Chapter II
Characters with an Element of Eccentricity
Chapter II

Characters with an Element of Eccentricity

The unaccountable actions and failures to act, the queer interests and inexplicable emotions, the delusions, and so on, have a significance in the total mental economy of the person which is concealed from his conscious self. His mind is to that extent divided against itself and failing to maintain its wholeness. Parts of it that are influencing his actions and feelings are nevertheless not within his purview, nor within the control, of the organized hierarchy of interests and sentiments which the person has come to regard as his ‘self’. (Harding 118)

The second implication of the dialectic of being and becoming for the characters of R. K. Narayan is that of becoming a split personality or a neurotic one and the consequential odd and eccentric behaviour. Many of R. K. Narayan’s characters become odd and eccentric in their outlook and behaviour during the course of their life due to this dialectic. But before discussing them, it is befitting to know the meaning of the term ‘eccentric’ and it usage. The Pocket Oxford Dictionary defines an eccentric as a person “who is odd and capricious in his behaviour and appearance, a person who is not placed at the center of his psyche”. The Compact Oxford Dictionary defines an eccentric as a person “who is unconventional and slightly strange and who is not placed centrally, whose axis is not placed centrally”. According to Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary, “Eccentric is a person who deviates from the recognized or customary character or practice; who is not concentric”. The Encyclopedia Britannica describes the word eccentric “as something or someone ‘out from the centre’ and is thus used to connote generally any deviation from the normal”. Thus, it can be derived from the above definitions that an eccentric
is an abnormal person who lacks any real conviction and remains away from the center of his real-self. Eccentricity is related to one’s existence, to self-hood and individuality. It is a sign of pathology arising out of an opposite self which remains active and works parallel to our real-self.

A person turns eccentric when he feels torn between his being and the process of his becoming and starts living at two levels of his self-conscious and unconscious. Such a person, though, fulfills his social duties, does not believe in the social norms and values from his core-self, but still obeys them, frivolously and ostensibly. He curbs his inner desires and aspirations in favour of his social roles, but such an unconscious suppression of his inner desires creates a split in his personality and he turns out to be a neurotic. This neurosis gives birth to certain oddities and eccentricities of character and behaviour. But such human beings are not like deviants as in spite of the oddities and eccentricities of their character they do not create social and moral tension in society. In spite of all their oddities, they are able to perform their social roles and duties or accomplish their moral tasks.

But, though their neurosis does not come in the way of their social roles, it comes in the way of their individuation. The roles they play and the things they do fail to get any sanction from their inner self. They do not believe themselves in them and, as a result, all their actions and roles appear as if having an air of ostentation in them. This difference or disharmony between their thoughts and actions, their value structure and their deeds, creates a dichotomy or split in their individual self too. D. W. Harding observes in this regard:

This is simply the central effort of a living being to remain an integrated whole and avoid the tension that results from actions
conflicting with the stable features of his personality, such as his sentiments and the established hierarchy of his values. (54)

He further observes about the character and behaviour of such odd and eccentric persons,

But as far as we manage to remain integrated and to see the clash between our actions and our sentiments about such actions, we shall experience what we call a sense of guilt, the disagreeable awareness of a disharmony within us that our own actions have created. (54)

The oddities and eccentricities of a person arise out of the mind’s failure to achieve or maintain integration. C. P. Sharma has observed about such characters of R. K. Narayan’s fictional world, “... the individual is shown to be a disintegrating personality with one part of the mind pulling him back to the social norms, while the other pushing him forward to march with the advance of times so as to attain personal fulfillment” (211).

Many critics and psychologists have tried to interpret this split or neurosis and have reached at various conclusions. The real reason of all this chaos lies in the interplay of being and becoming and results from their difference. This conflict takes place not at the conscious level of the individual, but at the subconscious or unconscious levels. C. G. Jung in his psychoanalytical studies found that this neurosis results from the conflict of opposite forces. Jung's theory of neurosis is based on the premise of a self-regulating psyche composed of tensions between opposing attitudes of the ego and the unconscious. Neurosis is a significant unresolved tension between these contending attitudes. He observed about a neurotic, “He hears and does not hear; he sees, yet is blind; he knows and is ignorant” (Man and his Symbols 33). In this way, a neurotic lives a double life- one for his own-self and the second for the
others, for the world outside. This is true of the odd and eccentric characters of R. K. Narayan also who too lead a double life such as the old man (Mr. Sampath), Jagan (The Vendor of Sweets), Madhu (The Talkative Man) and Nagaraj (The World of Nagaraj).

C. G. Jung further observed that neuroses are the results of a person’s failure to confront and accept some archetypal components of the unconscious. Instead of assimilating this unconscious element into their consciousness, neurotic individuals persist in projecting it upon some other person or object. For Jung this projection means,

an unconscious, automatic process whereby a content that is unconscious to the subject transfers itself to an object, so that it seems to belong to that object. The projection ceases the moment it becomes conscious, that is to say when it is seen as belonging to the subject.

(Archetypes and Collective Unconscious 60)

This habit of projecting things upon others can be seen in the case of persons who feel and say “I am the only wise or honest man of the world”, or “I am the only right person in the crowd”, or “Whatever I do is right and all others do wrong”. It is quite common that one projects his own unconscious faults and weaknesses on others much more easily than he can accept them as part of his own nature. R. K. Narayan’s characters too impose their own faults or weaknesses of character unconsciously upon others and fail to accept them. For example, the old man and Jagan are in the habit of finding faults with everyone in the town and consider themselves the only wise men of the world. They pose to be ascetic or sanyasi only to hide and justify their meanness and selfishness.
According to Jacques Lacanian psychoanalysis, a human subject after having separated from ‘the real’ and having entered into ‘the symbolic’ tries to go back to ‘the real’. That is why there is always a keen desire in him to be gratified by the entities existing in the symbolic order. Unfortunately, ‘the symbolic’ can only misrepresent ‘the real’; hence the subject always remains ungratified. So, unable to be gratified by the symbolic, the human subject keeps on substituting one desire with the other and remains fragmented. In the process of the dialectic of being and becoming, a person moves ahead on the path of becoming a member of society and learns certain lessons for this role. He tries to adopt the values which are related to the society he lives in, but these values can not get a real sanction from his being, the center of his core-self. Though he fails to believe in that value system, but he does not dare go against it. As a result, a split comes in his personality. He starts acting upon something without believing in it. He tries to betray his own real-self and gets divided within. He lives two lives, one for his conscious self and second for his unconscious self. As a result, he plays his social roles, but not to the satisfaction of the members of his clan. He appears quite odd and awkward and is unable to assimilate with the social milieu.

Though these odd and eccentric persons are accepted and accommodated by the society, but they, as D. W. Harding observes, “are encapsulated within the social tissue and made irrelevant by being pronounced cranky” (115). So, they live in the shell of their own inside the social milieu made up of their own value system like an island amid a vast ocean. The odd and eccentric people undergo great pulls and pushes inside their own-self and remain divided. They suppress one part of their own-self to maintain normality in behaviour and wholeness in personality, and this suppression leads to a split in their personality. But this does not mean that a whole or
integrated mind is one without any conflict. Both a person with a whole mind and a person with a divided mind undergo conflict, but in the case of a spilt-minded person it is in the form of repression which takes place at the unconscious level. But in the case of a whole mind this conflict takes place at the lower mental level. The process of choice and conscious rejection, as in the case of a whole mind, is entirely different from the repression of a divided mind, in which the conscious self loses awareness of and control over the repressed impulse. D. W. Harding has observed,

Conscious tension and the conscious need for choice are signs of integration. The fact that we experience tension between an impulse and some opposed sentiment means that we are holding the incompatibles together in a complex mental whole. From such conscious conflict arises the possibility of development. (119)

So, whereas in the case of a split personality unconscious repression is the hologram, in the case of an integrated mind, the symbol is conscious choice and rejection of one impulse in favour of the other. Even Earnest Jones has observed this aspect of human mind and has concluded, “The basic feature of normality is freedom from unconscious anxiety and its various disguises” (qtd. in Harding 118). In this way, the unconscious anxiety, as in the case of odd and eccentric persons, is a manifestation of the mental process by which one part of our mental life is repressed or prevented from ever reaching the conscious level. The result of this unconscious anxiety or conflict is the split in personality, and the oddities and eccentricities of behaviour arising out of such split.

The odd and eccentric characters of R. K. Narayan too suffer because of such split in their personality. Though they manage to play their social roles, but lack any real conviction in them. They too live a segregated life amid the social milieu and are
unable to synthesize with the other social participants. They have a different philosophy of life and are in the habit of finding faults with everything they see. They lead a double life one for their own-self and one for others. This aspect of dual personality is seen in all the cases of eccentric characters taken from the various novels of R. K. Narayan. Narayan paints this duality of character very beautifully and sympathetically and makes it a great source of humour and laughter in his novels. He assimilates this humour and laughter with the action of his novels in such a way that it becomes an inseparable part of his fictive writing. But the incongruities of his characters do not irritate readers, they rather amuse them. Jayant K. Biswal has observed about the comic vision of R. K. Narayan,

R. K. Narayan’s vision is primarily comic. It is comic in a broad philosophic sense, which enables him to weave all the bizarre events into a beautific vision of life; in which every small event, every small acquaintance, however, insignificant and absurd it might seem, turns out to have a meaningful role in the eternal scheme of things. (1)

R. K. Narayan tackles the oddities and eccentricities of his characters very delicately, which makes him one of the greatest humorists of Indo-Anglian literature. What John Palmer says about Shakespeare’s comic plays seems to hold good for Narayan’s novels too,

The appeal of his comic characters, even as we laugh at them, is to the touch of nature which makes the whole world kin. A delicate balance is constantly sustained in the person of the play between the folly which makes them laughable and the simplicity which makes them lovable, between the frailties or faults which lay them open to
rebuke and a common humanity with ourselves which calls for charity and secures for them an immediate understanding. (346)

Taking up such eccentric characters and protagonists from R. K. Narayan’s select novels, comes the character of the old landlord in Mr. Sampath, the old widower in whose house Srinivas lives on rent. Though he has several sons and daughters, but he lives all alone as he is not on speaking terms with any of them. He lives a double life- one for his own-self which is miserly and full of selfishness, and second for others which is the life of asceticism. He is a money-minded person who tries to earn the maximum money but does not spend even ten rupees a month on his own-self. The following narrative gives appropriate expression to the selfish, hypocritical and eccentric nature of the old man:

He bathed at the street-tap and fed himself on cooked rice, which was distributed as charity in a nearby temple. He was known to have declared to everyone concerned: “The true Sanyasi has no need to live on anything more than the leavings of God”. (7)

Thus, he claims himself to be an ascetic who has renounced everything, but which actually is his attempt to hide his selfishness. He boasts of his simple life and living in a small room. He claims, “I have no home. Didn’t I tell you that I am a Sanyasi, though I don’t wear ochre robes? Come, come with me. I live in a small room which a friend has given me” (9).

The old man lives in a room which he feigns to be given by one of his friends, but actually that room is taken by him forcibly from one of his debtors in lieu of his loan. Though he has several buildings of his own in the town, but he lives there to get compensated for the loan he has given to the master of that house. He is a miser who wants that his tenants should also live their life according to his eccentricities. He is
so possessive about his property that he does not want that any of his tenants should
drive a nail into the walls of his house. He becomes furious whenever he sees
someone driving a nail into his house or ruining the plaster of the walls, and because
of this he does not give his house on rent to anyone who has an attachment for
pictures and paintings. He is hateful even of children and calls them “a bane” because
they, in his opinion, create great uproar in the locality, and because he “had enough
trouble from my own children; I don’t want any more from strangers” (10). His
oddities and eccentricities become really intolerable for the people related to him.

The old man is a cynic and feels troubled even by the slightest complaint of
his tenants. He is full of grudges and finds fault with everyone and about everything.
He goes to his tenants on the second of every month to collect his money, but does not
listen even to their genuine demands and becomes harsh even at the mention of them.
He says, “I have given them (the tenants) a water-tap which they have not learnt to
use without tearing each other. I sometimes feel so sick of seeing all these crudities
that I blame God for keeping me in this world so long” (50). This is how he responds
and answers when he sees his tenants fighting on the issue of water, “I have known
days when people managed without any tap at all; there used to be only a single well
for a whole village. It doesn’t depend upon that, but people have lost all
neighbourliness in these days, that’s all” (50-51).

Thus, his behaviour is strange and eerie, and is full of selfishness and
cynicism. He believes that one should not use tooth-brush to clean one’s teeth as its
bristles are made of a pig’s tail, and instead of it one should use margosa or banyan
twigs as it is mentioned there in the *shastras* (scriptures). The following statement of
him gives ample expression to his eccentric outlook:
Fancy men parting and combing their hair like women! How beautiful and manly it was in those days when at your age you had only a very small tuft and shaved off the head. That’s why people in those days were so clear-headed. (52)

This observation shows about the oddities and eccentricities of his character as he believes that by keeping his head shaved clean one can achieve clarity of thoughts which in itself is quite eccentric and laughable, and tells volumes about his frivolous philosophy of life and religiosity.

The old man is a hypocrite who boasts of conquering the self, but fails in conquering even his sense of taste. As he says to Srinivas,

I’m a Sanyasi, my dear young man- and no true Sanyasi should eat more than once a day.... As a Sanyasi I have given up coffee completely, but it is a sin not to accept something offered.... One bad habit not able to conquer... (54)

He claims to be an ascetic who has renounced everything, yet he does not refuse to anything which is offered to him as charity. On being offered coffee the old man says, “You forget, sir. that I am a very old man and a Sanyasi, at that; I should never indulge in all this, though I’m inclined that way. It is not good for my soul” (119). In fact, he is a selfish and money minded person, but feigns to be spiritual. He claims to have lost all interest in money and materialistic things, yet he is very particular about the collection of monthly rent from his tenants. He makes a lot of money every month. but does not spend anything on his own-self. He lives alone and has no one to take care of him; but feels happy with his lot. He says, “There is no loneliness for a Sanyasi like me. If I keep repeating ‘Om’, I have the best companion on a lonely way” (124).
The old man is a miser who does not spend even a penny and lives a life which costs him nothing. He lives in a small room which does not cost him anything, though he has large property in his name; lives upon the food which is distributed in the temple as charity and takes bath at the municipal street tap which is actually meant for the poor people of Malgudi town. Though he does not part with a single penny, but becomes ready to give a large amount of money to Sampath who gives him the temptation of earning thousands of rupees through the production of the film. He, in fact, is a selfish businessman who makes a lot of money out of his income of monthly rents which he collects from his tenants, but claims to have nothing in his possession. Even his sons and daughters do not come to him and live far away because of his meanness and selfish nature.

The character of the old landlord is a parody on sanyas or asceticism. He claims to be a Sanyasi, but is actually a travesty, a simulacrum. He is a pseudo-saint who does not follow any of the principles of sainthood. Before analyzing the character of old man in terms of sainthood it is imperative to invoke Immanuel Kant who has observed that before discussing anything of a field, it is essential to trace its meaning and know the whole terminology of the field. Words such as Sanyasi, Gyani, Rishi and Muni are used in the Indian tradition to describe a spiritual person. In the Indian tradition Sanyasi is considered to be a person who is centered in his being. There is no becoming for him as he has already transcended the process of becoming and has reached the state of complete renunciation. A Sanyasi is one who has renounced everything and who lives on whatever is offered to him. He has no possession or abode to live and wanders from one place to the other without staying anywhere permanently. He does not save anything for himself nor does he feel worried about the next time’s meal. Gyani is a person who has a deep knowledge of scriptures and
religious books. He has certain realization of the divine being, though he may not have established his being. *Rishi* represents a person with whom the genealogical system started. It is believed in Indian spiritual tradition that every person is the genealogical descendent of one or the other of the *Rishis*. *Muni* represents a person who is spiritually wise, but remains silent in all circumstances. He rises above the pain and suffering of this mortal body and accepts everything with equal indifference.

The old landlord in the form of a *pseudo-sanyasi* poses to be a person who has renounced everything including his home, food and relatives. But actually he is mean who does not know the real meaning of *sanyas*. He claims to have lost all sense of taste, but relishes when something is offered to him as charity. He does not follow any of the principles of asceticism. He is completely selfish and purely materialistic in his approach towards life. He, unlike a true ascetic, is full of desires for money and materialistic things. He is so pathologically attached to his house that he gets irritated and becomes angry when any of his tenants tries to drive a nail into its walls. Thus, his self-posed asceticism is shallow which does not help him in coming out of the grooves of meanness and selfishness.

The character of the old landlord can also be analysed in Jungian terms. He, like C. G. Jung’s neurotics, has many weaknesses of character and complexes in his personality which he does not accept and unconsciously projects them on others. He is a selfish human being, but does not accept his selfishness. He tries to justify his meanness and miserliness by unconsciously relating it to his ascetic principles of simplicity and renunciation. But his hypocrisy is exposed in the course of the novel. For him the salvation of a soul lies in such small matters as the renunciation of coffee and habits of taste; but he ignores such vital things as one’s behaviour and relationship with others. The selfish nature and behaviour of him which actually
delves him deep in worldly temptations and snares, and which hinders his spiritual growth, does not appear to him bad at all.

Jagan, the protagonist of *The Vendor of Sweets*, is also an odd and eccentric fellow like the old landlord. It is his peculiarities and angularities of character and behaviour which actually make Jagan so memorable as he really is. He leaves a deep impression on the hearts and minds of the readers by way of his peculiar oddities and eccentricities of character which become a source of great humour and laughter in the novel. This is what Shiv K. Gilra observes regarding the comic aspect of the novel,

> **THE VENDOR OF SWEETS** is richly comic in the incongruities of its central character, Jagan, the ageing Sweet-vendor. The theme of juxtaposition of tradition and modernity, a recurring source of comedy in Narayan’s fiction, is treated here in a comical-fantastic manner.

(102)

Jagan turns out to be a selfish businessman in the course of the novel who uses his Gandhian principles and eccentricities to justify his meanness and selfishness. This is what P. S. Ramana has observed about the personality of Jagan, “Jagan is a curious mixture of an uncanny business sense, a few Gandhian fads and some eccentric theories” (107).

Jagan is a second generation character who is a sweet-vendor and has accepted his social role. He leads a calm and peaceful life in the Malgudi social milieu. He fulfills all the demands which the Malgudi society makes upon him. He has lost his wife at an early age, but has brought up his son with utmost love and care. He has always cared more for his son than his own-self and has sacrificed his individual urges for the sake of him. Like any other second generation character he gives more importance to his social roles than to his own whims and fancies. He passively
accepts those traditions and customs and patterns of social behaviour which are
sanctioned by generations, but becomes odd and eccentric in this process.

Jagan passively performs the role of a son, a brother, a husband and a father
and does what his society desires of him. As narrated in the novel, he had strong
desire to see his future wife, but he was strictly told to behave sensibly and “not to be
too communicative, as a certain mysteriousness was invaluable in a son-in-law”
(133). He had married according to the wishes of the society and had suppressed his
individual urges for the sake of his adjustment in the social milieu. He curbs his being
while undergoing through the process of becoming a useful member of society, but
this unconscious suppression of being, the natural core-self, leads to a schism in his
personality. He becomes neurotic and out of his neurosis arises his abnormal
behaviour. Because of the split in his personality, he starts believing in things without
having his inner sanction to them. All his beliefs are mechanical and lack any deeper
conviction.

Jagan poses to be a regular reader of Bhagavad Gita, but his reading of the
sacred book is mechanical like many real people of society and it is without any of his
real belief in it. He talks of conquering the self like the old man of Mr. Sampath, but
does not know the purpose behind it. He claims that he is on the way to rise above
everything by conquering his self and for this, he tells, he has lost all sense of taste:

“Conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self,” said Jagan to
his listener, who asked, “Why conquer the self?” Jagan said, “I do not
know, but all our sages advice us so”. (1)

To impress others he tells that he has given up sugar and salt and that he would take
only natural sugar and salt, but fails to explain the real meaning of it. He behaves in
an odd and eccentric manner and keeps on beating the drum of nature cure. He has his
own philosophy of life and nature. He believes that one should not use tooth-brush in
life because its bristles are made of pig’s tail and “It’s unthinkable that anyone should
bite a pig’s tail first thing in the morning” (12), he says. “He (Jagan) never ceased to
feel grateful to his father for planting a seedling in his time and providing him with a
perennial source of twigs—enough for his generation and the next—considering the
dimensions of the tree” (12).

Jagan further feels that his son has grown weak because he keeps on wearing
footwear all the time and his body does not come in contact with the current of the
earth which, in Jagan’s view, is a life-giving element and is a source of great mental
and physical energy, in the absence of which a person may suffer heart-stroke. This is
how he justifies his views,

Socks should never be worn, because they are certain to heat the blood
through interference with the natural radiation which occurs through
one’s soles, and also because you insulate yourself against beneficial
magnetic charges of the earth’s surface. . . . this is one of the reasons, a
possible reason, for heart attacks in European countries. (53)

Jagan’s eccentric philosophy of nature cure becomes a constant source of trouble and
torture for his poor wife and his son. “His wife refused to associate herself with any of
his health-giving activities. She hated his theories and lived her own life” (13). He did
not let his wife take an aspirin or any other pain-killing tablet as he believed that it
may have an adverse effect on her health. “Seated beside the ancient pillar in their
courtyard, she had knotted a towel around her temples and swayed madly back and
forth, desperately begging for aspirin” (13). His wife passed away at last after
suffering for many days and left her son Mali behind to Jagan’s care. But Mali hates
his father very much because he feels that he and his weird health practices had been
the cause of his mother’s death. Thus, Jagan turns out to be a boundless fountain of natural health theories and represents a typical middle aged Indian in this respect. But his theories do not have any practical relevance and are the results of his odd and eccentric character. One wonders as from where has Jagan derived all these natural theories and what is the source of all his health-related knowledge,

It was impossible to disentangle the sources of his theories and say what he owed to Mahatmaji and how he had imbibed from his father, who had also spent a lifetime perfecting his theories of sound living and trying them on himself, his coconut trees, children and wife. (12)

Another major eccentricity of Jagan’s character is his belief in the Gandhian ideals of non-violence and non-cooperation. He cherishes many Gandhian fads and R. K. Narayan has given an impartial description of them. Jagan claims to be a great follower of Mahatma Gandhi, but lacks any real faith. He boasts of his Gandhian ideals not because he has any real faith in them, but because he wants to cast an impression upon others by citing them. This is how he uses his Gandhian eccentricities to impress others,

"Being a follower of Gandhi", he (Jagan) explained, "I do not like to think that some living creature should have its throat cut for the comfort of my feet," and this occasionally involved him in excursions to remote villages where a cow or calf was reported to be dying. When he secured the hide he soaked it in some solution, and then turned it over to an old cobbler he knew, who had his little repair shop under a tree in the Albert Mission compound. (3)

Jagan wants to have his footwear made of the hide of an animal which has died a natural death and has not been killed intentionally by someone (butcher or cobbler).
Such eccentricities of Jagan cause a great trouble to his family members and his whole household is disturbed by them. “The presence of the leather at home threatened to blast his domestic life; he had to preserve it, in the early stages of tanning, out of his wife’s reach in the fuel shed, where there was danger of rats nibbling it” (3).

Jagan uses the same Gandhian incongruities to hide his crime and justify his selfishness and meanness. He is a selfish businessman and makes a lot of money daily from his sweet-shop, but does not pay due taxes to the Government. This is what Ron Shepherd observes about such selfish and hypocritical nature of Jagan, “Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets hypocritically preaches the virtues of selflessness while he proceeds to centre his own life around the acquisition of wealth…” (79). He evades taxes by having two collection boxes; one kept for Government record and one which he does not show to the world. He does a theft of taxes, but ironically he does not hold himself guilty of tax evasion. This is how he justifies his theft of sale tax through Gandhian excuse;

If Gandhi had said somewhere, “Pay your tax uncomplainingly,” he would have followed his advice. But Gandhi had made no reference to sales tax anywhere, to Jagan’s knowledge. (88)

Thus, Jagan is a selfish and money minded business man. He is also a hypocrite and this is how he boasts of his great sacrifice for the country and his devotion to Mahatma Gandhi which is duly exposed by the novelist:

‘I had to leave the college when Gandhi ordered us to non-cooperate. I spent the best of my student years in prison,’ said Jagan, feeling heroic, his remniscential mood slurring over the fact that he had failed several
times in BA, ceased to attend the college and had begun to take his examinations as a private candidate long before the call of Gandhi.

(18)

Jagan leads a double life, one for his own-self and the other for the world outside. He remains divided between his materialistic outlook and spiritual exposition. The novelist has exposed this duality of his character quite beautifully:

As long as the frying and sizzling noise in kitchen continued and trays passed, Jagan noticed nothing, his gaze unflinchingly fixed on the Sanskrit lines ... of the Bhagavad Gita, but if there was the slightest pause in the sizzling, he cried out, without lifting his eyes from the sacred text, ‘What is happening?’ (18)

Thus, he is a travesty who poses to be selfless and spiritualistic, but is actually selfish and materialistic.

Jagan turns out to be a cowardly father in the course of the novel and feels too tongue-tied to say no to any of the fantasies of his spoilt son. When Mali refuses to study any more, Jagan, though wants his son to be graduate, fails to press his wishes on him. Though he suffers internally, but can not tell his son bluntly of his own ideas and plans. At last, after suffering for many days, he himself agrees to his foolish ideas, “Jagan realized the time had come for him to forget college education and get completely identified with Mali’s fantasies, at least until he came out of his gloom” (23). Later, when Mali runs away to America after stealing away his hidden money, Jagan, instead of getting angry over this act of his son, pleads before his cousin, “Please tell him to go by steamer. It’s safer. Let him be safe. I don’t like aeroplanes” (37). When he comes to know that Mali has started taking beef in America. Jagan’s morality is shaken to its root. But he is unable to scold his immoral and ruthless son
even in this situation. He tries to evade this mental tension by his reading of *Bhagvad Gita* which he has done earlier also in similar situations.

Jagan’s cowardliness comes to the fore once again, when Mali brings home a foreign girl named Grace and introduces her as his wife. Though, he feels disturbed of having a daughter-in-law who is of different caste and ethnicity, but fails to tell of his grudge to anyone. The same Gandhian eccentricity comes to his rescue. He consoles his own-self by telling this to Grace, “Well, we don’t believe in caste system these days, you know. Gandhi fought for its abolition” (51). Jagan uses the same foolish ideals and adopts the policy of escapism when he comes in conflict with Mali on the issue of establishing a factory for the manufacturing of story-telling machines. Jagan fails to insist himself in front of Mali as earlier. Ultimately, this cowardliness of Jagan pushes him into a very tight situation from where he seems to have no way out. Mali wants him to invest his hard-earned money in his project which, in Jagan’s eyes, is a foolish plan. Even here Jagan adopts the same policy of non-cooperation. “He was aware that pressure was being subtly exercised on him to make him part with his cash. He was going to meet the situation by ignoring the whole business, a sort of non-violent non-cooperation” (68). He avoids the company of his own son and tries to evade even his shadow.

The same Gandhian eccentricity comes to his help when Grace tells him that she and Mali who are living like a married couple to all appearances are not married actually. His morality is shaken to its roots, but he does not have the courage to say anything to his son. He decides to insulate himself from the evil effects of the tainted couple. He shuts the middle door of his house and evades even their shadow. So his Gandhian eccentricity again comes to his help in this state of utter shock and humiliation.
Thus, Jagan is an odd and eccentric character through and through. He has a split personality and the angularities of his characters arise out of this split. He has certain weaknesses in his character, which in psychological terms, can be termed as 'complexes'. But he does not accept these weaknesses of character and unconsciously tries to project them upon other objects, or rather attempts to hide them through his ways and manners. He poses to be a sanyasi like the old landlord of Mr Sampath and talks of conquering the self, but fails to realize the meaning of it. He too is a pseudo-saint who does not follow any principles of sainthood. He uses his reading of Bhagwad Gita to befool not only others, but also his own conscious self. He does not recite Bhagwad Gita in normal situations, but comes to it only when he finds himself in a state of trouble or mental tension. In other times, this habit remains in the backdrop and comes to the fore only in certain troublesome situations.

Similarly, he poses himself to be a follower of Gandhi, not because he believes in the principles of Mahatma Gandhi, but only to impress upon others. He has his own notion about Gandhian ideals and uses them for his own-selfish motive of saving money. He poses himself to be non-violent person who practices this ideal even in the choosing of his footwear. His Gandhian notions come to his help when he finds himself in a tight situation and when his own son Mali rages a war against him. So, the teachings of Gandhi are used by him for his own convenience and expediency.

Jagan’s irrational health theories too make him an odd and eccentric character. His health related observations are quite weird and torturing. He boasts of practicing them in his life and wants the others also to practice them. He boasts that he is working on a book on nature cure which will soon be published and come in the hands of all. He believes like the old landlord that one should not brush one’s teeth with a brush because its bristles are made of pig’s tale. In place of a tooth-brush one
should make use of a twig to clean his teeth which is a herbal medicine also. Similarly he believes that one should not wear footwear all the time as it obstructs the vital vibrations of the earth from entering into our body. He claims that the habit of wearing footwear is the major cause of heart attacks in western countries. But all his health related theories are merely hazardous eccentricities of his character as they do not have any authenticity or validation.

Jagan’s theory of health cure makes one remind of a similar theory of the extinction of the earth by some ‘giant weed’ expounded by Rann in Talkative Man. Though the character of Rann has already been discussed in terms of social and moral deviation in the previous chapter, it can also be analysed in terms of eccentricity.

Along with being a deviant, Rann is also an odd and eccentric person and is having some oddities and eccentricities of his own. He cherishes his own theory which he claims to be working upon and which he calls as futurology:

- a general term which involves various studies we have to make a proper assessment and dangers; human as well as material. All kinds of things will have to go into it. We must get a scientific view and anticipate the conditions and state of life in A.D. 3000. To know whether we shall, as the human species, survive or not. (76)

He terms the congress grass a curse on earth, “a giant weed” which will bring disaster for the entire earth and will cause cosmic extinction of all life. In his lecture at the annual function of the Lotus Club in Malgudi, he speaks of his theory of futurology at length and tells about the extinction of this earth in 3000 AD by the giant weed. He asserts that the tuft of grass-like vegetation, an obstinate weed, was going to overrun the earth and dry all sources of water. He calls it Cannibal Herb which feeds and fattens upon all other plants, and ultimately it will preside over the entire earth and
cause complete annihilation of human, plant and animal race. He tells that in the present state this weed does not appear so threatening, but ultimately it will rise to gigantic heights sticking out of our planet skyward, so that an observer from another planet will notice giant weeds covering the surface of the earth like “bristles having used all the water” (107).

Thus, Rann expounds a new theory of the extinction of the earth, but like the theories of other odd and eccentric characters of R. K. Narayan, e.g. Jagan’s theory of nature cure in The Vendor of Sweets and the theory of the old landlord in Mr. Sampath, the present theory of Rann is self-proclaimed and lacks any factual support and scientific validity. But the Malgudians take it as true and feel terrified to listen to his theory of earthly doom which he claims to spell at about 3000 AD. This is how he expounds the dangerous effects of the gigantic weed, “If the observer peered closer with his infra-red giant telescope, he would find millions and billions of skeletons of humans and animals strewn about providing bone-meal for this monstrous and dreadful vegetation…” (107). So, Rann is also an eccentric fellow alongwith being a social deviant and his eccentricities arise from the dialectic of being and becoming. In this process of his becoming he gets so much occupied with his becoming that he loses all contact with his being. Because of his involvement in the fulfillment of his individual desires and animal instincts he gets completely alienated from his being and the result is his deviation and odd and eccentric nature and behaviour.

The character of Raman in The Painter of Signs is also a study in the oddities and eccentricities of human behaviour. Along with being an eccentric character, he also turns out to be a social deviant because of his antisocial behaviour and immoral deeds. Raman, as C. P. Sharma observes, is “one of Narayan’s rootless intellectuals whose unconventional aspirations, sooner or later, inevitably result in failure of
worldly life, frustration and despondency, giving rise to the inner tensions and conflicts” (136).

Raman in the novel is a painter by profession who paints and makes signboards for his customers. He claims to be an intellectual rationalist, but lacks the conviction and commitment of a genuine rationalist. He boasts that he is not in favour of sex and marriage because he believes that marriage is the least required of things. “He wished to establish that the man-woman relationship was not inevitable and that there were other more important things to do in life than marrying” (45). He does not want to marry and repeat “this blunder committed by human beings since Adam” (45). But such an attitude and behaviour of him is quite unnatural and hypocritical and lacks any real conviction of self.

The hypocrisy and shallowness of his philosophy is exposed when he comes in contact with a woman while bathing on the bank of the river Sarayu, which flows behind his house. He sees her water-soaked thighs beneath the edge of her tucked up sari and this view keeps haunting his mind all the time. His mind is engrossed with the thought of that woman and he finds it difficult to keep his mind away from her thought. He falls in a deep reverie centered around the sight of the woman with fair thighs. Though he criticizes himself for indulging in all this day-dreaming, but fails to tame his mind. As is narrated:

He wanted to get away from sex thoughts, minimize their importance, just as he wished to reduce the importance of money. Money and sex, he reflected, obsessive thoughts, too much everywhere- literature, magazines, drama, or cinema deal with nothing but sex all the time, but the female figure, water-soaked is enchanting. (14)
Raman is a neurotic and is full of contradictory aspects and feelings. He poses to be an ascetic who is far off the sexual desires in life, but feels unable to control his fantasies when he gets a chance. He deceives his own-self by feeling lustful to see the woman knee-deep in water washing clothes. He resolves to discipline himself against sex and other obsessive thoughts and makes it his principle, “Just my principle, and disciplining my mind against sex- obsessive sex” (16). But even such a resolution of him fails to bear any fruit.

Thus, he suppresses his inner desires and biological urges unconsciously and this suppression results in a split or schism in his personality. He, as a result of this split, cherishes contradictory views and is full of self-criticism. He cherishes some ideas at one time and questions and doubts their very relevance at the other time. In absence of any conviction, his ideas appear shallow, and his behaviour has an element of oddity and eccentricity in it. He is full of enquiry about his own ideas and views. This is how the novelist portraits his contradictory ideas:

Must not make a fool of myself, he thought, a fellow whose outlook is to place sex in its place. To pursue a female after seeing only the upper half, above the desk- she might be one-legged, after all. But this is not sex which is driving me, but a normal curiosity about another person, that’s all. (33)

Raman is so full of dichotomies that he can’t remain resolute. Though, he believes himself to be a man of resolution who has renounced all thoughts of sex and marriage, but his fort of this pretended asceticism crumbles down at the very first sight of the fairer sex.

His asceticism and rationalism is further put to test and is shaken out of its wit in his encounter with Daisy, a female health worker. The sight of Daisy makes him
restless and all his claims of bachelorhood and chastity in thoughts and feelings prove hollow. Her lovely appearance unhinges his cold rationality and he feels irresistibly attracted towards her. Her charms hold him in a powerful grip and he remains lost in erotic thoughts all the time. He himself realizes of this state of him, “He was going through a series of moments of indecision. Never had he been in such a predicament. He wished he had not embarked on this adventure” (34). Though he criticizes himself for being too curious to meet her, but the next moment he again wishes to do it. So, he becomes a split personality like the hero of T.S. Eliot’s “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, who too is a divided personality and is always full of self-criticism and self-denial.

He feels irresistibly attracted towards Daisy, the zealous health worker, at the very first sight when she comes to him for the making of some banner. He is so moved by his instincts that he starts inventing excuses to meet her. Though there is nothing strange in a man feeling attracted towards a woman, but what is odd about him is that first he craves to meet Daisy, but after his meeting with her he criticizes himself for his too much keenness and attraction towards her. Before meeting her, he prepares night and day for it. “He had prepared for this visit with utmost care. Kept awake half the night thinking of it; roused himself from dreams relevant and irrelevant to his mood, and dressed himself with care…” (35). But after the meeting, he scolds himself and admits,

I am sex obsessed, that's all, to admit the plain fact. The first exposure to a sari-clad figure (Daisy), and I drop everything and run after it. What excuse could I have for knocking on the door of a woman living by herself? (39)
Raman is a psychopath and fails to exist peacefully in any state. He has certain complexes in his psyche because of which he finds faults with everything, including his own-self. He comes up to the mark when seen in the light of Jung’s concept of neurosis because he too, like Jung’s neurotics, unconsciously projects the weaknesses of his character upon others. His superficial persona refuses to accept his own inclination towards sex and woman; rather he considers it an act of gods to break into his fort of asceticism and dissolve his vow of celibacy. But he decides to save himself from this conspiracy of gods by all means.

He had determined to give sex its place, and somehow the gods didn’t seem to like it. Having written signboards for so many years, it was rather strange that he should be presented with a female customer now, and that it should prove troublesome. He was going to shield himself against this temptation. Mahatma Gandhi had advised one of his followers in a similar situation, “Walk with your eyes fixed on your toes during the day, and on the stars at night”. (40)

Raman feels that the gods are, perhaps, conspiring against him to spoil his asceticism through Daisy, just as the heavenly maidens (the apasaras) used to do in ancient times with sages. So he considers himself no less than a sage whose vow of celibacy and austerity is perhaps inviting the ire of gods and they have planned to dissolve it through Daisy:

Our puranas were full of instances of saints falling in the presence of beauty. The gods grew jealous of austere men and maneuvered to disturb their rigours, and their purpose; their agency was always a woman of beauty. Now the same situation was presenting itself in the garb of a Daisy. (40)
Actually, Raman feels obsessed with the thought of Daisy and half heartedly wants himself set free of her reminiscences. "He told himself, I must get over this obsession. Till yesterday I was a free man with my mind unfettered. Today I am unable to think of any other subject" (44). The charm of Daisy seems to be breaking into his stronghold of restraint and self-discipline. Before the beauty of Daisy "an edifice of self-discipline laboriously raised (by Raman) in a lifetime seemed to be crumbling down" (45). It appears that he had built a fort round his own self against all the girls of the world, but now that fort appears to be crumbling down and being broken into by the appearance of Daisy. He finds himself "on the verge of defeat" (45), but this defeat is not in the external sense of the word, it is an inner defeat, received by him from his own unconscious self. He criticizes himself for such defeat or failure,

I am in bad shape, he told himself, sitting up in bed. I am a victim of some shock, and must get over it if I am not to make a fool of myself in this world. Finish her work completely and forget her, finish the transaction without raising my gaze to her. (46)

Raman feels divided within himself- one part of his self tells him to leave everything that is associated with Daisy, but the other part pulls him into opposite direction. Though he makes great resolution not to feel attracted towards female beauty, but all his efforts to set himself free of her temptation end in smoke, and he can not help feeling irresistibly attracted towards her.

Raman gets a chance to accompany Daisy to a health campaign and their long companionship and proximity, and her aloofness helps him to win her. On their way back, they are stranded on the road and they have to spend the night under the open sky. The romantic night, their solitariness and his own suppressed voluptuous desire
whip his passions up and in this fit of passion, he runs towards her, finding her all alone in the darkness of night in a bullock-cart. He rushes towards her like a wild beast, his only aim being to seize his prey, whatever the consequences may be. He behaves like this because he believes that “women like an aggressive lover” (92). His whole being now convulses with waves of desire and comes under the complete control of his animalistic instincts. This is how the novelist portrays his animal instinct and his evil desire to grab her,

He should run up and seize her and declare his love to her and beg her to leave the villagers alone and try to change the whole course of her life, or else become a true missionary himself for her sake. (64)

He tries to achieve her forcibly, but Daisy manages to escape from his hold and spends the night on the branch of a tree. Thus, he behaves like a wild beast which does not care for anything else; his only concern being to satisfy his animalistic urges. In the pursuit of his evil desire, he puts everything else at stake, but later feels afraid of being imprisoned and pestered for his immoral act.

After a fortnight, the tables are turned and their love-hate relationship matures into amorous one. Daisy comes out of her feeling of indifference and frigidity with her essential feminine charms and gets involved with Raman. Raman manages to copulate with Daisy and makes it his routine affair. He, because of his frequent visits to her, becomes quite conspicuous amongst the people of Malgudi. He becomes the laughing stock of the town. Even his aunt, who has brought him up like her own son after the death of his parents, feels sick of his actions and decides to leave him. She feels ashamed of his involvement with Daisy like the mother of Raju in The Guide and has to avoid the other women of the town for the fear of being taunted by them. But Raman has no regard for her sense and sensibility because the mirror of his mind
is misted by the image of Daisy and he has lost consideration of all pros and cons of life. He does not find anything wrong in his behaviour and is even ready to leave Malgudi, which he considers as a “conservative town unused to modern life” (146). When his aunt finds it difficult to cope with him and decides to leave him, this is how he reacts to her decision,

No use worrying about her (aunt). Let her be where she pleases. I have done nothing to hurt. I am only trying to shape my life, and I can’t really help it if she is going to worry about irrelevant details such as Daisy’s religion and such things. (148)

Though he himself feels reminiscent of his aunt and misses her care, but he is not ready to shun the company of Daisy. He feels divided between his regard for his aunt and his infatuation for Daisy. This is how he forms bridges in the praise of Daisy before his aunt and glorifies her mission,

She is a rare type of girl, devoted to the service of people, and that is all her religion. I don’t know if she cares for any other god or religion, and I haven’t asked. Her worship takes the form of service to the poor and the ignorant and helping them live a decent life. She cares not for wealth or luxury or titles. She can live with the poorest in their huts, eat their food, and sleep on the mud floor. (153)

He tries to justify his decision to marry Daisy by this entire glorification, but his aunt does not agree with him and goes away to a pilgrimage.

Later in the novel also Raman feels divided as Daisy refuses to marry him as per traditional rites. She is ready to marry him as per Gandharva vivah, which believes that “When two souls met in harmony the marriage was consummated perfectly, and no further rite or ceremony was called for” (158). Raman finds it
difficult to make her agree to live with him under the same roof. He feels pained to know that Daisy is not ready to give birth to a child and bring it up. She wants to keep herself free for her mission to serve others. Raman wonders:

What sort of a married life is this going to turn out to be? Separate lives and separate everything! Only the roof was to be common, and perhaps the bed- even of that he was not certain how long. She might want to lock herself in her room and forbid him to enter. Should he write a NO ADMISSION sign and present it to her as a wedding gift?

(172)

Though such an awkward behaviour of Daisy hurts him a lot, but even then he hopes to manage the things anyhow. But at last, Daisy moves on with her mission of population control and leaves Raman to his fate for good.

Thus, Raman in the novel is an odd and eccentric character and it results from the dialectic of being and becoming. This dialectic results in his split personality as he believes in the things, but without having any real conviction in them. Though he boasts himself to be a rational person, but does not give way to rationality at any point in his life. He claims to have no desire for marriage or sex, but immediately falls a victim to the charms of Daisy, proving all his beliefs to be false and shallow. He seems to be at war against his own-self. His unconscious desires and prohibitions do not allow him to rest even for a while in the novel. He remains divided throughout the novel- first between his instincts and his ideals and then between his love for Daisy and his regard for his aunt and at last is left all alone. He is so full of dichotomies that he always finds himself in a state of fix and confusion like Shakespeare’s Hamlet.

In Freudian terms, Raman seems to be under the complete hold of his superego which makes him act in an irrational manner. It tries to curb even his
genuine biological and sociological needs, and this unconscious suppression of his inner desires results in a certain schism in his personality from which arises his contradictory nature and temperament. From this contradictory nature, the oddities and eccentricities of his character arise which make his behaviour look queer and irrational. Though Raman claims to be a great rationalist, but actually he is irrational in his thinking and behaviour. This is the greatest complex in his personality or weakness of his character, but he tries to pose it as his strength. He projects his weaknesses upon others in the same manner as Jung’s neurotic subjects do, and feels himself to be the only wise person of the world ‘who can do no wrong’ and even the gods feel jealous of whose “austerity” (40).

Raman poses himself to be an austere man like the old landlord and Jagan in terms of his indifference towards love, sex and women, but is exposed at his very first encounter with a female. His attraction towards Daisy is the call of ‘Anima’ to which he responds at once, but his ‘Superficial Persona’ hinders his way and comes in-between in the form of self-criticism and self-denial. His union with Daisy, the feminine principle, later in the novel makes him accept the reality of life and leave his irrational behaviour. It helps him rise above his complexes and weaknesses of character. Now his mind gives way to reason and he no longer indulges in the previous acts of self-criticism or denial of female reality. Thus, Daisy becomes instrumental in doing away with many of his complexes, but she leaves him at the end of the novel and joins her troupe of health workers to go on some family planning expedition leaving Raman behind high and dry.

The character and behaviour of Nagaraj in *The World of Nagaraj* is also a study in oddity and eccentricity. Nagaraj is normative member of society who has adjusted himself in his social milieu by the fulfillment of the demands made upon his
personality by the society. He has realized his social roles and has performed them perfectly. But his complete identification with his social roles without any sanction from his being, leads to his alienation from his own true-self, and the result is a split in his personality and his odd and eccentric behaviour arising from such split. He is an introvert who indulges in deep thoughts at all situations of life, but is unable to share his ideas and give them an expression. He is a coward and does not dare reveal his ideas to anyone and, this being an important trait of his personality, comes to light at every turn of his life.

He is absurd in his ways and manners and indulges in certain oddities and eccentricities of his own. He feels obsessed with the idea of writing a book on Narada, the great Indian sage, but does not have much to write about him. He desires to get some material related to the topic of his book, and for this he hankers after people like the old Brahmin and the stationery man. But his idea of writing a book on Narada seems only an idea and does not show any seriousness on his part. His book reminds us of the Jagan’s book on nature cure which too was neither printed nor published. Nagaraj hankers after many people to collect the material for his book.

But all his plans appear to be the result of his mind’s attempt to keep or rather show himself busy and occupied with something important as he does not have much to do in life. He belongs to one of the rich people of the Kabir street locality of Malgudi who have been left with enough money and wealth by their ancestors. They do not have to worry their minds by the question of livelihood. Nagaraj is free from all worries of domesticity, so he tries to show himself busy, of course without any valid reason or work. He wakes up early in the morning not because he is supposed to do something, but only because he wants to show and prove himself busy and for this he is rebuked by his wife as she feels her routine household chores being disrupted by
his habit of getting up early. After getting up, Nagaraj takes a tour of the whole market even when the shopkeepers have not opened their shops and feels happy to watch the hustle and bustle of the market and the farmers bringing cart-loads of vegetables to sell in the town market. Thus, he roams to and fro aimlessly, but fancies himself to be occupied with an important mission. The writer himself observes,

Nagaraj fancied himself a man with a mission. If you asked, ‘What is your mission?’ he would look away and pretend not to have heard your query. He was not quite clear in his mind about his mission, but always felt he must be up and doing. (1)

Though Nagaraj is married and fulfills his social roles, but there is an element of dissatisfaction in his heart. He is diplomatic in his dealings and acts wisely in domestic matters. He does not offend his wife or anyone else on any issue. He feels, “Have to be careful and diplomatic all the time, the tightrope walking called domestic harmony” (4). He feels himself chained in the fetters of domesticity. He feels jealous to see the freedom enjoyed by Madhu, his friend, who is unmarried, “Blessed fellow, never married, unlike me, a prisoner of domesticity” (5). Thus, family life appears to be a prison for him. He feigns to be a spiritual person both to himself and to others and for this he expresses his abhorrence for materialistic things. He tells himself, “Thank God. I don’t have to think of money. I’m not greedy, that’s why I am happy” (18).

Nagaraj, like the old landlord and Jagan, is a pseudo-saint and poses to be a sanyasi. To look spiritual he does all kinds of odd and awkward things, which appear quite humorous in the novel. He gets a hermit’s ochre robe so that he may acquire peace of mind after wearing it. “I thought it would give me greater peace of mind at home if I wore a sanyasi’s dress...” (11). He brings this ochre robe not for any
genuine purpose of trance, but only to save himself from domestic worries. This is how the novelist tells about the benefits of this unique costume,

Now in his ochre robe he felt transformed. While he was in this dress, his wife was not to bring up any domestic matter or any letter in the post, never call him to the street door, even if an emperor knocked. She had to conduct herself as if he had ceased to exist... It was a state of being dead for some moments each day. (12)

He finds this robe an effective medium to escape from the worries of life. When Nagaraj feels troubled by his nephew and his wife, the same dress comes to his escape. By wearing ochre robe he could save himself from all unnecessary trouble.

Nagaraj is a loving uncle and, being childless, he loves Tim very much. His blind love for Tim makes him tongue tied and coward. He does not say anything to Tim when he comes to him after leaving his parents in the village. He is coward by nature and does not scold him on his deviation and for this he is accused by his brother. “You have spoilt him beyond repair: you are Narada, mischief-maker. If he (Tim) doesn’t want to see me, I don’t want to see his face either” (44). But Nagaraj does not feel offended by this; in fact he seems to be offended by nothing. Whenever he finds himself in a state of trouble or conflict with others, he just transports himself to the world of thought and gets lost in it.

Nagaraj has the habit of getting lost in the world of thought and imagination, whenever he confronts a difficult situation and when he fails to cope with it. He has made this habit a mode of his escape from the difficulties of life. He is an escapist. “a wishy-washy and dreamy person” (25). He doesn’t have any guts to speak up his mind to his brother, his wife, his mother, his nephew and his daughter-in-law. He accepted whatever comes his way when the property was divided between the two
brothers after the death of his father. He did not make any claim in the property and accepted whatever was given to him. He adopts the same policy of acceptance when Tim starts deviating from the normal patterns of behaviour and for this habit of him he is rebuked by his wife, Sita. Nagaraj can not speak his mind to Tim nor can he keep a check on his ways and manners and because of this he has to suffer a lot in the novel. Thus, Nagaraj too is an abnormal character like the other eccentric characters of R. K. Narayan.

R. K. Narayan’s fictional world is a place where he shows all types of people. Even the eccentric characters he portrays in his novels are not of one type, they are distinct from one another. In some cases it is seen that the eccentricities of character and behaviour come in the way of one’s social roles and takes the form of negativity as seen in the case of Jagan who turns into a selfish human being and Raman who becomes an irrational person. But certain eccentricities of character lead to positivity and it can be seen in the case of Madhu, the protagonist of Talkative Man.

Madhu’s eccentricities do not come in the way of his social roles. He is a normative member of society who performs his social roles convincingly and enjoys great name, fame and reputation in society because of his sweet nature which matches with his name. The novel moves around Madhu, who is more popularly known as the Talkative Man, the Narada of Malgudi world because of the reason he tells himself,

I have earned this title, I suppose, because I cannot contain myself. My impulse to share an experience with others is irresistible, even if they sneer at my back. I don’t care. I’d choke if I didn’t talk, perhaps like sage Narada of our epics, who for all his brilliance and accomplishments carried a curse on his back that unless he spread a gossip a day, his skull would burst. (1)
Madhu firmly believes in the accepted social and moral customs and traditions of Malgudi. He lives peacefully in the social milieu of Malgudi. He is a person who is good at heart and is always on his tows to help whoever comes to him. He himself feels suffering in the grief and sufferings of others. He comes to the help of Rann when he meets him at the railway station rest house. When he can not find any accommodation for Rann to stay, he brings him to his own house. He belongs to one of the few rich families of Kabir Street in Malgudi whose ancestors have left them with enough money and wealth by the dint of their labour, and who do not have to worry for their livelihood like Nagaraj. So Madhu does nothing actually, except that of some journalistic work and that too without being attached to a particular newspaper and without being paid anything for it. So, he is a self posed journalist and his occupation of sending news to the various newspapers is self-assigned which exemplifies his eccentric nature.

Madhu is a bachelor and has not married because he does not want his freedom to be curtailed by anyone. This is how he boasts of his indifference towards the opposite sex, “Well, a long time ago I gave up staring at women and studying their worth too, so I am not able to provide a good description” (45). He lives all alone in a big house which he has inherited from his ancestors. But he has a quality for which he is praised by everyone in Malgudi and that is of helping others in need and being hospitable towards them under all circumstances. He tells, “I belonged to the Kabir Street aristocracy, which was well known for its lofty, patronizing hospitality, cost what it may” (26). But because of this tendency of him, he comes in contact with Rann and suffers great trouble later in the novel.

Another feature of his odd behaviour is his status of a self-proclaimed journalist. He collects news and sends it to different newspapers most of which are
not printed by any of them. But in spite of all this he shows himself to be a great journalist and this he feigns not only to others but to his own conscious self too. This is what Nagaraj, a friend of him observes about him, “He was the busiest man in the street, fancied himself a journalist and wandered about the town the whole day on his bicycle” (5). So, he is a live newspaper and shares his information here and there in the Malgudi town without being paid anything for it.

Thus, the Talkative Man has some angularities or peculiarities of character which appear quite absurd and weird, but they do not come in the way of his social roles. He is a parody on Narada, the son of Brahma with whom we as Indians have close association and to whom we worship as a sage.

But it is seen in certain cases, as in the case of Jagan, the old landlord and Raman that the eccentricities of character certainly come in the way of one’s social and moral roles and blur his vision. In Jagan’s case it makes him a selfish businessman and a cowardly father who spoils his son by his Gandhian fads and eccentricities. In the case of the old landlord, it makes him a miser and a pseudo saint. In the case of Raman, it makes him an irrational braggart who boasts of his purity in thoughts, but succumbs to the female beauty at the first instance. In Nagaraj’s case, it makes him an introvert who always lives in the world of illusions and runs away from the realities of life.