CHAPTER III
THE THEME OF ASCETICISM OR SPIRITUAL REALISATION
IN R. K. NARAYAN'S NOVELS

INTRODUCTION: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TERM:

Man is, in his essential nature, pure, free and immortal. But in his ordinary worldly life he seems to be impure, fettered and mortal. That all men are mortal is a common place of logic and philosophy. That he suffers from various limitations, and smarts under a sense of disability and incapacity is a common fact of our experience of life in this world. There is, as it were, a fundamental contradiction in human life. Man has a body that binds him to this world with an iron chain made of hunger, thirst, and sensual appetites. He has a mind that has a natural impulse towards carnal pleasures and worldly goods, and is swayed by desire, hatred and infatuation. But there is in him a soul that refuses to be laid low with the burden of the body, or be lost in the maze of natural impulses and passions of the mind. Man's spirit wants to soar high above the limitations of the body-mind, breathe the pure atmosphere of freedom, unfettered by its bodily and mental limitations, and realise its destined goal in the life divine, i.e. attain liberation from bondage.

There are two stages in the course of liberation. These are described as the paths of pravṛtti or worldly activity and nivṛtti or renunciation, and are regarded as continuous with one another. The first is a movement of Contd.....181.
the soul in the direction of desired objects, or its tendency towards objects of enjoyment. It is a sort of outgoing activity of the soul and is a necessary preliminary stage in its evolution and liberation. The other is apparently a tendency of the soul away from objects, and towards its own subjective being. It is an inward-directed activity of the self and an inwardization of its subjective being. It does not, however, require one to renounce the world, but to renounce worldliness or attachment to the world. Nivṛtti is thus really renunciation in spirit and not necessarily in action and practice.

Dr. Radhakrishnan says:

All worldly relationships have their end, but they cannot be ignored. The eternal is manifested in the temporal, and the latter is a pathway to the former. Truth in the definite aspect leads us to infinite truth. Renunciation is the feeling of detachment from the finite as finite and attachment to the finite as the embodiment of the infinite. The two are bound to each other and to separate them is ruinous. The Upanishad says: 'In darkness are they who worship only the world, but in greater darkness they who worship the infinite alone. He who accepts both saves himself from death by the knowledge of the
latter ....... while the pursuit of wealth and happiness is a legitimate human aspiration, they should be gained in ways of righteousness (dharma) if they are to lead ultimately to the spiritual freedom of man (moksa) .... Moksa is self-emancipation, the fulfilment of the spirit in us in the heart of the eternal. This is what gives ultimate satisfaction, and all other activities are directed to the realisation of this end. 1.

The Hindu scriptures give us a definite and detailed plan of the both paths of pravṛtti or worldly enjoyment and nivṛtti or renunciation so that by following the path of pravṛtti, the individual soul may develop its potential powers and attain its destined goal of liberation or renunciation. The individual soul is a spark from the divine fire and has an innate attraction for it. Just as the planets thrown off from the Sun moves round the Centre of its being throughout its earthly sojourn, till at last it finds itself in God. Hence in continuation of the path of pravṛtti is laid down the path of nivṛtti and the worldly life of enjoyment leads us to the spiritual life of renunciation.

In the Gita Sri Krishna said that fearlessness, purity of mind, steadiness in knowledge, concentration,
charity, self-control, sacrifice, self-discipline, practice of austerity and simplicity, non-mischievousness, truthfulness, self-denial, composure of mind, spirit of accusation, compassion to all beings, uncovetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of indiscreet action, forgiveness, fortitude, cleanliness, absence of malice and of too much pride—all these are the properties of a man who is born with divine nature. These accomplish transformation, elevation and renunciation of mind and transmutation of self more quickly, and surely, to attain which otherwise requires many births and intricate processes of acquisition of knowledge from the unfathomable Vedas and Scriptures, or self-purification through meditation or observance of penances. The ideas of liberation or deliverance from sufferings or of renunciation or resignation of fruits of all actions or the transformation of self or self-surrender to the merciful God contain the essence or the soul of the Gita.

The message of renunciation or liberation was meant to be given to Arjuna to engage him to action which he wanted to avoid not because he attained spiritual development of the highest order but for various considerations that were the products of ignorance, weakness and passion, and it may therefore be said to be the secret of action. Man cannot attain deliverance from sufferings
of life and death by directly renouncing any unpleasant action which he is otherwise called upon to do under various circumstances as his duty but only by renunciation of the desire to enjoy the fruit of the action he undertakes and by giving up attachment for the same. To enable one to do this one should rise above the forces or impulses of nature so as to have a pure and perfect mind, speech and body. This requires self-control, true knowledge or knowledge of our relationship with Nature and God, and implicit love and unflinching devotion to him. To attain such perfection and wisdom requires self-abnegation or self-effacement by complete surrender at the feet of God by renunciation of work, knowledge and duty or religion. Nothing remains for him at this stage but all is given up to him and he becomes an instrument of God doing his work and he ceases to do work for himself. When a man attains this stage, he has no duty to perform, no knowledge to acquire, no penance to practise and no love or devotion to offer - everything drops away and having attained the 'end' he is no longer in need of any 'means' but all these become part of his nature and his existence becomes surcharged with all these and he becomes Karmamay or Karmayogin or Karmin, Jnānamoy or Jnānayogin or Jnānin, Tapomoy or Tapoyogin or Yogin and Premamoy or Premayogin or Premin. His body, mind and spirit, the conscious, the pre-conscious and the unconscious work... Contd....P/185.
flawlessly together and attain a rhythm expressed in the 
ecstasy of joy, the illumination of knowledge and the 
intensity of energy.

ASCETICISM AS A STAGE OF SPIRITUAL UPLIFTMENT FROM DARKNESS
TO LIGHT

Renunciation is a spiritual change, an inward transformation. It is a stage of upliftment from darkness to light, from an unregenerate to a regenerate condition. It is an awakening, a rebornness. It is a power by which man is to break the bonds that are laid on him by our first birth and rise above his original imperfection through blood and tears. Renunciation or non-attachment is not the result of the acceptance of dogmas or historic events. It is an experience that kindles the flame of the spirit in every individual soul and affects our entire being, cessates us from actions which are prompted by worldly desires, ends our disquiet and anguish, the sense of aimlessness of our fragile and fugitive existence. This state may appear to be one of retreat, of escape from a threatening world. A truly wise man claims that the realisation of his yearning is far reacher and deeper than the deepest satisfactions of this world. It is a state of relief from restraint (Sāttvic), enjoyment (Rājasic) and grief (Tāmasic). The whole world is bewildered by these states, derived out of the three aspects of nature and does not crave the ideals of renunciation.

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This divine illusion arising from the influence of the three impulses is very difficult to get over but those who cultivate discipline, austerity and renunciation overcome their delusion and proceed to attain the supreme bliss. S. Radhakrishnan says:

> When he has this contact he gets back to the world and loves and serves his fellowmen spontaneously. The cosmic process has for its goal the kingdom of free spirits where the son of man becomes the son of God. The first fruits of the new species of spiritual personality are already manifest on earth in the saints and sages of the different religions.

But the deluded, foolish, wretched men of evil deeds lose their conscience by their illusion and by taking to demonic nature do not worship him. They are duped by their ego due to their deceptive lower nature in which there is preponderance of either Tama or Rajasic Guna, and seek only to satisfy their ego. These men are violent and impetuous and having no self-control and self-discipline do evil acts. They have no God and they never try to renounce selfish motives, passion and emotional bondage. It is only the men of higher nature possessing Sattvic Guna who fight against the evil spirit and have

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the will to realise the ideals of renunciation. The Bhagavad Gita asks us to raise the self by the self, to thrust aside fear and anger and put off desire and egoism. The cards in the game of life are given to us. We do not select them. They are traced to our past Karma. The theory of Karma allows man the freedom to use the material in the light of his knowledge. Man controls the uniformities in nature, his own mind and society. There is thus scope for genuine rational freedom. It is through the realisation of Karma that we can achieve absolute liberty in the world of thought. The Hindu Philosophy insists not on the religious conformity but on the spiritual and ethical outlook in life acquired through renunciation. It is said in the Gita:

The performer of the good and not the believer in this or that view - can never get into an evil state. 3.

In a very real sense practice precedes theory. Only by doing the will does one know the doctrine. Whatever our theological beliefs and metaphysical opinions may be, we are agreed that we should be kind and honest, grateful to our benefactors and sympathetic to the unfortunate and thus the reward of the spiritual ideal of renunciation can be realised and enjoyed. Hinduism insists on this principle -

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it is the core and life-blood of all religion and draws into fellowship all who feel themselves bound to the claims which the moral law makes upon them. Hinduism is a fellowship of all who accept the law of right and earnestly seek for the truth.

ASCETICISM AS THE FOUNDATION STONE OF INDIAN RELIGION AND CULTURE

Renunciation of worldly possessions and selfish motives is the foundation stone of Indian religion and culture. Desires constitute the springs of human action. The life of man centres round certain basic cravings, each distinct from the other in its object and each stimulating men to a particular mode of activity in order to satisfy it. Each individual has in him the sex and the parental instincts, love of power and wealth, desire for the common good and a hunger for communion with the unseen. These different activities react upon and modify one another. They function differently in man's life. If life is one, then there is one master science of life which recognises the four supreme ends of Dharma or righteousness, artha or wealth, Kama or artistic and cultural life, and Moksha or spiritual freedom.

The practice of renunciation links up the realm of desires with the perspective of the eternal. It binds together the kingdoms of earth and heaven - it is 'true' to the kindred points of heaven and home.'
Renunciation is therefore, an inevitable factor in every life. It has its own law. It has conformity with the truth of things and it encompasses and controls the world. The essence of the message of Sri Krishna in The Bhagavad Gita is to attain perfection and wisdom by complete renunciation of work, knowledge and duty or religion. Sri Krishna asked Arjuna to be free from all attachment and do all his work as sacrifice:

The sacrifices infold the true purpose of life - it is for the good of mankind and to please God. The Lord of men (Brahma), having created mankind along with sacrifices (rites and rituals before fire as enjoined or one's allotted duties by birth) in the days of Yore, said 'By this shall Ye prosper (or produce or procreate) and this shall be your Kamadhuk (the mythological cow who gives whatever is desired from her) of your desires (i.e. shall give you all that is desired). By this Ye propitiate Gods and Gods propitiate you and by such mutual propitiation Ye shall attain the good'. The Gods thus propitiated by sacrifice will give the desired objects of enjoyment. One who would enjoy the gifts of Gods without offering any sacrifice in return to them, is verily a thief. The good people

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Who partake only the remnants of sacrifice, are free from all sins, but those who prepare food only for their own sake, verily commit sin. From food the creatures come into being; the food is produced by rain, rain is generated by sacrifice and sacrifice is born of work. The work has its origin in Brāhmin (The Vedas) and the Vedas come out from the Imperishable (Brāhmin). So the Brahman comprehends all and is centred round the sacrifices. He, who does not follow the wheel thus set in motion, lives in sin for the enjoyment of his senses and lives in vain. 4.

What is important is this that all should work without attachment to attain the highest perfection. The saints like Janaka in the ancient India perfected themselves through work and sacrifice and therefore a man should work without any selfish desire for the good of all. The good deeds of the truly wisemen are imitated by the world. Sri Krishna advises Arjuna thus:

Surrender all your works to Me and by concentrating your mind in the Supreme Self, give up all desires, shed off egoism and fight the battle free from all mental embarrassment. 5.

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Sri Krishna establishes the salutary principle of action and enunciated the eternal formula for human action:

You have only the right to do work and not to the fruits thereof. Do not therefore be the reaper of your action nor desire inaction .... It is the expectation to enjoy the fruit of one's action, that brings all the ills of life. It makes them depraved and degraded. The more one cultivates the spirit of non-attachment, the more he elevates himself. If a man sheds off ego from his action he has no attraction or claim to the fruits of his action. This is the quintessence of the teachings of the Gītā and all that follows only explains how one may attain such a state of mind. 6.

Each one of the ends of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Mokṣa requires ethical discipline. Freedom can be obtained only through bonds of discipline and surrender of personal inclination. The Hindu Dharma says that man does not live by bread alone, nor by his work. He lives or must live by his life of spirit. Moksa is self-emancipation, the fulfilment of the spirit in us in the heart of the eternal. This is what gives ultimate satisfaction and all other activities are directed to the
realisation of this end. Prayer and petition, fasting and sacrifice, communion and self-examination - all are included in the life of devotion. In its highest stage, bhakti coincides with Jhāna, and both these issue in right Karma or virtuous life.

FOUR STAGES OF LIFE AND ASCETICISM

In the Vedas the life of a Hindu has been broadly divided into four stages - the stage of Brahmacarya or the period of training, Gārhaṣṭya or the period of work for the world as a householder, Vānapresthya or the period of retreat for the loosening of the social bonds, and Śamnyāsa or the period of renunciation and expectant awaiting of freedom indicate that life is a pilgrimage to the eternal life through different states. The stage of Śamnyāsa is the last and final stage of spiritual realisation.

The first stage is the period of training and discipline of body and mind. Young boys and girls during this period are taught to form the basis of individual character. The student at this period is required to live for a fixed time in the house of a teacher where, along with the building of character, he is also taught the arts and sciences which would be useful in his future. By the

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watchful exercise of self-discipline, self-respect and self-control, purity of heart and mind of a plastic youth becomes habitual and character of a student is built up, that is, he is moulded to a life of duty.

The second state is that of a householder or the Gārhaṣṭya. In the Vedas marriage is regarded as sacred. The Gods are married. Śiva is Ārdhaṇārīśvara, and his image signifies the co-operative inter-dependent, separately incomplete but jointly complete masculine and feminine functions of the supreme being. Marriage has its spiritual side in which instincts and passions of physical love are to be worked up into an ideal whole. A successful marriage transforms a chancemate into a life companion. Love demands its sacrifices. By restraint and endurance we raise love to the likeness of the divine. The relation between Rama and Sītā, or Savitri and Satyavan is idealised in the Hindu Scriptures. The genuine qualities of an ideal marriage are perfectly reconciled in their conjugal relationship of husband and wife. The general Hindu view of woman is an exalted one. It regards the woman as the helpmate of man in all his work; Sahadharmini. Sayana Says:

The wife and the husband, being the equal halves of one substance, are equal in every respect; both should join and take equal part in all work; religious and secular. 7.

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The Hindu believes in the speciality of the contribution which woman makes to the world. She has special responsibilities and special duties. While man is expected to take to the worldly pursuits, woman is capable of great heights of self-control and self-sacrifice and self-denial. But the modern woman is not conscious of her own individuality and uniqueness. She is fast becoming masculine and mechanical and losing her self-respect.

The third stage is a further advancement upon the earlier stage. It is the stage of Vanaprasthya when all the domestic responsibilities are given up. The aged householder goes to the forest and he is followed by his Sahadharmani. It is the time when a man renounces all his worldly possessions in order to prepare himself for the true life of the spirit. The main objective of this stage to escape from the din and bustle of the complicated materialistic life into the solitude of the forest to meditate on the higher problems. It is at this stage of Vanaprasthya or retired life which follows on the preceding stage and is preparatory to the next and final stage of Samnyasa. At this stage a man's duty is to serve the world by means of prayer and sacrifice. He is, therefore, to continue the performance of the five daily sacrifices and engage in other kinds of sacrifice as well. The duties of a man at this stage are sacrifice, constant study of the
Veda, austerity and equanimity, amity, readiness to give and not to take anything, love and compassion for all living beings.

The soul of a man contains infinite power. If a man loses his own soul or spiritual life and gain the whole world instead, eternal darkness will envelop his senses and knowledge. Family and country, nation and the world cannot satisfy the soul of a man. We are to leave the individual for the family, the family for the community, the community for the country and the whole world for the soul. This is renunciation; it is not a step, not a stage; it is complete emancipation, a spiritual regeneration; it is fulfilment. It is realised in all its depth in the last journey on the road of life. It is at this time when each individual is called upon at a certain stage of his life to give up his wife and children and his caste and colour and work.

The objective of the state of Sanyasi is not to escape the realities of life but to attain a state of spiritual freedom when he is not tempted by wealth and honour; enlightened by success or depressed by failure. He develops a stronger spirit of tolerance and patience. He does not hurt anybody, does not hate anyone for the sake of his physical body.

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He becomes free from attachment to all objects including his body, senses and life, attains perfect equanimity of mind and having realised Brahman or God, renounces all worldliness, so as to remain content with and concentrated in the self that is within him. 10. Such a soul stands liberated from all bondage to the world, even when he is in this body and in this world, engaged in disinterested activities for the moral uplift of humanity in its entirety. 11. As we have it from the Bhagavad - Gitā, he who performs all actions as are his duties without a desire for their fruits, is the true Sannyāsī and a Yogi as well, and not one who shirks his duties like sacrifices, rites and social service. 12. They bear patiently all improper words and criticisms, but does not criticise anybody or insult anybody. They are free men. They are: solitary souls who have not any personal attachments or private ambitions but embody in their own spirit the freedom of the world. They take on the wideness of the whole earth, dwell in love and walk in righteousness. The social order regards the Sannyāsī as a parasite since he does not contribute to it materially and does not care for its forms. The state looks on him with suspicion as he does not profess any loyalty to any family or Church, race or nation.

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He does not function in any industrial factory, social system or political machine. These Samnyásins do not serve our policies that make the world unsafe for human life, do not promote our industries that mechanize persons, and do not support our national egoisms that provoke wars. Patriotism is not enough for these fine souls. Life, and not India's life or England's life, demands their devotion. They look upon all men and all groups as equal.

In Christianity and Buddhism the life of a monk has been held superior to the life of the worldly man. But in Hinduism both forms of life have been equally appreciated. This is a more realistic appreciation because every state is necessary and natural, and one comes out of the other. The blossom cannot deny the leaf and the leaf cannot deny the tree nor the tree the root. All the states are interdependent. We pass from one stage to another gradually and this is the general rule.

It is utter misconception that a Samnyásin is indifferent to the welfare of the world. Renunciation, as has already been stated, is the effacement of the self and not giving up of the work enjoined by the scriptures.

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Sankaracharyya, Sri Chaitanya, Janaka etc. of ancient India and Ramakrishna Paramahamsadeb and Swami Vivekananda of modern India upheld the ideals of renunciation without being indifferent to the welfare of the world. It is said that when Buddha was on the threshold of Nirvana, he took the vow never to cross it so long as a single creature on earth being remained subject to sorrow and suffering. The Bhagavad Gita holds the similar view that the liberated souls take up the sorrow of all creatures who suffer and enter into them in order to make them free from sorrows and sufferings. Freedom on the highest level of existence expresses itself on the lower as courage to suffer, sacrifice, and die.

These four stages of life dominates the Hindu mind, Hindu culture and even Hindu literature. All these represent the soul of the entire people, its great ideals, its strong emotions and its essential tendency. Indian literature - all its forms since inception have been dominated with this spiritual truth - specially in respect of their themes and treatment of the themes.

- ASCETICISM AND ITS IMPACT ON R. K. NARAYAN'S NOVELS -

The institution of Sannyasa or the renunciation of worldly goods and attachments for the sake of spiritual

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pursuits, is an ideal that remains constant in Narayan's novels. It is the obverse side of attachment or involvement which very often forms the cycle of events in his stories; but different characters in these novels choose to interpret and occupy the idealised role differently. In the early novels, Sanyasa is used as the only possible means of escape from the rules of society and the only means of expressing one's individuality. There is an opposition here between the roles of householder and Sanyasi which is very similar to that which Dumont formulates. He writes:

The complexities of Indian religions, seem to flow logically from an initial position or, as it were, an initial choice, which can perhaps be summed up as follows: That the society must submit and entirely conform to the absolute order, that consequently the temporal and hence the human will be subordinate and that while there is no room here for the individual, whoever wants to become one may leave society proper.  

- TREATMENT OF ASCETICISM AS COMEDY -

Thus Chandran, the hero of 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS' is really a man whose station is within the world; he applies its standards to the duties and responsibilities
of each role including that of the Sanyasi. He tries to escape responsibility by drooping out and becoming a bogus wandering Sanyasi. Narayan, unlike other novelists, chooses to treat this situation as comedy. Chandran wanders the various part of South India to seek an escape from the pricking memory of Malati whom he loved at first sight. Owing to a freak of destiny the horoscopes of Chandran and Malati do not tally and the matter is dropped. Chandran is so shocked by the breaking of his engagement that he loses the balance of his mind. In his aimless travels incidentally he sees the magnificent grey spire of Kapaleeswarar temple. The peace and serenity of the temple attracts him and he turns a Sanyasi. He then visits several South Indian districts on foot and lives on alms. After eight months of these purposeless wanderings he, however, gets tired of his new role of an ascetic. He, therefore, renounces his asceticism as easily as he has accepted it and returns to his parents at Malgudi.

Chandran first refuses the social pressures bearing upon him. He feels indignant at the caste restrictions which are the scourge of the Indian society:

A marriage would not be tolerated even between sub-sects of the same caste. If India was to attain salvation these water-tight divisions must go - community, caste, sects - sub-sects and still further divisions. 15.
Ironically enough, Chandran's first proposal of marriage fails not because of caste consideration, but because of another convention, that is, the horoscopic agreement. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the problem of developing an integrated personality is real for Chandran, as for the rest of his generation. Ultimately he has to come to terms with them. He never leaves the orbit of social norms; this is why he does not become a true saint. He chooses Śānyasa in preference to the other alternative because of the 'social stigma' attached to 'suicide. It is not out of sincerity and earnestness that Chandran adopted the ideal of renunciation.

Chandran's impulsive renunciation of the world and the veneration he receives undeservedly from the villagers betrays his imperfect personality, because he was different from the usual Śānyasi. His renunciation was a revenge on society, circumstances and perhaps too, on destiny. Chandran's final return to Malgudi is symbolic of the strength and sustenance of the traditional family. 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS' clearly emphasizes the lasting values of the Indian national tradition which contribute to the individual's self-knowledge, as in the words of Anand K. Coomerswami:

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The last achievement of all thought is a recognition of the identity of the spirit and matter, subject and object.\textsuperscript{16}

However, Asceticism is a distinctly difficult condition attainable only through the conquest of the senses. But Chandran could not rise above the earthly desires. He becomes a Sanyasi when he is sorely afflicted with domestic trials and troubles. It is a temporary attempt to escape from earthly frustration. He returns to the world because he has not earned by virtue of spiritual worth the gifts of food he is given by the simple villagers during the time of his aimless travel. Lakshmi Holmstron has rightly said:

...he (Chandran) is placed as a conformist and a householder, although a romantic one, and his way of coming to terms with society is to convince himself that in ordering his life from the role of student to householder, each step is his own considered decision.\textsuperscript{17}

Through the portrayal of Chandran, R.K. Narayan has asserted that the high caste Hindu is traditionally expected to pass through the stages of Brahmacharya (student), householder,
and then hermit, before the stage of the Sanyasi. After returning home from the aimless wanderings as an ascetic with a begging bowl, Chandran marries and becomes a responsible householder. Thus each compromise of Chandran is accompanied by some kind of rationalisation. As a student he believes in squeezing the maximum aesthetic delight out of an experience. He returns to Malgudi from his wanderings as Sanyasi, deciding that this greatest striving should be for a 'life free of distracting illusions and hysterics'. He marries Sushila convinced of the callous realism of his motives. His all individual schemes in all the stages of life thus become a series of comic illusions.

In A. K. Narayan's novels it is possible to trace the ideal of asceticism unobtrusively behind certain situations and characterisations. In 'The Bachelor of Arts' the tone of spiritual asceticism does not get prominence. Narayan has just touched it to treat as comedy. The treatment is kindly but disillusioned. His view seems to be that happiness is elusive as well as illusive. Deep passion is human but destructive and divisive. The best values are ultimately exercised and nurtured in the ideal domestic life at home and not in the hermitage. Hence, Malgudi, inspite of its narrowness and snobbishness is a lesser evil than Madras with its temptation to fraud. Chandran's renouncement of the bogus temptations of fake asceticism
and return to Malgudi - the abode of peace have been true and appropriate in terms with Narayan's Comic Philosophy of life.

- TREATMENT OF THE IDEAL OF SAINTHOOD TRUE TO THE DEFINITION OF JIVAN-MUKTA -

But in his novel 'WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA' do we come across someone who has actually succeeded in achieving the ideal of renunciation. The Mahatma himself emerges here as a saint who can sympathise and remonstrate with ordinary men true to the definition of Jivan-Mukta and at the same time retain an internal calm. The Jivan-Mukta state is that in which a saint has ceased to have any desires. He may be doing all kinds of actions externally, though he remains altogether unaffected by them internally. This definition of Jivan-Mukta in Yoga Vasistha that describes the idea of a man enjoying a higher bliss through non-attachment and renunciation comes very close to the concept of Sthita-Projna in Bhagavad Gita. R.K. Narayan has portrayed Gandhi in his novel as he has seen him in his own life as a perfect saint corresponding to the idea of a Christian Saint in becoming a martyr. Gandhi accepts a cruel death like that of Christ to redeem the sufferings of others. Gandhi is not the central character in the novel but his benevolent influence on Sriram, Bharati and others is magnanimous. Narayan's treatment of Gandhi is conventionalised. Nothing is added to the accepted portrait of 'Bapu'. He has therefore

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ceased to be a living character. He is rather a living symbol of traditional Indian asceticism.

Though not thoroughly a human figure, Gandhi has been drawn with sure and delicate touches such as can perhaps be found only in the great Russian novels. We see him as a saintly figure in white, with his watch tucked at his waist into a fold of his dhoti and a smile shining over his face. We know of his strict observance of regularity and punctuality, his rising early at 3 A.M. and going to bed at 7-30 P.M., his spinning, his prayers, his meagre meals consisting of groundnuts, dates and milk, his morning walks, his intense love for children and untouchables, his efforts for Hindu-Muslim harmony, his joviality of nature and unaffected graciousness of tone, his simplicity, austerity, his faith in truth, non-violence, 'Charke' and 'Ram dhun' and his intense humanity. Gandhi is presented as a superman. We are told how he does several things at the same time - while his hands are spinning and his eyes perusing a letter held before him by another, he finds it possible to put in a word of welcome to guests as they come to meet him by the front or back door of the hut. He chooses his abode not in a locality where aristocrats live but in one which is inhabited by the scum of the earth:

The Mahatma entered his earth. This was one of the dozen huts belonging to the city sweepers.
who lived on the banks of the river. It was probably the worst area in the town, and an exaggeration even to call them huts; they were just hovels, put together with rags, tin-sheets, and shreds of coconut matting, all crowded in any how, with serately fowls cackling about and children growing in the street dust. 12.

The ideal of asceticism is the undercurrent force in Gandhi's life. His life and works reflect his great veneration for the high ideals of renunciation. Like the dedicated saints of the world he tours the villages on foot and talks to the villagers about spinning, war, non-violence and religion. He trudges his way through ploughed fields; he climbs hard rocky places through mud and slush, but always with the happiest look and in the most cheerful mood. During the Hindu-Muslim riots in Calcutta and West Bengal, he walked all through the swamps, floods and fields of that area with bowed head. He walks amidst the angry and aggressive crowds who threaten to murder him but fall at his feet when he approaches them with a message of love and Ahimsa. We know of his humanity that makes him feel quite at home both in the company of a fabulously rich Municipal Chairman and a poor sweeper boy having nothing to cover his body except a cast off knitted vest full of

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holes; the humanity that makes him attend to the domestic problems of the ordinary people with the same interest with which he attends to the momentous problems upon which revolves the destiny of the nation.

'WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA' presents not only a brilliant portrait of the Mahatma but also a penetrative analysis of his philosophy and ideas. R.K.Narayan has thoroughly realised the truth and sublimity of his ideas and therefore tried in the novel to express them in a very precise and simple language such as was used by Gandhi in his actual life and such as was in perfect harmony with his personality and character. In his first speech on the soil of Malgudi, Mahatmaji describes the saintly philosophy of his own life:

But we have a system of our own to follow; that's Ram Dhun; spinning on the Charaka and the practice of absolute truth and non-violence.

Gandhi explains to the people his creed of non-violence and how it can be practised in daily life......

It is perfectly simple procedure provided you have faith in it. If you watch yourself you will avoid all actions, big or small, and all thoughts,

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however obscure, which may cause pain to another. If you are watchful, it will come to you naturally. When someone has wronged you or has done something which appears to you to be evil, just pray for the destruction of that evil. Cultivate an extra-affection for the person and you will find that you are able to bring about a change in him. 20.

It is not the ordinary voice of the mortal being; it is the everkind God that speaks through the Mahatma. Regarding the use of violence the Mahatma says:

Before you aspire to drive the British from this country, you must drive every vestige of violence from your system. Remember that it is not going to be a fight with sticks and knives or guns but only with love. Until you are sure you have an overpowering love at heart for your enemy, don't think of driving him out. You must gradually forget the term 'Enemy'. 21.

Before his departure from Malgudi Gandhi gives advice to Sriram for his self-development:

Spin and read Bhagavad Gita, and utter 'Ram Nam' continuously, and then you will know what to do in life. 22.

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Gandhi's faith in the unerring guidance of conscience is expressed in his letter to Sri Ram:

Your work should be a matter of inner faith. It cannot depend upon what you see or understand. Your conscience should be your guide in every action. Consult it and you won't do wrong. 23.

Bharati tells us about his faith in humanism above the narrow distinction of caste, creed or religion:

Bapuji forbade us to refer to anyone in terms of religion as Muslims, Hindu, or Sikhs, but just as human-beings. 24.

The great popularity which Gandhiji enjoyed in this country is a unique phenomenon. No other political or religious leader in any part of the world has ever made so much peace for himself in the hearts of the people around him. The novel gives us a glimpse of this wide popularity of Mahatmaji. We are told how the huge crowds gather to listen to him or to see him passing through the round:

Through archways and ringing cries of 'Gandhi Ki Jai', Gandhi drove in the huge Bentley which the Chairman had left at his disposal. People sat on trees and housetops all along the way and cheered Gandhiji as he passed .... All shops had Contd.... P/210.
been closed and all schools, and the whole town was celebrating. School Children felt delighted at the thought of Gandhi. Office-goers were happy, and even banks were closed. They waited in the sun for hours, saw him pass in his Bentley, a white-clad figure, fair skinned and radiant with his palms pressed together in a salute.25.

He is loved and respected by all irrespective of their caste, creed and position. His presence works miracles in the sweepers' Colony. It transmutes the whole atmosphere of that place:

The man of the colony tied round their heads, their whitest turbans and the women bore their best saris, dragged their children to the river and scrubbed them till they yelled and decorated them coiffures with yellow chrysanthemum flowers. The men left off fighting, did their best to keep way from the drink shops, and even the few confirmed topers had their drinks on the sly, and suppressed their impulse to beat their wives or break their household pots. The whole place looked bright with lamps and green mango leaves tied across lamp posts and tree-branches.26.

R.K.Narayan's portrayal of Gandhi retains all-through an air of spiritual serenity. He is presented as a
perfect holyman with great endeavoured seriousness. He is held in such a high reverence by his country-men and possesses such a magic charm that even the angry, excited and violent mobs bow down before him like dumb sheep and begin to follow him in their lives. Even the great criminals utters his name with great piety. One of the hardened criminals says to Sriram:

Don't drag his name in here; that great saint.

'WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA': "with its fundamentally serious, heroic theme the freedom struggle, and its outcome - is Narayan's tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, both eulogy and elegy" says Haydn Moore Williams.

The Mahatma appears only twice in the novels - at the beginning when he and Bharati change the direction of Sriram's life to make him a 'Satyagrahi', and at the end when he sanctions Sriram's marriage; but his shadow lies large over the story and the characters. In the novel actually the Bharati - Sriram romance gains a new dimension in the background of their common allegiance to the Mahatma. Remaining in the background the holyman has spread the sweet perfumes of renunciation and non-violence. It is his credit that Narayan has not made the Mahatma a dull figure. His appearance has generated enthusiasm and liveliness, honour and respect. It is
not a preacher in the novel, he is a 'wandering ministrel' with special spiritual powers to the people of Malgudi. In the words of Louis Fischer:

His legacy is courage, his lesson truth, his weapon love. His life is his monument. 29.

In the hands of R.K. Narayan Chandran or Gandhi has not played the central role as Sanyasins or holy men. In the construction of theme and technique of the novels their role as saints is subordinate and a portion of the main stream of actions.

THEME OF REDEMPTION TREATED ON A TRAGIC LEVEL

The problem of Savitri in 'THE DARK ROOM' is similar to that of Chandran in 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS'. Her temporary renunciation of the worldly relationships in protest against her husband's immoral involvement with another ultra-modern lady and finally Savitri's return to the disciplines and support of her family are treated by Narayan in tragic terms. In utter grief and pain Savitri leaves her dear children and immoral husband and attempts to commit suicide. But she is saved. She finds employment at the Murugan temple in Sukkur village cleaning the temple and tending the garden. The Pujari insists that she should sleep in the dark room of the temple and not under the open sky.
Savitri soon realises that even the Gods abode is no safe for a lonely woman. The mother in her prays for her children at the shrine night and day. The simple prayer no longer satisfies her motherly love; for them she would even live in dark room for all time to come:

This is defeat. I accept it. I am no good for this fight. I am a bamboo pole... Perhaps Sumati and Kamala have not had their hair combed for ages now.

Savitri’s defiance, and defeat and even the detestable dark room seem to be trivial in the light of her motherly fulfilment. Ramani’s libertine uncouthness may be there to drive her again to the dark room but the supreme beatitude of a mother illumines the darkest of the dark rooms.

In 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS’ Chandran is allowed the comic illusion that within the limits of a fixed fate he is free to choose his life; Savitri knows that she is defeated once and for all. She does not have the necessary strength of non-attachment to live by herself. She fails because however much she desires her individuality, her emotional attachments in the world are too great to follow it. She must either live within society by accepting its norms,
or live outside it entirely on her own inner resources. In the novel, Narayan dramatises the psychological tragedy of a conventional wife, whose redemption is achieved, not through her husband's love, but through the affirmation of her own motherhood.

"ETERNITY AS THE CENTRAL CHORD OF INDIAN SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIAN SYSTEM OF MARRIAGE -

Eternity, not temporality, is the central chord of the Indian spiritual consciousness to which 'THE ENGLISH TEACHER' bears a convincing testimony.

In contrast with Bamani and Savitri in 'THE DARK ROOM' Krishna and Sushila in 'THE ENGLISH TEACHER' symbolise the spiritual significance of the Indian system of marriage. Krishna in this novel begins where Chandran in 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS' ends; the youthful Chandran stands on the threshold of wedded life while Krishna is already mature in the happy alliance of marriage and life in general.

In the portrait of Sushila, Narayan presents the ideal type of a Hindu wife, steeped in the cultural traditions of the country. Krishna's attachment to her is not merely physical. As Coomerswamy explains:

In India, the conditions of human love ... have seemed spiritually significant .... physical union

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has seemed to present a self-evident image of spiritual unity. 31.

Spiritual identification is the ultimate end of marriage, according to the time-honoured tradition of India. The Hindu rituals of marriage symbolically suggest the indivisible union of husband and wife; on the occasion of the marriage, the husband leads his wife around the holy fire, uttering the verse from the Atharva Veda:

He am I, she thou, chant am I, verse thou,
heaven I, earth thou let us (two) come together here.32.

That Krishna and Sushila ideally represent this type of Indian spiritual tradition is evident from the mystical experience of Krishna after the death of his wife. Their connubial happiness is the theme of the first part of the novel. In developing this motif, Narayan typifies Sushila as the traditional wife devoted to and identified with her husband.

The last journey of Sushila to the funeral ground and the religious rituals practised before cremating the deceased, Narayan vividly narrates, introducing, like Raja Rao in 'THE SERPENT AND THE HOPE', Krishna's diary notes:

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Sushila lies there under the window, laid out on the floor...... The corpse-bearers, grim and subhuman have arrived with their equipment - bamboo and coir-ropes. Near the front step they raise a small fire with cinders and faggots - this is the fire which is to follow us to the cremation ground .... The bearers, after brief and curt preliminaries, walk in, lift her casually ..... lay her on the stretcher and tie her up with the ropes. Her face looks up at the sky, bright with the saffron touched on her face, and the vermilion on the forehead and a string of jasmine somewhere about her head .... They shoulder the stretcher. 33.

Presently they reach the cremation ground 'a sort of cloak room, a place where you leave your body behind' and the priests minister the last rites. At last, "They build up a pyre, place her on it, cover her up with layers of fuel ... Leaving only the face and a part of her chest out, four layers deep down. I pour ghee on and drop the fire." 34.

This ritualistic disposal of the dead is based on the basic belief in the immortality of the soul and its ultimate merger with the Divine Spirit. The mantras are the auditory symbols of Deity, the chanting of which transports

Contd.....P/217.
the spirit into Heaven. Thus the obvious in Narayan’s novel conceals the profound metaphysical truths of Vedanta as can be perceived by Krishna’s psychic development in the second part of the novel.

Philosophically, ‘THE ENGLISH TEACHER’ postulates few interesting posers in contrast to Aja Rao’s ‘THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE’. Aja Rao asserts: ‘Duality is Anti-Indian; the non-dual affirms the truth’. That is, in other words, the monistic philosophy of Advaita, propounded by Shankara. In the highest realms of the Vedantic thought, the world of spirits as distinct from God cannot possibly exist. But Krishna’s psychic perception of Sushila’s spirit finds favour with the traditional belief of the Visistha-Advaita, the monotheistic creed of Ramanuja, which recognises, like other Indian systems, the individual salvation as freedom from this mundane existence, but with a difference as Hiriyanna explains:

Over and above this is the idea here of reaching a supramundane sphere and those enjoying in the presence of God the highest bliss. The imperfect prakriti body of the jiva is then replaced by perfect one, so that release does not mean here a disembodied state ....It is this ideal world - 'the Highland of the blest' - that is constituted out of Suddha - Sattva. .. It is a place of

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absolute peace and perfection.

This qualified dualistic exegesis is corroborated by Krishna's intensely esoteric experience. The band of spirits that inhabit the supramundane world of bliss and perfection strive to help the imperfect souls of this world by removing the barrier of death, not in the physical sense, but in the transcendental sense of supra-mental development. The spirits communicate through a medium to Krishna, vouchsafing a vision of peace and understanding:

Please understand that this work may revolutionise human ideas, and that you are playing a vital part in it. This is an attempt to turn the other side of the medal of existence, which is called, Death.

Krishna is sceptical, to begin with. But the spirits explain the difficult process of communication through a medium and one must seek to express oneself directly through a devotional concentration and mental relaxation. Communication and even a vision of the spirit are possible only when the subjective consciousness merges with the pure objective consciousness. Gradually, Sushila instructs Krishna in his psychic perception of 'the radiant presence' in the surrounding atmosphere. She assures him that she is always watching him from a higher region. She explains her own being:

Contd... P/219.
Time in your sense does not exist for us. Our life is one of thought and experience. A considerable portion of our state is taken up in meditation and our greatest ecstasy is in feeling the Divine light flooding us. We have no physical bodies. Music is ever with us here and it transports us to higher planes. And a song or melody can establish a link between our minds.

Jaijuhila's teaching is representatively the path of devotion in the mystical tradition of Vaishnavism with one fundamental difference. Krishna's goal is only a psychic union with the spirit of his wife, while the Bhakta or Devotee of Lord Vishnu aims at becoming one with the supreme.

In 'THE ENGLISH TEACHER' Krishna looks for a stabilising factor in life, an unchanging value, a knowledge of the self. After his wife's untimely death he seeks emotional solace in complete renunciation. Krishna looks for a 'harmonious existence' such as he sees in the nursery school:

When sat at the threshold of his hut and watched the children, all sense of loneliness ceased to oppress, and I felt a deep joy and contentment stirring within me. I felt there was nothing more for me to demand of life.

Contd....P/222.
But like Chandran and Savitri, the role of Krishna as Headmaster is also a joke in the Institution of Sanyasa:

He uses the role as a label: as a Sanyasi he is given licence to follow his idealistic mode of life which for a householder was considered eccentric and irresponsible.39.

Savitri and Chandran consider suicide as the only other logical alternative to Sanyasa. It is not self-renunciation which they planned. Even the Headmaster in 'THE ENGLISH TEACHER' says that the false prediction of death in his horoscope can be taken to mean Sanyasa Ashrama, that is, the last of the four stages of life.

- THE PROTAGONIST IN QUEST OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE -

In 'MR. SAMPATH' the novelist's sensibility operates in a double focus which invests the novel with its characteristic charm and grace. It is in the first place a novel of education, embodying the traditional spiritual images; and secondly a picaresque story of a scoundrel typical of a war-torn world with it floundering values even in such a quiet town as Malgudi. The complete urbanisation of an essentially rural town is portentous: 'Over-night, as it were, Malgudi passed from a semi-agricultural town to a semi-industrial town with a sudden influx of population of all sorts'
The protagonist of the novel, Srinivas, is a journalist, seeking self-knowledge through the instrument of his weekly, 'The Banner'. When the second world war was imminent 'The Banner' had proclaimed that 'it is only concerned with war that is always going on - between man's inside and outside. And a happy resolution of this spiritual problem is the policy of 'The Banner', and the mission of Srinivas.

His existential involvement in the worldly affairs reveals to Srinivas that 'man has no significance except as a wage-earner, as an economic unit, as a receptacle of responsibilities'. His casual encounter with Mr. Sampath, a resourceful and effusive printer results in a long association that helps him understand the ways of the world and finally fulfils his quest. He realises later:

I don't know whether I am helping Sampath or Sampath is helping me - the whole position is vague and obscure. The clear-cut lines of life are visible only when I am at my table and turning out 'The Banner'.

The Banner's immediate concern is to attack the highheadedness of the municipality and prod humanity to live life more seriously. This odd mixture of the inanities of the materialistic world and the spiritual quest for lasting peace and harmony makes his journal unique.
Srinivas is convinced that this world helps him in his search for the 'unknown stabilizing factor' that restores man's faith and his essential peace in life. Nor is the Banner his only means, for, he has his own traditional religious images which elevate his personality. Thus, for example, he never starts his day without first invoking the blessings of the God head in the image of Nataraja, his grandmother's gift, decades ago. This is the divine symbol that finally enlightens Srinivas. The deeper significance of the image of Nataraja, that forms such an inalienable and invisible part of his consciousness, is well-explained by the famous cognoscente of Indian traditional Art, Anand K. Gooperswamy:

He wraps about him, as a garment, the tiger-fury of human passion; the guile and malice of mankind he wears as a 'necklace', and beneath his feet is for ever crushed the embodiment of evil.41

The garment is the tigerskin; the necklace is the snake; and the embodiment of evil is the demon on whom God Shiva dances. It is noteworthy that this image of Lord Shiva as the destroyer of the evil and the base in the universe recurs again and again in the novel.

Piqued by Sampath's meddlesome egoism, Srinivas recalls the mystery of the Chidambaram temple:

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At Chidambaram temple there was a grand secret, beyond the semi-dark holy of holies, beyond the twinkling lights of the inner shrine. He had always wondered what it might be; but those who attempted to probe it too deliberately lost their lives .... it seemed to be expressive of existence itself. 42.

The sanctity of the human heart is inviolable. Symbolically; Chidambaram, the centre of the universe where Shiva dances, is situated within the human consciousness. Hence, transgression at Chidambaram is dangerous to man.

- AN ATTEMPT OF COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE HOUSEHOLDER AND THE SANYASI - TREATMENT OF THE STAGE OF VANAPRASTHYA OR RETREAT -

In 'THE SWEET VENDOR' Narayan explores the similar compromises between the householder and the Sanyasi. The story shows Jagan's inability to achieve the possible compromise within the world, or renunciation of the fruits of action. Jagan has released himself from the bond of worldly desires such as marriage and money. Like Margayya in 'THE FINANCIAL EXPERT' he does not keep himself actively engaged in making illegal money and immoral comforts. Yet his economical life within the world fails to bring him 'tranquillity of mind', the ideal taught by the Bhagavad Gita.

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Jagan is different from Margayya. Margayya has a craze for money but "his mind gloated over visions of his son." He becomes too absorbed in making easy money to bother about his son and not about himself. His ways of life, when his ill-gained money is lost and he becomes poorer than when he started, the incident hardly disturbs his peace of mind. But his is self-imposed discipline. He has not learnt anything from the several experiences of his life. His self-imposed discipline of worship does not improve him any, because it was not discipline at all but merely ritual; the rise to wealth does not affect him. Money can bring him nothing because he does not know now to use money; he still lives in his bare, old-fashioned little house with its single file of four rooms and the small room he builds upstairs stores dust and currency notes. Except for a new umbrella...

he gave no outward sign of his affluence...

He walked to his office everyday. His coat was of spun silk, but he chose a shade that approximated to the one he had worn for years so that no one might notice the difference.

He does not even buy an oil lamp for his office. Later the only comfort he indulges in is a car, and that is more in self-defence than for comfort. He learns nothing from Balu's flight, supposed death, and return. This is utter

Contd.... P/225.
callousness and miserliness. This is not renunciation. Simplicity of Margayya’s ways of life is good but his miserliness and callous indifference to life is disgusting. He is neither aware of values nor human hearts nor human suffering. And therefore, he does not reach the higher spiritual plane. He works out his own ruin but he does not bring it about for any moral principles. He does not find the true meaning of life nor does he attempt to find it.

But Jagan finds himself. Unlike Margayya he finishes on a higher plane. But his discoveries of the truth of life are sad in perception and slow in realisation. Narayan’s growing artistic maturity has realised this and contributes to making ‘The SWEET VENDOR’ his best novel to date.

Apparently the resemblances between Margayya and Jagan are numerous. Both are typically misers - both have acquired a huge amount of money and do not wish to spend a penny of it. For both, their only child is a child of many prayers. Both have high hopes for their son. Both are ruined by the son they have spoilt. Both men are themselves the product of fundamental change in the traditional family pattern; the joint family system so basic to the Hindu way of life has been broken in their youth and each lives in a
relatively isolated domestic world. Jagan claims to be a Gandhian in his ways of life. He is genuinely loyal to Gandhi. He has been spinning Khadi for his own clothes and wearing only acceptable Gandhian footwear and has been using unadulterated foodstuffs in his shop. That Jagan is not as obsessed with money as Margayya is also unquestionable. He loves money but he is liberal with his son's lunch allowances and he does not mind if Mali, his son steals away ten thousand rupees from his hidden treasure. Jagan is less concerned about money than about his child. Even when asked to shell out fifty thousand dollars, he is more concerned only about his son's rashness than about the money. And ultimately when the walls of difference between him and his son become clear and his mental peace is entirely lost, he leaves his entire fortune without a backward look. He does this because of his new awareness that his own peace of mind is more important than anything else. He wanted to educate himself in the school of life and now he is truly educated. This is the 'awareness' that Jagan attains - the transmutation of self. This is the philosophy the novel embodies - let each man work for his own salvation and that to reach the stage of salvation man requires self-effacement by complete surrender at the feet of the all powerful God by renunciation of work, knowledge and duty or religion - and that nothing remains for him at this stage except that of being an instrument.

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of the divine will. Jagan reaches this stage of mind and he passes through several stages of perception before he finds the proper focus for the good life. At the initial stage his focus is on his son and on his sweet shop. Then the son moves out of focus when he is slipped away from Albert Mission College. Jagan brings him back in focus through a subjective process. When Mali goes to America and stays there for study Jagan tries to keep him in focus with the help of letters. After his return from America with a foreign mistress, Jagan realises his first ever shock in life. He realises that the lens of communication is completely fogged over and he tries to clear it through Grace, the supposed wife of Mali. But things grow more complicated. He feels he has completely lost his focus for ever and he concentrates on his business though Mali and Grace still form part of the composition - blurred and more indistinct. He becomes sick of his nagging child and completely detaches himself from his evil company. He looks at life in a new direction and suddenly sees a whole new vista. This is his realisation. He attains penance of mind embodying calmness of mind, gentleness, control of speech, self-control and honesty of purpose. He is on the way to attain 'Sattvic austerity' as described in the Bhagavad Gita. This is the point at which he deserts his dear shop and departs to the forest to adopt the state of Vanaprasthya.

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At the foot of the Lawley Statue he looks back at the past scenes of life and considers his present state as the output of Karma; that is, as he sowed so he now reaps - the essence of all teachings of life. The sower and the seed were two different units. Jagan is now responsible only for himself and Mali for Mali:

Who are we to get him out or to put him in?

I am going somewhere .... I am a freeman. 45.

With this realisation Jagan ascends to a new level of perception.

Jagan leaves the world and comes to the forest but there he does not take up the uncompromising role of Sanyasi, but rather the intermediary state of Vanaprasthya or retreat to the forest.

ASCETICISM AS THE PRINCIPAL POINT OF INTEREST IN 'THE GUIDE' - THE TRANSFORMATION OF A BOGUS HOLYMAN INTO A DYING GOD.

In 'THE GUIDE' R.K. Narayan for the first time makes a Sanyasi appear prominently as the central point of interest. Chandran, 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS', leaves Malgudi in despair and becomes a bogus Sanyasi. This is something like Raju's fate in 'THE GUIDE' when after his tragic obsession with Rosie he is sent to jail and immediately after his release from the prison he takes refuge in a temple by the river where he comes to be known as a Sanyasi.

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The story of Haju's transformation into a holyman is similar to that of Kalo in Bhabani Bhattacharya's 'HE WHO RIDES A TIGER'. The heroes of both the novels deceive society suddenly by taking the role of saints. Both of them are carried away by the stream of deceptive activities and both of them come to a point when it is impossible to throw away the mask and go back where they began. But these resemblances are only apparent. There is a very fundamental difference between the consequences of the activities of Haju and Kalo. Both of them wear a mask of fake Sadhu in order to meet foul means of depriving people. But in 'HE WHO RIDES A TIGER' the mischievous holyman throws away the mask at the end of the novel quite unexpectedly and makes a clean breast of his deception to a large crowd that has gathered near the temple. He and his daughter leave the temple built on an enormous lie and take the dusty road together. Kalo threw away the saffron robe as easily as he wore it. But the matter is entirely different with Haju. He finds it more difficult to disclose its identity. Once he wore the saffron robe deliberately to pass himself off for a Sadhu. But towards the end Haju loses the feeling of an actor performing an act. The act becomes the reality and the mask becomes the man. Haju can no longer throw away his mask and go back where he began. The Guide really turns into a Guru. Kalo in Bhattacharya's novel turns into a Sadhu deliberately.

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to take revenge against society. The initial inspiration of his deception comes out of his anger against the high-brows of the society. He wants these people to bow to him. This is his revenge. But Haju had no such evil intention. He becomes a Sadhu without any previous plan. He took such a role simply because it gave him unconditional and free supply of food and that is all.

Haju has always been whimsical in his life. It is the general pattern of his life. His sudden drifting into the role of a Sanyasi in the temple of Mangala village, therefore, is quite in keeping with this pattern. The author says:

Haju soon realised that his spiritual status would be enhanced if he grew a beard and long hair to fall on his nape. A clean-shaven close-haired saint was an anomaly. He bore the various stages of his make-up with fortitude, not minding the prickly phase he had to pass through before a well-authenticated bear could cover his face and come down his chest. By the time he arrived at the stage of stroking his beard thoughtfully, his prestige had grown beyond his wildest dreams.

This drifting into the role of a Sadhu and paying too much attention to his appearance, his beard, his fluency in uttering...
mystifying words to convince people suit Raju's system of life wonderfully. Raju says to Vela emphatically that he never did anything; things always happened to him and that he has always tried to utilise those things just for a change willy-nilly in life. He started his career as an owner of the sweetmeat stall on the platform of Malgudi Railway station.

'I came to be called Railway Raju' - he says. Tourists happened to ask him about the important historical spots around Malgudi. Raju pretended to be very wise and learned and exaggerated to them about the great beauty and importance of the spots though he was quite ignorant about them. He says: 'This sort of enquiry soon led me to think that I had not given sufficient thought to the subject. I never said, 'I don't know'. Not in my nature, I suppose. If I had had the inclination to say, 'I don't know what you are talking about', my life would have taken a different turn. Instead, I said, 'Oh, yes, a fascinating place. Haven't you seen it? You must find the time to visit it, otherwise your whole trip here would be a waste'. I am sorry I said it, an utter piece of falsehood. It was not because I wanted to utter a falsehood, but only because I wanted to be pleasant.'

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Thus 'Railway Aaju' turned quite by accident into a full-fledged tourist guide.

In the second phase of his life the tourist guide drifted into the role of a lover. He was thrown into the dangerous, passionate relationship with Āsie, the mistress of a rich tourist he calls 'Marco'. Āaju's passion for Āsie makes him restless and almost a mad. He elopes with her and spends all his hard-earned savings to make Āsie a great classical dancer. He becomes her business manager and publicity agent without making any conscious plans about it. It is characteristic of Āaju that once cast in a particular part he performs it with gusto, partly for the sake of self-preservation, partly because it suits his temperament wonderfully.

In the third phase of his life he becomes a convict. Obsessed and ultimately ruined by the strange, cold-hearted Āsie, Āaju is accused of forgery by Marco. He goes to prison, deserted by his mistress, despised by his family and friends. This act of forgery was the only one done by him deliberately. But Āaju could not imagine that his act of forgery should bring him such a disaster. Even this role of the convict in the jail was performed with joy and inspiration:

I was considered a model prisoner, he says.

After the expiary of his term of imprisonment, he takes refuge in an old temple by the river. While sitting on the steps of the temple one evening and reflecting on the
future course of his life, he is taken for a holy saint by a peasant called Velan who seeks his advice on his domestic problems. By uttering a few platitudes, he helps the peasant to find a solution for his problems and soon acquires a reputation as a holyman. The convict thus drifts into the role of a Swami. People come to him to seek his advice in domestic problems. Baju does not disappoint them. He utters mystifying statements to them with characteristic dignity. He knows -

the essence of sainthood seemed to lie in one's ability to utter mystifying statements. 49.

But very soon Baju realises that he is playing with fire. When a draught comes to the district and the crops are scorched and the cattle begin to die for want of grass and water, the peasants turn to him for help and pray to him for performing a penance to propitiate the Rain-God. Baju finds himself caught in his own trap. Finding no way out of this critical situation he wants to tell the villagers the story of his past sinful life so that he can be saved from this dangerous ordeal. But he cannot escape his destiny. In his role of Sanyasi forced on him he reluctantly agrees to undertake a fast to end the draught which gets world wide publicity and finally kills him.

Baju's entire life is a game of deception. He is always dynamic and hence the most moving of all Narayan's heroes.
He has always been in the habit of surprising himself with his own excellent performance. Years ago when he entirely dedicated himself to the task of making a classical dancer he was impressed by his own oratory:

Heaven knows where I had found all this eloquence. 50.

I never knew I could speak so fluently on cultural matters. I had picked up a little terminology from and put it to the best use. I described 'The Dancing Feet' and explained its significance word by word and almost performed the dancing act myself. 51.

Even as a tourist guide he had shown similar success as an eloquent speaker. The secret of Raju's success is this that he had the rare ability to identify himself completely with whatever role he plays. The same capacity helps him in the final role of his life as an ascetic. His sudden adjustment to the role of a Sadhu does not surprise us. It is entirely in keeping with the similar tricks he has played throughout his life. People come to him to listen to his discourses and story-tellings. He delivers big lectures on the necessity of education and instantly establishes an evening school in the temple in order to eradicate illiteracy of the children. Gradually Raju realises that the essence of sainthood lies in the art of uttering mystical words. He advises the people.

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in his newly-acquired self-styled fashion:

Rerecollect and reflect upon every word you have uttered since day break. 52.

To the village teacher he converses with an air of authority:

I like to see young boys become literate and intelligent ..... it's our duty to make everyone happy and wise. 53.

When the villagers talk about a crocodile in the river, Haju says in the same vein:

What can a crocodile do to you if your mind is clear and your conscience is untroubled. 54.

Thus the railway Haju has been going on exceptionally well in his new role of a saint. But at last he reaches a stage when the situation is no longer under his control. People began to come in batches:

Let us all go and pay our respects to Swami, our Saviour. 55.

Haju now becomes a Saviour and so he is now afraid of some new turn in his life which may be quite unfamiliar to him and may cause his disaster. Very soon these ominous thoughts take shape. The shadow of famine stalks the countryside,

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the earth was fast drying up and cattle begin to die.
People come to their saviour:

You must show us the way, Swami. 56.

The saviour himself is now in a helpless state of mind. Apparently he looks untroubled and reserved and tells them:

Be peaceful; everything will be all right; I will fix it with the Gods. 57.

But inwardly he has become restless. For the first time he confronts a situation in which he does not know how to act:

Something was happening on a different level over which he had no control or choice and where a philosophical attitude made no difference. 58.

It is at this stage of the matter that Daju has been compelled to begin the fast. He now realises the hard truth that he cannot get out of this trap. He makes his last effort to convince the people:

I am prepared to fast for the sake of your people and do anything if I can help this country, but it is to be done only by a saint. I am no saint... I am not a saint, Velan, I am just an ordinary human being like anyone else. 59.

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This is for the first time Haju makes a frank confession of his real identity by breaking down all barriers of pretension and duplicity. He is in a frantic bid to save himself and therefore discloses at this point the sinful past history of his life to Valen. When he has thus told the whole story before Valen to remove all the layers of disguise from his true self we notice with wonder the beginning of his real growth. He is now a changed man, a transformed personality. This transformation of Haju from the fake saint to a saint discovering his own self is really convincing. Valen's respect for him increases instead of diminishing after hearing about Haju's past. He says:

I don't know why you tell me all this, Swami.
It is very kind of you to address, at such length, your humble servant.

Haju realises that he has undertaken a destructive risk. He has so far lived a very whimsical life but now this task of fasting in order to purify the sins of others by pleasing the God of Aain is beyond his human capacity. He feels sick of the whole thing. Sometimes he feels it powerfully to come out of the temple and cry aloud to the crowd:

Get out, all of you, and leave me alone, I am not the man to save you. No power on earth can save you.

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if you are doomed. Why do you bother me with all this fasting and austerity. 61.

But he thinks again:

it would not help. They might enjoy it as a joke. 62.

During the early days of the fast he has thought of escaping from the whole matter. But he could not betray the simple faith of the villagers:

He felt moved by the recollection of the big crowd of women and children touching his feet.

He felt moved by the thought of their gratitude. 63.

The unquestioning faith of the people elated his mind and personality. It transforms Baju from:

what he really is, into a worthy object of its devotion. Towards the end Baju loses the feeling of an actor performing an act; the act becomes the reality, the mask become the man. 64.

He now feels that his role itself has a certain power. He is 'hypnotised by his own voice', 'impressed by his own grandeur', he imagines himself 'growing in stature'. 65.

Baju's act of sacrifice transcends his self. This is a moment of illumination, a moment in which an individual acquires the heavenly power to go beyond the barriers of his self:

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For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort; for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing something in which he was not personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him a new strength to go through with the ordeal.66.

Raju, the guide turns into Raju the master, the saviour-saint. A minor Oedipus, Raju lives on to redeem himself; the bogus holyman changes into a dying God sacrificing himself for the people.67.

The transformation unfolded in different stages of development.

The sainthood motif stands right at the centre and the entire action leads up to it. It sums up in one word the tremendous significance of the strange transformation of the hero from 'Railway Raju' to recluse Raju; from a forge to a fakir; from a picaro to a pilgrim. This strange transformation has been unfolded in different stages of development. In the initial stage Raju is transformed into a Swamy without any conscious effort on his part, though the process is actually set in motion by his own eagerness, derived from his days of the tourist guide to interest himself in the problems of others:

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It was his nature to get involved in other people's interests and activities. Every action of Baju — even his mistakes and shortcomings furthers the grand design which is finally complete only when he is compelled to attain a saint's martyrdom. There is irony in this phase arising out of the incongruity of a freshly released criminal being mistaken for a holyman.

In the second stage we find Baju playing assiduously the role of the saint thrust upon him. He transfers his seat to the inner hall of the temple "in order to get a better background." He decides:

- to look as brilliant as he could manage, let drop gems of thought from his lips, assume all the radiance available.

The villagers request him for a discourse perhaps on religious matters. But Baju realises that the only subject on which he could speak with is jail life. Therefore, at the request of the villagers he runs into difficulties. But at the next thought he hits upon a clever solution by asking his disciples to meditate. The irony in this phase stems out of the improvisations practised by Baju in adjusting the mask of the saint to his face.
The third stage is a clear development upon the earlier stages and appears to be more critical and at the same time ironical. The severe draught in the village signals the turning point of his life. The draught disturbs life in the village leading to fracas and violence. Ha$u is afraid that the police might arrive and expose him. The irony of fate now operates impressively by making the village moron an unconscious instrument of Raju's destruction. But he still plays the role of a saint and sends a message to the villagers through the moron: "unless they are good I'll never eat". But to the villagers the message gets twisted into something like 'The Swami won't eat because it won't rain'. Raju senses the destructive risk of the situation. He cannot escape and undertake the risk to bring rain. His sainthood has now become a prison from which there is no escape for the victim. The irony here reveals in a flash the deep-seated complexities of human nature. During the last stages of his ordeal he is still alert enough to tell a brazen-faced lie to the American film producer who asks him:

'Have you always been a Nogi ?', to which Raju's answer is: 'yes; more or less'.

The ambiguities that operate in the closing pages of the novel question ironically our accepted ideas of human nature.
and conduct. Ruling out the official message to break the fast, Raju goes to the river to pray - an act which hastens his death. Why does he do this? Is it done in a spirit of sheer fatalism? Or has Raju now identified himself with the saint's role so completely that he does not mind losing his life for the greater interest of the masses? The final question also remains unanswered: Why does Raju declare, 

> It's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming under my feet, up my legs. 

Is it that Raju has now attained the great spiritual powers of genuine sainthood? Or is it a miraculous vision of a martyred soul or a pathetic delusion of a dying man? Compared to the eventful life of the mighty Raju, this act may not mean harder to him. He has done so many impossible things in his life and this task has also been done in that vigorous spirit of sacrifice. It is an act of dedication of a genuine self. To call his death a pathetic delusion will be wrong judgement of Raju's true sainthood.

The transformation of Raju's life is indeed the spiritual triumph of Narayan's art. For, Raju dies in the true spirit of a saint. Raju's reply to the American correspondent is characteristic of a saint:

> I am only doing what I might have to do; that's all. My likes and dislikes do not count.
Raju's death at the end is for the Dharma that holds up the suffering humanity.

Narayan's art signifies in 'THE GUIDE' a moral dimension that marks a definite advancement from the representation of mere types. It is indeed rewarding to watch the progress of the typical individual consciousness in 'THE GUIDE' from its narrow ego-centricity to the ultimate archetypal awareness of cosmic consciousness. The transformation of the selfish and the lustful Raju into a true Swamy, 'Dharmatma' is an artistic triumph.

The events leading up to the death of Raju may sound fantastic to the Western reader. But in India whenever there is a draught, village saints are always expected to fast and work miracles and some of them like Raju may die which thousands watch with devotion-studded eyes.

For Narayan theme is supposedly an Indian spirituality founded on the ancient concept of Bhakti. Here we must consider the term as it first appeared in the Bhagavad Gita referring to loving personal devotion to God in his incarnation as Krishna. We might then consider the extension of this devotion to ordinary human beings as exemplified by Kabir and other medieval saints. Finally we must realise that Narayan who is himself an inadvertent spiritualist,

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never cuts off the term from its religious base and reduces it to something like western humanitarianism as in Anand.

ASCETICISM - A DEEP-SEATED MOTIVE THAT CONSTITUTES THE VERY SETTING OF THE FORM

Thus the spirit of traditional Indian asceticism strikes out the keynote of theme in most Indo-Anglian novels. It is the undercurrent wave that dominates the atmosphere and pervades the background of the literary landscape in India. In whatever amount of contact with the modern western trends does this landscape come, it cannot and perhaps will not shake off its own roots of spirituality. It is an ingrained quality - a deep-seated motive - a long cherished ideal which constitutes the very setting of the form. Any attempt to shake it off or rule out its possibility will be suicidal. Political or social problems of life may take upperhand as theme in the novels but the narrative will be dictated and absorbingly guided by the innermost undercurrent of Indian mysticism or spirituality. The cry for the ultimate, the quest for self-knowledge assumes greater significance in all the Indian literatures. This religious experience or trend helps in maturing the novel form because an universal experience shared by the people at large becomes the matrix of a society and such novel flourishes best in a society where the traditional values of life are integrated.

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E.M. Forster sees the portrayal of "life by time" as the special role which the novel has added to literature's more ancient preoccupation with portraying "life by values".

The concern of the Indo-Anglian novel to-day is the 'ultra historical' modern man whose individuality and personal life are shaped by factors of traditional spiritual truths. The underlying situation is real to all Indians and lies very close to their immediate experience.

The fulfilment of desires, however, important a target according to the individualistic ideals of western society has always been either neglected or consciously avoided in Indo-Anglian literature. Such thing is foreign to Indian tradition of faith in Socio-cultural life and therefore poses to be a great difficulty to the novelists, because they are using the language and form of the English novelist but they have to operate within a totally different frame of reference. Sex and worldly pleasures are the central concerns of the western novel but adherence to the ideals of renunciation and self-sacrifice and simple faith in the superior wisdom of asceticism constitute the fundamental context of Indian literary scene. We have noticed this factor in our study of some prominent novels of Indo-Anglian novelists. (See Appendix). In literary practice numerous characters are found to adhere to classic prototypes - especially the women of fiction such as Sarojini

The trend of spiritual quest and its realisation constitutes the basic theme of Asja's first novel 'KANTAPURA'. The essence of sainthood and its radiating glory ring the cardinal point of the story:

In the great Heavens Brahma the self-created One was lying on his serpent, when the sage Valmiki entered, announced by the two door-keepers. 'Oh, Learned Sire, what brings you into this distant world?' asked Brahma, and, offering the sage a seat beside him, fell at his feet. 'Rise up, O God of Gods! I have come to bring you sinister news. Far down on the Earth you chose as your chief daughter Bharatha, the goddess of wisdom and well-being. You gave her the sage-loved Himalayas on the North and the seven surging seas... Contd... P/247
to the South, and you gave her the Ganges to meditate on, the Godavery to live by, and the pure Cauvery to drink in .... You gave her too, sages radiating wisdom to the eight cardinal points of the Earth, Krishna and Buddha, Shankara and Ramanuja. But, O Brahma! You who sent us the prince propagators of the Holy land and sages that smote the darkness of Ignorance, you have forgotten us so long that men have come from across the seas and the oceans to trample on our wisdom and to spit on virtue itself. They have come to bind us and to whip us, to make our women die milkless and our men die ignorant. O Brahma! deign to send us one of your Gods so that he may incarnate on Earth and bring back light and plenty to your enslaved daughter.

... 'O sage, pronounced Brahma, is it greater for you to ask or for me to say 'Yes'? Siva himself will forthwith go and incarnate on the Earth and free my beloved daughter from her enforced slavery. Pray, seat yourself, and the messengers of Heaven shall fly to Kailas and Siva be informed of it.

And lo! When the sage was still partaking of the pleasures Brahma offered him in hospitality,
there was born in a family in Gujerat a son such as the world has never beheld. As soon as he came forth, the four wide walls began to shine like the kingdom of the Sun, and hardly was he in the cradle than he began to lisp the language of wisdom. You remember how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four, had begun to fight against demons and had killed the serpent Kali. So too our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of the country. And as he grew up, and after he was duly shaven for the hair ceremony, he began to go out into the village and assemble people and talk to them, and his voice so pure, his forehead so brilliant with wisdom, that men followed him, more and more men followed him as they did Krishna, the flute-player; and so he goes from village to village to slay the serpent of the foreign rule. Fight, says he, but harm no soul. Love all, says he, Hindu, Mohamedan, Christian or Pariah, for all are equal before God. Don't be attached to riches, says he, for riches create passions, and passions create attachment and attachment hides the face of truth. Truth must you tell, he says, for Truth is God, and verily, it is the only God I know.... He is a saint, the Mahatma, a wiseman and a saint.75.
Sainthood is ingrained in Indian religion and Indian philosophy of life. Saints like Valmiki, Janaka and Shankara dominated the ancient legends and literatures and in modern time the sainthood of the Mahatma Gandhi permeates the setting of many contemporary Indian literatures. Did not Nehru say, where Gandhi sat become a temple, where he walked the ground became hallowed? Such is the glory of man who by renouncing all worldly pleasures for the sake of the poor, distressed and the destitute attained transcendental consciousness and generated into thousands the same spirit of self-conquest and self-realisation. In 'Kanthapura' Murthi is in search of a Guru who would release him from the worldly bondage. He is deeply involved in Gandhism as well as in search for a Guru. Consider statements like:

Moorthy had gone through life like a noble cow, quiet generous, serene, deferent, Brahminic, a very prince; and later: 'He is our Gandhi'. Gandhi is the invisible God. Moorthy is the invisible avatar. 76.

He is the saint of our village. 77.

From the time we meet him at the beginning of the novel to the very end of the book, Moorthy is perched at the top in his ascetic strength. He is idealised as a Gandhi man.
who has preached brotherhood, and equality and castelessness and abolition of untouchability. He is a young man and he has an emotional affair with a young widowed girl of the village. But he tries to rise above the temptations of the earthly pleasures of life. He overcomes his desire and passion and works with her in the Satyagraha movement in a detached way. Moorthy is a Gandhiman but at some moments he is still subject to his emotions and prejudices. He calls Pariah Bachanna, 'Brother Bachanna', but will 'stand on the gutter slab' in front of Bachanna's house and talk to him 'from outside'. He now goes to see him. Bachanna is not at home. Bachanna's wife is pounding rice and encouraged apparently by Moorthy's professions and spectacularly liberal practises asks him in. It is a crucial moment for Moorthy. His instinctive revulsion and momentary anguish indicate the struggle that went on within him constantly. The novelist relates the distress felt by Moorthy with astonishing faithfulness to experience:

...and with one foot to the back and one foot to the fore, he stands trembling and undecided, and then suddenly hurries up the steps and crosses the threshold and squats on the earthen floor. But Bachanna's wife quickly sweeps a corner, and spreads for him a wattle mat, but Moorthy, confused, blurts out, "No No No No ", and he looks this side and

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that and thinks: Surely there is a carcass in the backyard and it is surely being skinned; and he smells the stench of hide, and the stench of pickled pigs and the room seems to shake, and all the gods and all the manes of heaven seem to cry against him, and his hands steal mechanically to the holy thread, and holding it he feels he would like to say, "Hari Om, Hari Om". But Machanna's wife has come back with a little milk in a shining brass tumbler, and placing it on the floor with stretched hands, she says, "Accept this from this poor hussy!" and slips back behind the cornbins; and Moorthy says, "I have just taken coffee, Lingamma ...." but she interrupts him and says, "Touch it, Moorthappa, touch it only as though it were offered to the Gods, and we shall be sanctified"; and Moorthy, with many a trembling prayer, touches the tumbler and brings it to his lips, and taking one sip, lays it aside.

Moorthy is thus in the process of conquering his senses and attaining the state of Jivan Mukta adhering to the ideals of non-attachment, conquest of all prejudices and emotional bondage and selfless love towards all humanity.

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The theme of renunciation and salvation is carried out in his next novel 'THE CAT AND SHAKESPEARE' which is a thunderous affirmation of life in Hindu terms where life is the merging of the self into the self, the victory through surrender. The surrender is not an act of blind faith - it is by an act of instinctual knowledge that Ramakrishna Pai in 'THE CAT AND SHAKESPEARE' recognises the beatitude of women. But whereas Rama strives in anguish for a revelation, Pai gets it without effort. This difference in their attitude and experience is the result of the author's own anguished experience that culminated in serenity under the influence of his Guru Swami Atmananda.

The problem of the nature of reality is combined with the problem of salvation. Early in the novel Govindan Nair reads the Hindu scripture to Ramakrishna when he is sick, though it is Ramakrishna who is the Brahmin not Govindan Nair. Govindan's guru-like role is continued in the sequences concerning the cat in the office, the boss's death and Ramakrishna's vision of bliss beyond the wall of life and death. He reaches a state beyond the fear of suffering. It is the state of Jivan Mukta which has been defined thus:

The Jivan Mukta state is that in which the saint has ceased to have any desires: He is full of bliss and happiness, and therefore appears to
ordinary eyes to be an ordinary happyman ... He is wise and pleasant and loving to all with whom he comes in contact .... he can play like a child and can sympathise with the sorrows of sufferers. 30.

The same ideal characterises Amaswamy, the hero of Rao's novel 'THE DEPART AND THE HOPE'. The final solution of the conflict and tension comes through renunciation. After his alienation from Madeleine, Amaswamy seeks in vain the purpose of life:

... Why we are here, what is it we seek. 81.

The ultimate reply he gets from his Guru at the end of the novel :

No, not a God, but a Guru is what I need. 82.

It is only a Guru who can tell him the deeper meaning of life and thus show him the path that leads away from one's self. Suddenly the vision of the Guru comes :

I knew his face as one knows one's face in deep sleep. He called me and said, 'it is so long, so long, my son. I have waited you. Come we go'. I went .... and I will not return. I have gone whence there is no returning ... Do you ... need a candle to show the light of the Sun ? Such a Sun I have seen, it is more splendid than a million Suns.

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It sits on a river bank, it sits as the formless
form of truth; it walks without waking, speaks
without talking, moves without gesticulating,
shows without naming, reveals what is known. To
such a truth was I taken, and became its servant,
I kissed the perfume of its holy feet, and called
myself a disciple .... it is the gift that
Yagnyavalkya made to Maitreyi, it is the gift he
made to me, My Lord. May I be worthy of the Lord.
Lord, my Master! 0 thou abode of Truth. 83.

Lama realises that he must go to his Guru at Travancore:

I have no Benares now, no Ganga, no Jumna,
Travancore is my country, Travancore my name. 84.

The end of Lama's quest at the feet of his Guru is in
keeping with the age-old spiritual tradition of India which
gives the Guru the highest place in Man's quest for truth.
To be in his company is spiritual education. To obey and
serve him, to listen to his words - and even to his silences
is to be initiated. Lama's ship has neared port. He has
attained Moksa.

Krishnan of B. Najan's 'THE DARK DANCE' faces a
problem of similar type. His dilemma is over and he finds
the right path when he deserts Cynthia and comes back to
his wife Kamala who is nursing the riot-ridden people of
Shantipur to forget her own unhappiness. Krishnan, the
Contd.....P/255
protagonist thus learns abandonment of the self and purification of mind from Kamala. He gets ultimate peace of mind. When Kamala dies trying to save a Muslim woman, Krishnan finds serenity and meaning in life. The instance of his wife's complete renunciation changes the course of his life. His desire, passion, quest for happiness are all left behind. He emerges a freer and more detached man. He no longer worries about his identity or his mission in life. A new state of serenity and saintliness add a new dimension to his realisation of self. The mother in Santha Rama Rau's novel 'MEMBER THE HOUSE' is a character who has renounced all worldly possessions in quest of superior bliss through detachment. She lives with her Guru far away in a town in Kerala. She is portrayed as a symbol to counteract the effects of the exuberance and glitter of worldly happiness. She has reached the state of sthita-projna and enjoys a superior bliss through detachment. This is a fundamental and all-pervasive ideal of Indian life, an ideal that transcends the boundaries of language and culture and permeates all levels of society.

The ascetics do not live for themselves. They live for others. In Indo-Anglian novels they have always been found to influence other people. They have spiritual powers or at least many of them pretend to have powers. They solve problems of worldly people. They bring peace and stability
to a troubled situation. They love all people - good and bad alike and pray for their wellbeing in the temples and mosques. These are the simple functions they perform in Indo-English novels. Except in Bhabani Bhattacharya's 'A GODDESS NAMED GOLD' and 'HE WHO RIDES A TIGER', Sudhin Ghose's 'THE FLAME OF THE FOREST', Kamala Markandaya's 'POSSESSION', and R.K.Narayan's 'WAITING FOR THE MAMATA', and 'THE GUIDE' the ascetics hardly appear as an individual character. The 'wandering minstrel' as described by Bhabani Bhattacharya in his 'A GODDESS NAMED GOLD' plays a great role and wields so much influence on the villagers. He seems to be a large-hearted man, a saint with great spiritual powers. He is not always present in the novel but his infrequent visits to the village and acts of kindness exert beneficial influence on people. His reputation built up for him is aptly substantiated in the actual characterization of the man.

Bhattacharya's treatment of Kalo, the hero of 'HE WHO RIDES A TIGER' is entirely different from that of the 'wandering minstrel' in 'A GODDESS NAMED GOLD'. The story of Kalo is not that of Yogi concerned with mystic experiences. His is the adventurous story of deception of an imposter. He is a blacksmith by profession but acute poverty leads him to an act of theft of food and he is sent to jail. Out of jail he lives a life of frustration totally

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embittered with society. He thinks of taking revenge on the society dominated by the privileged Brahmins. Soon Kalo becomes a revered priest of a temple wherein he has made a Shivalinga sprung out of the soil by his clever trick. He wears the plain dress of a Brahmin with a sacred thread on his body. When people gather around the temple with great reverence he pretends entirely to be lost in worship:

He had closed his eyes. He had held his breath. Clutching the sacred thread in his hands he had passed it lightly over his shoulder and across his bare chest ....... Putting on the sacred thread he had made him rootless.

At a certain point Kalo feels satisfied with his acts of revenge. What he wanted is already materialised. The people of high class now bow to his feet in great faith and holy fear. What began as an act of deception now takes shape into reality. Kalo becomes extremely conscious of his new role of self-styled Brahmin. He takes his place in the new order of living. He is so sure of his newly acquired Brahmin identity that he plans to marry his daughter to a Brahmin. Kalo's daughter Lekha also joins the same venture of her father. She is transformed into 'The mother of sevenfold bliss', a living Goddess. But it is also a forced transformation. Lekha submits to this deception because she has no will to protest.

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The tragedy of the situation can be viewed from two angles. First: a human being is made into a tool in the hands of powerful men; the victim is denied all the natural pleasures of youth and the fulfilment of the normal instincts of life. But the second tragedy lies in the fact that she herself, however hesitantly, comes to believe in her sacred powers. Lekha, who to begin with wanted no part of her father's huge game of deception, later reaches a stage when she agrees to touch with her toe the forehead of a sick child in the hope that this would cure him. The child dies and the violent curses of the mother bring Lekha back to her senses. But even then she does not rebel against the role that has been imposed on her. But Kalo confesses ultimately to the people his fraud when he finds it difficult to undo the enormous lie. He and his daughter leave the temple and go away. Thus the story of Kalo is the story of a man who in order to fulfil his submerged wishes to rise to the status of Brahmin deceives society by passing for a spiritual man. Similar examples of the self-styled motivated spiritual men wearing a mask are not rare in Indo-Indian novels.

But Mynah, the singer of devotional songs in Sudhin Ghose's novel 'THE FLAME OF THE FOREST' is not a fake.

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ascetic. She is an ideal devotee of God wandering away from place to place. A young lady Mynah has renounced all the natural pleasures of youth and the fulfilment of the normal instincts of life. Strange mystic experiences have changed the entire course of her life. She becomes a visionary and sees in her visions:

the bride Radha was playing at hide and seek with the divine spouse Krishna. 87.

Mynah belongs to the Vaishnavic cult of religion. Renunciation is at the basic root of this religion. She tells Balam, her male counterpart:

You will play on the flute and I shall sing and we shall move on and on till we reach the throne the 'Bestower of Bliss'. 88.

Mynah is a spiritualist who has made the caves of the Himalayas, her abode of peace. She has no faith in the worldly knowledge of life because it does not help a man towards self-realisation. Thus Mynah’s mystic voice reflects the traditional voice of Indian faith. Her life is a journey in quest of eternal truth. She and Balam are the living symbols of Radha and Krishna. They have left behind all their earthly concerns in order to discover their identity with the universe. Sudhin Ghose has portrayed in Mynah a living image of

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Vaishnavi who is an additional attraction in Indo-Anglian literature. She is a unique character as she has the power to play upon the faith of man by exerting her devotional influence.

Kamala Markandaya's stand towards the spiritual powers of the saints is not very clear as it is in Aja Ano or K.R.Anand. In the stories of Anand there is no dearth of the spirited Brahmin, self-righteous religious leaders who give association to the Pragativad movement with which Anand himself was involved. His portrayal of the saints or the religious teachers is in keeping with his ideals of progress and prosperity of idealism. Religion, Anand believes, very often becomes an instrument against oppression. Anand has clear-cut attitude to the holyman. He satirises the fake religious leaders who exploit religion as an instrument of oppression and put an obstacle to the development of independent thought. He appreciates with great respect the activities of the great souls who use religion as a means to the alleviation of the sufferings of his fellow human beings. There is no ambiguity in his attitude to them. Anand's attitude towards the fake religious leaders is permeated with sternness and severity. His treatment of the holyman such as priests and Yogi in his novels assume an unexpected dimension. They lack spiritual inclination and devote themselves to the evil practices.
of tyranny, hypocrisy and immorality. Anand has exposed in plain language the hypocrisy of the so-called honourable priest in 'UNTUCHABLE'. Apparently he is a stern ritualist; he will not touch even the shadow of the low-caste people because it will dishonour the ritualistic purity and sanctity. Kalinath, the priest regards Baka as an untouchable boy but he feels attracted to the blossoming youthfulness of his sister Sohini. When Sohini approaches the well for water, Kalinath was present there. He drives away others and pours water into Sohini's pitcher. He looks at Sohini's lustrous body and asks her to come to his house in the evening to clean his house. When Sohini goes the priest forgets all about his Brahmanical religion and attempts to have a sexual intercourse with her. Anand's relentless effort in exposing the fake holy men of the society reveals his attitude of indignation towards them. The ascetic in 'COOLIE' is another typical character who is in fact a female eater. Anand describes on a comic level how the ascetic tries to satisfy his physical demand by way of performing certain spiritual rites to a barren lady. This exploration of the darker elements of the Sadhus or the religious leaders of the society becomes the recurrent pattern in his novels. There is not the slightest ambiguity or complexity in Anand's treatment of them.

But Kamala Markandaya's attitude seems to be little complicated or elusive to the end. The influence of the
saint in 'A Silence of Desire' at first appeared to be malevolent inviting unrest and troubles to the happy domestic life of Dandekar and Sarojini. Sarojini goes to Swamy with two objectives, to be cured of a secret female disease and to seek salvation of mind and heart. The relation between her and her husband enters a new phase of crisis. When Dandekar asks why she kept this a secret, Sarojini answers:

Because you would have stopped me going to be healed .... Yes you. You would have sent me to a hospital instead, called me superstitions, a fool, because I have beliefs that you cannot share. You wouldn't let me be - No ! You would have reasoned with me until I lost my faith because faith and reason don't go together, and without faith I shall not be healed.59.

This conflict between the traditional trend of spirituality and modern materialistic attitude is an important issue in the context of Indian society today. This is a recurring theme in most Indian literatures - this conflict between faith and rationalism. Kamala Markandaya seems to avoid taking sides in the conflict. But one thing is clear that the spiritual association of the Swami has imparted Sarojini enough strength and tranquility in standing alone in her faith. The worldly Dandekar also feels that the association of the Swami has some effect on him but that is

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temporary. When he comes away from him he feels:

the pains crept back, the worry, the misery,
the lust for gold chains...

Dandekar is a sceptic but he does not question the spiritual
greatness of the Swami. He only says:

.... his reality is not ours.

But to Sarojini it has great significance. The small matters
of everyday life - cease to carry any meaning to her. She
is satisfied with the wisdom and peace she has received
from the Swami. She is on her way to salvation.

Un-like Kalo in Bhattacharya's 'A3 WHO RIDES A
TIGER' the role of the Swamis in Kamala Markandaya's
'A Silence of Desire' and 'Possession' maintains a tranquil
calm. They seem to have attained the Jivan-Muktta state
remaining altogether unaffected by the outside forces of life.
They are full of bliss and contentment and therefore, appear
to ordinary eyes as extraordinary spiritual teachers. The
Swami in 'A Silence of Desire' at first appears to be male-
volent because his presence in the village breaks up a
normal happy domestic life of a government employee. But
our final assessment of the Swami is far from being malevolent.
He lives on a higher level and satisfies the needs of the

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people who want an object of faith. The Swami of Kamala.
Markandaya’s (Possession’ is also a man with strong spiritual
inclination but beside Kalo, Mynah and the Swami of ‘A SILENCE
OF DESIRE’ he does not appear convincing. He lacks vividness;
he appears just as a symbol that represents the conflict
between possession and renunciation, between wealth and
freedom and the spiritual East and the materialistic West.
He simply performs certain functions corresponding to the
ideals of non-attachment and non-violence and nothing more
than that. He lives in a dense cave in an obscure South Indian
village. Like the Swami of ‘A SILENCE OF DESIRE’ he does not
maintain enough social relation and does not become a point
of controversy. He is very simple and almost inactive.
Spiritually of course, he has reached such a state where
pain and pleasure, joy and agony, profit and loss, victory
and defeat count little to him. He is benevolent but he is an
abstraction or a vague power in the background influencing
the action and behaviour very slowly of other characters.

Another Indo-\Anglian novelist who deals with such
fake holymen is G.V.Desani. In his novel ‘ALL ABOUT H.HATTER
(1970) the author describes the experiences of a European
into a series of seven adventures in close association with
Indian sages. Hatter’s adventures comprise the seven sections
of the book. All the sections are concerned with Hatter’s
dissillusioning encounters with Indian saints. Desani portrays
Sanyasins and fakirs as comic frauds but he never attacks on religion. Hatter has come from England to India to seek enlightenment from the Indian sages.

The East has always honoured the men of Right purpose, who renounced the pleasures and comforts and who have no home, but who roam the earth. Truly, such a man was Christ Jesus, a peniless feller, yet a Lord, of Lordly courage, and another such was Siddhartha Gautama, son of Maya, a queen of India, later the hallowed teacher, the right and wise Buddha. 92.

Hatter is a sincere truth-seeker but all the imposters manage to make a fool of him. He has been utterly disillusioned by the ludicrous behaviour of the Hindu monks. In every section Hatter either sheds his clothes or has them torn from him. In section -I he goes to interview the monk as a journalist but he has to come back without his clothes. He has been stripped of his clothes by the fraudulent holyman who deals in second-hand garments. The section-ll describes Hatter's encounter with a bogus holyman called All Happy. But very soon he discovers that All Happy's scheme involves Hatter's castration. It is a bitter disillusionment for Hatter. He has also noticed that there is a hint of homosexual passion mixed in with All Happy's lunacy. In Section-IV Hatter meets Ananda Giri Giri, a sage of Bombay. The sage invites Hatter

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to stay with him. In the night Anand Giri Giri utters in a trance that he is a pure spirit and demands Hatter's body to inhabit. He sits on Hatter's body and terrible spiritual practices continue till Hatter gets a scope to escape with his life. The section-V is concerned with Hatter's search for the treasure of King Shivaji.

Money, Banerji! Damme, it makes a pot boil though the Devil might do his dirty worst to cool it off. 93.

Disguised in 'a naked wandering minstrel' Hatter reaches the Western Ghats to dig for the treasure. There he meets a nimble-fingered naked Fakir who first declares his enmity to money but later on tactfully makes off with Hatter's money making him reduced to penury. Thus Mr. Hatter's adventures proceed till Punchum, the last of the holyman proves to be yet another unscrupulous imposter. The sage gives as the mantra supreme:

Abscond from Charlatans and deceivers as thou wouldst from Venomous snakes. 94.

The disciple absconds that very night and the sage repents of handing out his wisdom. Hatter's search for the truth has to continue - it is still unfulfilled when we reach the last paragraph of the novel.

Desani has portrayed the imposter ascetics to exhibit the different varieties of deception in our social life.
It will be wrong to consider the book as a Christian attack on Hindu religion. The book is just a comedy - deflation, denudation, exposure, retribution are the keys to the seven sections. Desani's keen sense of humour is the staple food of the novel. Hatter's adventures are humorous; he regularly loses his clothes. Nudity becomes the symbol of comic exposure. It is not only the ascetics and the holy men who are exposed but a dark side of religious hypocrisy in Indian life is also brought to light. Mrs. Meenakshi Mukherjee comments:

It is possible to regard the novel merely as a study of different varieties of human deception. Characters in ochre robes have a special advantage in deceiving men because they can exploit the simple faith of a credulous people. Hatter stands for the eternal dupe who is an easy prey to all kinds of swindlers; to use Hatter's own terminology, he is the 'ruddy crab who takes the hitting' while the imposters belong to the class of 'hitters'. The theme of the book could have been 'the education of Hatter', if one could see some development or progress in his character. But as it is the book is merely a spoof - a tract against imposter ascetics which has sometimes been regarded with undue seriousness.
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