrow and go to the banyan

36. Ibid., p.176.
tree in front of the Co-operative Bank. I hope the tree is still there. Go there, that is all I can say: and anything may happen thereafter.'

When Balu hesitates, Margayya does not mind doing his old business under the banyan tree. He says: "... if you are not going, I am going on with it, as soon as I am able to leave this bed."

Though Margayya is reduced to bankruptcy he does not lose hope. He emphasises the need to stick on to reality. Fantasy is subordinated to fact, in this novel. At the end of the novel Margayya is back at the position he started from "but with an altered and enriched kind of awareness.'

Both Mr. Sampath and The Financial Expert are similar in their thematic contents. Ravi in Mr. Sampath though unwittingly, and Dr. Pal in The Financial Expert, quite deliberately bring in the ruin upon the protagonists. In both these novels, fable is well contained within the framework of reality. Both the novels start with the stable worlds - Printing Press and Banyan Tree - and move on to the world of fantastic creations only to return to realities at the end. But The Guide written during this period carries

37. Ibid., p.178.
38. Ibid., p.178.
a slightly different note. Fable takes possession of fact and the novel ends differently. The fabular world that the protagonist creates for himself outshadows the real world so much that he has no escape from it and he becomes a victim of his own creation.

The Guide

The Guide differs from both Mr. Sampath and The Financial Expert in the treatment of fictional realism, though it deals with the same theme of the illusory life of the protagonist. Fiction plays a significant part in this novel. Raju the hero of The Guide, like Kalo of Bhabhani Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger is carried away by his deception to a point of no return. Kalo's deception is deliberate; Raju's accidental. It is Raju's role as a sanyasi, which is the imaginative creation of the writer, that stands right at the centre of the novel and the entire action leads up to it. "The strange transformation of the hero from Railway Raju to recluse Raju; from a forge to a fakir; from a picaro to a pilgrim" 40 is so convincingly effected that fiction passes for fact in the novel. Though the theme is fantastical, the events leading from the "beginning to the conclusion of Raju's career, the links between the guide in the railway station and the Swami

in the temple, make up a natural, realistic sequence.'\(^{41}\)

Raju's story is partly narrated by himself and partly through an omniscient narrator. Both the points of view are juxtaposed from the very beginning of the novel. The hero is presented in different angles so much so that reality and fantasy mingle convincingly. This is achieved by a masterly narrative technique. In the words of Dieter Riemenschneider

"'The Guide represents the, perhaps, most sophisticated example of narrative technique in the Indo-English novel.'\(^{42}\)

The realistic incident of the novel confines itself only to an incident that Narayan knows. He describes it thus in his autobiography *My Days*:

A recent situation in Mysore offered a setting for such a story. A severe draught had dried up all the rivers and tanks; Krishnaraja Sagar, an enormous reservoir feeding channels that irrigated thousands of acres, had also become dry, and its bed, a hundred and fifty feet deep, was now exposed to the sky with fissures and cracks, revealing an ancient submerged temple, coconut stumps and dehydrated crocodiles. As a desperate measure, the municipal council organized a prayer for rains. A group of Brahmins stood knee-deep in water (procured at great cost) on the bed of Kaveri, fasted, prayed, and chanted certain mantras continuously for eleven days. On the twelfth day it rained, and brought relief to the countryside.


This was really the starting point of The Guide. During my travels in America, the idea crystallized in my mind. I stopped at Berkeley for three months, took a hotel room, and wrote my novel. 43

Narayan develops a highly fabular story out of this incident by bringing in his favourite sanyasi-theme. The enforced sainthood of Raju offers a very good scope for Narayan to fuse fiction with fact. The Guide remains much more fictional than both Mr. Sampath and The Financial Expert. However, it does not lose sight of reality. Nowhere in the novel the reader is forced to "diminish into a twittering world of enzymed shadows." 44 The fictitious events, deceptions, comical situations and the incredible acts are all balanced, nicely, against a greater reality and so the novel does not end up as a fantasy. The novel as Bruce King puts it, can be understood as, "a representative of the confusions of modern Indian life and especially of the difficulty in separating the true from the false in Indian spirituality." 45 Raju's career as a fake sanyasi, though fantastically drawn, is not quite improbable. Fake sanyasis are found everywhere and Raju is not an exception. Similarly, the villagers' implicit faith in sanyasis is not entirely

43. My Days, p.167.
fictitious. What is fictitious is the chain of events that the novelist creates to develop his plot. T.D. Brunton elaborating the fictitious quality of the novel feels that, 'the career of Raju himself is too fantastic for Narayan's essentially realistic mode to cope with and the book cannot overcome its inherent improbability.' Disagreeing with this Uma Parameswaran argues that The Guide is, 'the only one of Narayan's novels which comes close to having a perfect unity and a 'compound' of realism and fantasy.'

The novel has also attracted the attention of the reader in its ambiguous ending. Does Raju die? If so, is it because of fast or is it a sacrifice? Does it rain at all? These are questions that worry the readers' minds and Narayan does not give any answer. Similarly, Raju has been treated both as a martyr and as a fake sanyasi. Narayan describes a true sanyasi thus:

A Sannyasi is one who renounces everything and undergoes a complete change of personality. Why one would become a Sannyasi is not easily answered - a personal tragedy, or frustration, a deeply compelling philosophy of life, or a flash of illumination may drive one to seek a change. Whatever the cause, when one becomes a 'sannyasi',

46. T.D. Brunton, 'India in Fiction', Critical Essays in Indian Writing in English, p.221.
47. A Study of Representative Indo-English Novelists, p.63.
one obliterates one's past.''

Raju, however, does not obliterate his past. Neither does he renounce the world completely. He is forced to fast and meditate for the sake of others. He stands up at the end, up to his knees in water to pray for rains. It is his 'collaboration - uneasy, desperate and finally total - with the expectations of the people that turns their immense illusion into something like the truth.' In keeping with the expectation of the people, Raju sacrifices his life; rather the novelist does away with him. Narayan himself admits that the death of Raju happens even before his birth. In My Days he narrates the situation thus:

Graham Greene liked the story when I narrated it to him in London. While I was hesitating whether to leave my hero alive or dead at the end of the story, Graham was definite that he should die. So I have on my hands the life of a man condemned to death before he was born and grown, and I have to plan my narrative to lead to it.

It therefore becomes necessary to differentiate what is fantasy and what is realistic in The Guide. Of the three stages of Raju's life Railway Raju is the realistically drawn picture. Rosie's lover and manager of dance performances,

the second stage, is a slightly heightened version of 
reality and the third stage namely Raju's role as a sanyasi 
is purely fabular. To effect the change from the realistic 
railway Raju to that of a fake sanyasi Narayan uses his 
technique of fictional realism.

The first stage of Raju's life is convincingly drawn. 
He narrates the picture thus:

The railways got into my blood very early in life. 
Engines with their tremendous clanging and smoke 
ensnared my senses. I felt at home on the railway 
platform and considered the station-master and the 
porter the best company for man, and their railway 
talk the most enlightened. I grew up in their 
midst. 51

Though Raju runs a 'Hut Shop' in his house opposite 
Malgudi Railway Station, his heart is not in shop-business. 
He is interested in reading books of all sorts. He confesses: 
"I read stuff that interested me, bored me, baffled me... 
I read stuff that picked up a noble thought, a philosophy 
that appealed, I gazed on pictures of old temples and ruins 
and new buildings and battleships... I learnt much from 
the scrap." 52  It is this learning that helps him to take 
upon the role of a tourist guide. Narayan very carefully

52. Ibid., p.44.
and in a credible way prepares the hero to take upon his new assignment namely that of a tourist guide. Nothing is unnatural in this transformation. Raju fits into his new role quite easily. In a few months time he becomes a much sought after tourist guide. If the tourist is of a scholarly type Raju does not guide him at all. If he is of the average type Raju astonishes him with the figures and facts from his head. He is helpful to tourists of all sorts. If they want roll-films he is ready to get it from Malgudi Photo Bureau. If they wish to see a tiger or an elephant he accompanies them to Mempi Forest. If tourists like Rosie desire to see a cobra dance he is ready to take them to the place of the show. It is this attitude in him, which we notice in Nataraj in a later novel The Man Eater of Malgudi, that brings upon him his ruin. When Rosie, the dance girl, expresses her strange desire to see, ''a cobra - a king cobra it must be, which can dance to the music of a flute.'" Raju immediately accepts to fulfil her desire. Not only that; he even entertains a sharp desire to please the girl, as he finds out that her husband is too egotistical. With his characteristic shrewdness he learns that Rosie and Marco are an ill-matched pair. Anything that interests Rosie irritates Marco. Her 'dance' appears to be 'street-acrobatics' for him. Raju, on the other hand, flatters her by calling her ''World's artist number one!'" He assures

53. Ibid., p.57.
54. Ibid., p.74.
her that he would make the world recognize her talents. They become lovers. The second stage of Raju's life starts with his love for Rosie. Narayan effects this as quickly as he makes Raju a tourist guide from the railway Raju. The next part that Raju takes upon himself is that of an art patron. From the lover to that of an art-patron, is not an easy job and Raju realises that he has slipped into a fool's paradise. It is at this stage Gaffoor the taxi-driver advises him to get rid of Rosie. He tells him: 'Send her away and try to get back to ordinary real life. Don't talk all this art business. It's not for us.' Raju's infatuation for Rosie confuses his senses. He views the world outside Rosie as an unreal one. He mistakes illusion for reality. Not caring for Gaffoor's advice or his mother's threat Raju continues to live with Rosie as her lover and patron. He names her as Nalini and even wishes to obliterate his name thinking that by changing the names they would lead a different existence. He learns to speak fluently on cultural matters. He creates an impression that unless he is present Nalini cannot dance. However, he is conscious of the fact that Nalini became known, for she had the genius in her. But Raju knows the part he has to play in this stage of his life. He narrates it thus:

In every show I took, as a matter of right, the middle sofa in the first row. I gave it out that

55. Ibid., p.144.
that was my seat wherever I might go, and unless I sat there Nalini would be unable to perform. She needed my inspiring presence. I shook my head discretely; sometimes I lightly tapped my fingers together in timing. When I met her eyes, I smiled familiarly at her on the stage. Sometimes I signalled her a message with my eyes and fingers, suggesting a modification or a criticism of her performance.  

Nalini also, in the beginning, feels grateful to him. She tells him: "Even if I have seven rebirths I won't be able to repay my debt to you." But this sort of make-believe life does not last long. Raju himself admits: "Gradually arguments began to crop between us, and that, I said, put the final husband-wife touch on our relationship." Nalini gets tired of Raju. Some dangerous weariness seems to come over her. It is at this juncture Marco's book, sent as a gift to Raju, arrives to spell a doom on their relationship. Raju hides the book from her sight and Rosie verbally fights with him. She confesses that Marco after all is her husband and his reputation is her pride. Raju's unnatural existence with Nalini comes to an end with the arrival of Marco's letter to Nalini promising her a box of jewellery. Raju forges the letter and that settles the issue. He lands himself in jail. Rosie merely expresses: "This is 'Karma'. What can we do?"
In fact, the law of karma works more effectively after this. Raju completes his jail-term and starts a new career willy-nilly. This is the third stage in his life. When he is resting in a holy shrine he is mistaken for a holyman. Innocent villagers seek him out daily for practical advice and words of spiritual consolation. Raju plays his role as easily as he does the other parts. In the words of Shirley Chew, "Raju's character has no solid centre but he can always rely on a darting intelligence, the instinct of an actor who cannot let his audience down...." He is initiated into sainthood by a quirk of fate. His presence in the temple, his random utterances and his long beard are mistaken by the villagers. Though conscious of the fact that he is not a sanyasi, Raju plays this role for two reasons. First, he gets his daily food because of it. Next, he does not want to shake the faith of the villagers. As he himself confesses: "There were of course, two ways open; to bluff one's way through and trust to luck or to make a clean breast of it all." He tries in vain to announce that he is not a saint. He tells Velan, his trusted disciple, "I am not a saint, Velan, I'm just an ordinary human being' like anyone else." But the law of karma operates more fiercely.

62. Ibid., p.99.
His confession adds more reverence on the part of Velan. The saint's past is not a matter of concern; only his present is important. His present holiness would save Mangala from its drought. So, he must fast and meditate. The villagers thrust this task upon him. Once again, Narayan builds a farcical situation to enforce this task on Raju. Draught sets in and the villagers become too engrossed in the rising problem of famine. Raju feels that he is neglected. Even Valen his devoted disciple is more engaged in village feuds than in his attention on Raju. It is at this stage Raju threatens not to eat unless the villagers stop fighting. This ultimatum is transmitted in quite a different way, by Velan's brother, who is stupid to the core. He connects the draught with the Swami's refusal to take food and it works adversely. The villagers conclude that the Swami goes on fast in order that it may rain in Mangala. They become eloquent over this idea:

This Mangala is a blessed country to have a man like the Swami in our midst. No bad thing will come to us as long as he is with us. He is like Mahatma. When Mahatma Gandhi went without food, how many things happened in India! This is a man like that. If he fasts there will be rain. Out of his love for us he is undertaking it. This will surely bring rain and help us.63

63. Ibid., p.90.
Raju undertakes the fast much against his will. At one time he even entertains the idea of running away from Mangala but the thought of the villagers' gratitude prevents him. He even confesses that he is not a saint, but Velan does not admit it. Rather, he gives a clear account of what Raju the Saviour is expected to do: "Stand in knee-deep water, look to the skies, and utter the prayer lines for two weeks, completely fasting during the period." Velan emphasizes: "Your penance is similar to Mahatma Gandhi's. He has left us a disciple in you to save us." Raju realizes that he has worked himself into a position from which he cannot get out. Pathetically, he remembers his mother's words: "If there is one good man anywhere, the rains would descend for his sake and benefit the whole world." He realizes the enormity of his self deception but continues to play the 'good man'. Even during the time of fast, he deceives himself. When James J. Malone, the American journalist asks him whether he has been a yogi always, Raju replies in the affirmative. The final deception occurs when he entertains the hallucination that it has started raining in the hills. He tells: "Velan, it's raining in the hills, I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs-".

64. Ibid., p.95.
65. Ibid., p.93.
66. Ibid., p.97.
67. Ibid., p.221.
With these words he sags down. Even the novelist finds it difficult to save such a character. The guide, misguides himself and is deceived by his own self. Raju deceives himself in the beginning when he starts living with Rosie forgetting the reality that she is after all Marco's wife. His illusion is shattered when Rosie does not shed a drop of tear on his arrest. But he does not learn a lesson. Impelled by a desire to lead a care-free life and carried away by the faith of the villagers, Raju deceives himself for the second time into thinking himself as a saint. This is a greater deception for he is 'pitted not against a vindictive husband, but against the vengeful nature of an image he has so steadily built up for himself.' It is this image that spells his doom. The shadow kills the substance. The interaction of fact and fiction has a special meaning in The Guide. Viewed realistically the novel recounts the ups and downs in Raju's personal life. Considered poetically it deals with the problem of evil and self-deception in man. It is this problem of evil and egotistical nature in man that forms the key-note of Narayan's other novels The Man Eater of Malgudi and The Vendor of Sweets, which depend so much on fables for their themes, that they remain more fabular and less realistic than The Guide.

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68. Shirley Chew, Readings in Commonwealth Literature, p.70.