CHAPTER 5

NARAYAN’S POST-INDEPENDENCE

NOVELS AND NATIONHOOD
In writing his novels R.K. Narayan throughout remains preoccupied with the treatment of social and national issues. His novels which are published after independence delineate the experience of the colonial age and dilemmas of post-independent realities. Here Narayan has more or less spoken about the realities of colonial and post-colonial India. Like most of the Indian English fiction writers of post-independence era Narayan has chosen Indian socio-cultural situations as the themes of the novel. They have also explored the relationship between the east and the west. Fictional reworking of mythology and history has also been rediscovered by him in this period. National identity and national boundary occupy the narrative in most of them. The novels in this period are Mr. Sampath, The Financial Expert, Waiting for the Mahatma, The Guide, The Man-eater of Malgudi, The Vendor of Sweets, The Painter of Signs, A Tiger For Malgudi, Talakative Man, The World of Nagaraj and Grandmother's Tale where the concept of nation and nationhood takes a prominent place.

**MR. SAMPATH**

*Mr Sampath - The Printer of Malgudi* (1949), is, from the general point of view, a story of relationships. The novel delineates the journey of Mr Sampath who is ‘the printer of the newspaper’, “The Banner”. The ins and outs of relationships, the falling in love and then experiencing the pain of love are perfectly presented in the novel with Narayan’s inimical style of comedy touched with humour and irony.

Srinivas, the protagonist of the novel, is a passionate editor of a newspaper named “The Banner” that is run by only one person. Mr Sampath is the printer there who
shoulders the financial load of the newspaper. In this agenda he also makes uninvited editorial comments. This relationship appears to work well for Srinivas until the paper closes down and Sampath invites his friend to join him in the world of movie making. In due course Sampath falls in love with the heroine of the movie and this step makes his life difficult as well. Srinivas has his problem of over responsibility. Owing to some unavoidable circumstances Srinivas leaves the studio and revives “The Banner” with another printer. Sampath was not bothered about it. But at the loss of the lady, money, fame, wealth, and peace he decides to leave Malgudi. The novel ends as Mr. Sampath bids farewell to Srinivas.

One interesting thing is that Mr. Sampath is written about the time of the Chinese invasion of India and refers to Nehru and his Third Five Year Plan. Narayan fictionalizes the Government of India’s family planning programme and nationalization of banks and has emphasized the need for the people to be really educated in good taste. So, here in Mr. Sampath we find the old man, the landlord of Srinivas who is “an old widower who tried to earn the maximum money and spend less than ten rupees a month on himself” (Narayan, Mr. Samapath 7). The old man “had several sons and daughters, all of them in various prosperous activities all over the country, from the Himalayas down to the South” (Narayan, Mr. Samapath 7). After the death of his wife, the old widower “partitioned off the entire house, so that half a dozen families might be lodged in it” (Narayan, Mr. Samapath 7). He collects the rent on the second of each month, takes away the entire amount and places it in Saryu Street Post-office Bank and he himself lives in his debtor’s house at such a low rent that he can easily stay there for over twenty years working off the loan. It is said
that he bathes at the street-tap and feeds himself on cooked rice, which is distributed
as charity in a nearby temple. To give justification in living so miserably the old man
often remarks: “The true Sanyasi has no need to live on anything more than the
leavings of God” (Narayan, Mr. Samapath 7). This type of fake-idealistic in post-
independence India is always the butt of Narayan’s satire.

Narayan sums to satirize here that excessive idealism results in the escapist attitude
of the Indian people towards their family. Srinivas is an idealist and being an idealist
his repeated reading of the Upanishads makes him indifferent to his family life. He
maintains a philosophical attitude to the life and the universe. He is in a fix about his
duties and responsibilities. He is always absorbed in the work of his newspaper, “The
Banner” and while doing this he forgets his responsibilities towards his wife and
children. His wife becomes worried and hence rushes Malgudi to meet Sampath.

Showing the helpless dependence of a wife on her husband, Narayan subtly makes
Sampath comment: “Family duties come before any other duty” (Narayan, Mr.
Samapath 33).

The evil of casteism in post-independence India is critiqued by Narayan in this
novel. This is highlighted in Srinivas’s negative feeling of casteism and
untouchability who believes that these are venomous social curses and are responsible
for division of human societies into compartments. Narayan brings out the issue when
Srinivas’s wife hesitates to take the ‘Hotel food’ as the touch of it may pollute her
caste:

“Hotel food! I can’t,” she said. She was brought up in a very
orthodox manner in her little village. “And I can’t eat any food
without a bath first. It'd be unthinkable.” The boy tried to say
through his full mouth: “Mother has been fasting since yesterday—
wouldn’t take anything on the way.”

“Why?” asked Srinivas.

“Should you ask?” she replied.

“What foolish nonsense is this?” Srinivas cried. He
stood looking at her for a moment as if she were an embodiment of
knotty problems. He knew what it was: rigorous upbringing fear of
pollution of touch by another caste, orthodox idiocies—all the
rigorous compartment of human beings. He looked at her with
despair. “Look here, I don’t like all this. You eat this stuff. What
does it matter who has prepared it, as long as it is clean and
agreeable?” (Narayan, Mr. Samapath 34-35)

Like The English Teacher, Narayan here once again questions in the education
system that does not provide job opportunities in accordance to one's real skill and
talent. Ravi is a fine artist but his skill is not used in the bank where he has been
working. Narayan here gives emphasis on the necessity of reshuffling the existing
system in education:

Meanwhile Ravi picked up a pencil, snatched a piece of paper, and
after plying the pencil for a few minutes, pushed the paper across.

“Well, this is the person,” he said. It was a perfect pencil sketch of a
girl of about nineteen: the pencil outline was thin and firm, etched
finely like an image in the mind….Srinivas became breathless at the
sight of it... “This is wonderful. I never knew you could draw do well.”

“Drawing’s not required in a bank,” Ravi replied. He picked up the picture, gazed at it, tore off an edge and rolled it away.” (Narayan, Mr. Samapath 40)

In Mr. Sampath, there are varieties of female characters like Srinivas’ wife, Sampath’s wife and Ravi’s mother but among them the character of Shanti stands apart representing a modern woman, who challenges to follow a career in order to attain an independent identity in the society which is patriarchal. She has been a wife of a forest officer with whom she terminates her marital relationship due to some differences. That’s why she comes to Malgudi to seek a career in a film, leaving her only son in the care of an unknown person in Madras. This background exposes modernity of her outlook. In due course she is successful to acquire the role of a heroine in a movie.

Shanti seems to transmit the movement of Savitri of The Dark Room a step ahead. Shanti raises her voice against the traditional life of a widow. So in the course of time she agrees to be the mistress of Sampath who promises her to give her name and frame through his film. Like a modern woman she is very much alert to the fact how to utilize her physical charm as an effective weapon to gain economic success. So she is successful in gaining Sampath’s closeness. She succeeds in arousing jealousy in Ravi’s mind against Sampath. When she is taken to the hill resort at the top of Mempi hill to recover her mental equilibrium, though she has already promised to marry Sampath putting an end to the illegitimate relationship, she gives a shock to the reader
by taking a surprising decision that she will go back to Madras to take care of her only son. Her return to the real world of her domestic life reveals the fact that earlier she had mistakenly imagined the unreal, alluring world of film industry as a real one. Now she understands reality: “I had different ideas of a film life” (Narayan, *Mr. Samapath* 218). Unlike Savitri, her return cannot be considered as a failure from the feminist point of view rather it gives her a crown of success. By doing this she projects herself as a modern woman who lives life on her own terms. There are two categories of women in this whole plot. The first category which consists of Srinivas’ wife, Sampath’s wife and Ravi’s mother who subscribe orthodoxy, who like to be incarcerated in the four walls of their house, who get pleasure in the happiness of family members, and who are ignorant of their self identity. The other category to which Shanti belongs, represents modern emancipated women who leads her life on her own terms, having complete freedom, who stands shoulder to shoulder with men, leaving no stones unturned to seek economic independence.

Therefore, it is revealed that in *Mr. Sampath* the Malgudi mode is truly established; the creation of a twentieth-century South Indian town, where a rich variety of people are occupied with mundane occupations, yet influenced, often unconsciously, certainly ironically and tragi-comically, by the ancient conservative values of the Hindu lifestyle upheld by our ancestors.

**THE FINANCIAL EXPERT**

*The Financial Expert* (1952) is Narayan’s sixth novel and is considered to be a masterpiece. It is the story of the rise and fall of a financial expert Margayya who, like
his other characters, belongs to Malgudi celebrating traditional Hindu values along with the waves of westernization. The novel’s background is the time when India has recently achieved Independence which marks Indianization being shadowed by cross-cultural ideas and ways of life. Narayan is interested in the lower middle classes of South-India in a world relatively free from the terrible confusions and agonies, privations, political conflicts and economic depression. He sees South India as a fundamentally conservative Hindu society getting changed under the impact of the western industrialization and modernism. Like other novels the locale of The Financial Expert is Malgudi where modern facilities have reached in the form of banks, high schools, printing presses, tourists’ ‘home’, a club and motor cars.

Margayya, a middle-aged moneylender, begins his career under a banyan tree in front of the Land Mortgage Co-operative Bank. He helps the shareholders of the bank to borrow money at a small interest and lends it to the needy at a higher interest. In this process he makes some money for himself. He is, obviously, the product of Malgudi. He is a modern town dweller who is always in a struggle of changing his social position through earning money. But he consciously or unconsciously responds to the echo of the traditional Hindu norms and beliefs. Narayan portrays the traditional Indian society to be changing under the clutches of western capitalism. But modernization is, nevertheless, traumatic for his protagonist Margayya as he feels that this realization is not unreal; his beliefs on his own heritage have been shaken and he fears losing his cultural identity and is getting drawn into the orbit of the western cultural world.
The Financial Expert celebrates the main phase of Narayan’s work as a novelist. As Elleke Bohemer has indicated in his book, Colonial and Postcolonial Literature, Narayan joins in this phase other postcolonial writers of the period who “tried to integrate the cultural life of the past with their post-independence, westernized reality” (Bohemer 202). In a materialistic society that results in lots of inconsistencies, Margayya feels insecure about his own position in society and full of self-pity. He knows “that the world treated him with contempt because he had no money” (Narayan, The Financial Expert 14). Consumed by the modern desire for wealth and motor-cars, he propitiates goddess Lakshmi and meets Dr. Pal who offers him to become the owner of a pornographic manuscript—“Domestic Harmony”. This Dr. Pal, “journalist, correspondent and author” (Narayan, The Financial Expert 63) is the cause of ruin for both Margayya and his son, Balu. The western wind that blows in this British colony brings much change to the rich and ancient cultural heritage of this region.

Narayan likes to present whatever he experiences and observes in Indian life. So, he can’t help portraying the influence of the gods and goddesses in traditional Indian life. But this is constantly being haunted and affected by the spectre of western materialism. He wonderfully creates Margayya who, to some extent, has the superficial views of oriental ideals that are deeply rooted in his psyche and that have laboured hard to make him the Indian Margayya. But Narayan’s graphic presentation of this central character shows him to be torn between the two worlds. His confused but adamant acceptance of Lakshmi proves the shallowness of his religious sense and lightheartedness of his imagination. The religious attitude of common people is shared
by Margayya. He also believes in astrology and makes consultations for Laxmi Puja with “Ashes from a Red Lotus and ghee made out of a grey cow.” He knows that the goddess of wealth ‘Laxmi’ bestows her blessings in the shape of silver, gold and man-made coins. He worships the goddess of wealth with ridiculously scrupulous devotion as the priest prescribes. He, however, succeeds to earn enormous wealth through the purchase of the book on “Domestic harmony” by Dr. Pal for a paltry sum of Rs.25.

Like the other ‘Malgudi novels’ of R.K. Narayan, the locale of The Financial Expert is a small town which the novelist calls Malgudi and which, as shown in the novel is situated in the vicinity of Madras, is a place where modern facilities have reached in the form of banks, high schools, printing presses, a tourists’ ‘home’, a club and motor cars, as there is a Land Mortgage Co-operative Bank outside which Margayya works as a banking guide for some time, and there is a government bank close to the private bank which Margayya sets up after he has discontinued his publishing business. In the town there is a High School in which Balu gets education for a few years. There is a printing press which Madan Lal owns and in which Dr. Pal's book Domestic Harmony is printed, there is a tourists' home which Dr. Pal sets up and in which Margayya meets him before he starts his bank. There is a club from which Dr. Pal and Balu come in a motor-car and then Margayya beats his son's companion, and there are at least two motor-cars we hear of, the first is the one
which brings Pal and Balu from the club and the second in which
Margayya rides (Sharma and Sharma 25).

However, there also exist here private money-lenders like Margayya, jaggery
godowns full of files like the one close to the shop which Margayya hires, and muck-
stuffed gutters like the one in which Balu throws his father's account book. It is town
where industrialisation has begun. A number of mills have been opened and the
biggest mill-owner is Mangal Seth. But there also exists a sari-manufacturing cottage
handloom factory owned by the man in whose house the priest performs puja for the
health of a diseased baby. The town is, thus, inhabited by private bank-owners, bank
employees, teachers, printing press-owners, publishers, writers and mill-owners, and
is approached by peasants from the villages around it.

The farmers who figure in the novel are mostly in need of money and approach the
Land Mortgage Cooperative Bank for loans. By and large they are uneducated as they
have no knowledge of the by-laws of the Banks, and need Margayya to fill their
application forms rather than sign them. The behaviour of the farmers in this novel,
thus is a proof of the fact that R.K.Narayan's India of The Financial Expert is an India
facing the problem of rural poverty and illiteracy. Since there exists no organisation of
the farmers in this novel, it is evident that the farmers of Narayan's India in The
Financial Expert have not made any effort to organise themselves into unions. In
other words, Narayan's Malgudi has no organisation to unite the peasants so that they
may jointly fight for better economic gains in the market and for a better treatment
from the government officials.
Narayan also mentions certain facts which throw light on the political activities of the town, for instance, it is evident that elections for municipalities are held here and the persons in power play the trick of getting welfare activities done shortly before elections so that they are able to get people’s votes before what they have done has become stale. The fact is evidenced by the Municipal officials’ having left the gutter of the Vinayak Mundali Street uncleaned till the next elections and people’s saying, “They are only looking for the election votes there!” (Narayan, _The Financial Expert_ 41). The fact implies that people working in the political field are clever enough to use their measures for people’s welfare for political gains for themselves. It also throws light on the fact that the voters’ memory is short and that they vote for only those candidates who are engaged in welfare activities at the moment rather than those who have worked for them in the past. Like their political masters, the voters are also guided by immediate consideration and not long term benefits.

In this novel, technology is being used for both desirable and undesirable purposes:

if in this city there are printing presses in which newspapers, for whom Dr. Pal works as a journalist, are printed, there is also Madan Lal’s printing press in which the pornographic book _Domestic Harmony_ is printed. Machines here have made Mangal Seth rich and unlike the cobblering machine in Mulk Raj Anand’s story ‘The Cobbler and the Machine’ have driven none to a pre-mature death (Sharma and Sharma 29).

The India of _The Financial Expert_ has in it not only those who make people resort to praying to gods and goddesses to achieve their ends but also those who believe they
can achieve their ends through prayers. The priest of the temple Margayya visits, the Municipal Chairman, and the sari-manufacturer family are the people of this kind. However, the novelist does not give any suggestion to the effect that the priest makes people believe in the efficacy of prayer in order to cheat people into giving him money. So far as Margayya is concerned the priest takes nothing from him. The people who believe in the efficacy of prayers and devotion include the handloom weaver whose son is suffering from a wasting disease. The priest is able to tell Margayya the story of Markandaya and expresses his belief in the teaching of the Bhagavad-Gita that action is man's duty, reward not his concern. He also tells the story as told in the Mahabharata. All this signifies that Narayan's priest is a well-read man rather than an ignorant person. This priest does not take any thing from Margayya, rather he gives Margayya plantains and a piece of coconut from the offerings to Hanuman, the deity in the temple. Margayya also went to the temple of Thirupati when for twelve years after his marriage his wife remained childless.

Thus, Narayan's presentation of Indian ways of life gets a meticulous and painstaking regard for verisimilitude in The Financial Expert. At the centre of the novel is the landscape of India, the customs, conventions and lores that are the quintessence of Indianness. Building up a new nation parallels with searching and adjusting a new identity of an Indian. Narayan's protagonist, in the book, is forced to transcend the age-old customs and traditions of the society and embrace his new identity which he cannot without echoing his own world. Finally he discovers himself and comes back to his root.
WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA

Narayan’s novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* was first published in London in 1955. Gandhism is the very essence of the novel. The very title of the novel indicates that the novel is a political one. But ironically it is a love story. Though the Mahatma figures in the novel again and again it is the love-story of Sriram and Bharati against the background of the political life of India during the years that immediately preceded the Independence of the country in 1947. The novel, *Waiting for the Mahatma* is exceptional in two respects. Firstly, the action of the novel strays out of Malgudi, the common locale of R.K. Narayan’s writings and it goes as far as Delhi. And secondly, the two central characters of the novel—Sriram and Bharati—are intensely involved in politics.

In Mulk Raj Anand’s novel *Untouchable*, Mahatma Gandhi is given a part towards the end delivering his speech in the open field against untouchability and measures to be adopted to abolish the evil from Indian society. Other Indian fiction-writers, not only in English but in other regional languages, often utilize the image of Gandhi in their writings. But none of them has presented Gandhi in the total action of the novel. The two problems persist here. Gandhi is too big to be given a minor part; on the other hand, if he is given a big role then there is a chance for the story to transform to a biography. The golden mean would be to keep Gandhi in the background but make his influence felt indirectly. In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, the theme is apparently the romance between Bharati and Sriram. But it gains a new dimension in the background of their common allegiance to Mahatma Gandhi. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar in his book, *Indian Writing in English*, points out:
Since the stress is not merely on Gandhi’s influence but on Gandhi himself—we see him in Malgudi stationed in Nallappa’s Grove and we see him, years later, in Delhi on his way to prayer on the fatal day, 30 January 1948—the novel develops a duality of interest which is not wholly resolved by the compulsion of art (Iyengar 372-373).

The central protagonist of the novel, *Waiting for the Mahatma* is Sriram. He lost his parents at an early age. His grandmother brought him up. Having received over-affection and indulgence from his grandmother Sriram turned into a worthless young man. Out of the pension of the father his grandmother deposited an amount of over thirty-eight thousand rupees in a Bank for his future guidance. Bharati, the female protagonist of the novel was the daughter of a patriot who was killed by a policeman. So she was adopted by the local Sevak Sangh. She was brought up and educated on Gandhian principle. In course of time she became a true follower and devotee of Gandhi. In the portraiture of Bharati we can easily make an assessment of Gandhi’s attitude towards women. Mahatma Gandhi has paid special attention to the emancipation of women in India by drawing them into the freedom movement and trying to remove various social and economic obstacles which stand in the way of their progress. Although women occupied a high social status in ancient India, we must concede that in course of the past centuries the women have suffered gross social and economic injustice at the hands of the community. Gandhiji, therefore, has espoused the cause of women with great concern. It is mainly due to his untiring efforts in this direction that women in free India occupy high positions in national life.
But in the portrayal of Bharati a fleeting touch of irony is easily visible. She is a devoted and disciplined follower of Gandhi, but once again, a follower whose extreme devotion to the master makes her little more than a puppet whose actions are all manipulated by the strings in the master’s hand.

Sriram met Bharati when one day she approached him for contribution to the fund which was being collected for the reception of Mahatma Gandhi in Malgudi. The good for nothing young Sriram fell in love with the beautiful young lady Bharati at first sight. To show his love for her and with a view to being closer to her Sriram joined Gandhiji’s group of followers of which Bharati was a member. The novelist beautifully describes the day of the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in Malgudi and Sriram’s eagerness to see the Mahatma:

In the huge gathering sitting on the sands of Sarayu, awaiting the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi, Sriram was a tiny speck. There were lot of volunteers clad in white Khaddar moving around the dais. The chromium stand of the microphone gleamed in the sun. Police stood about here and there. Busybodies were going round asking people to remain calm and silent. People obeyed them. Sriram envied these volunteers and busybodies their importance, and wondered if he could do anything to attain the same status. The sands were warm, the sun was severe. The crowd sat on the ground uncomplainingly (Narayan, Waiting for the Mahatma 24-25).

When Mahatma Gandhi started to deliver his speech Sriram got the first hand knowledge of Gandhism from Mahatma Gandhi’s own voice:
Mahatma Gandhi said: ‘I see before me a vast army. Everyone of you has certain good points and certain defects, and you must all strive to discipline yourselves before we can hope to attain freedom for our country. An army is always in training and keeps itself in good shape by regular drill and discipline. We, the citizens of this country, are all soldiers of a non-violent army, but even such an army has to practice a few things daily in order to keep itself in proper condition: we do not have to bask in the sun and cry “Left” or “Right”. But we have a system of our own to follow: that’s Ram Dhun; spinning on the charka and the practice of absolute Truth and Non-violence.’ (Narayan, Waiting for the Mahatma 28).

At the next evening’s meeting Sriram secured a nearer seat. He was looking at the ladies attending the meeting but suddenly he recollected Gandhiji’s suggestion on the previous day:

All women are your sisters and mothers. Never look at them with thoughts of lust. If you are troubled by such thoughts, this is the remedy: walk with your head down, looking at the ground during the day, and with your eyes up looking at the stars at night (Narayan, Waiting for the Mahatma 29).

So when Mahatmaji ascended the platform Sriram hastily took his eyes off the ladies and joined in the hand clapping with well-timed devotion and then in the singing of Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram. After that Gandhiji spoke on non-violence and explained how it could be practised in daily life. Gandhiji said:
It is a perfectly simple procedure provided you have faith in it. If you watch yourself you will avoid all actions, big or small, and all thoughts, however obscure, which may cause pain to another. If we are watchful it will come to you naturally....Cultivate an extra affection for the person and you will find that you are able to bring about a change in him. Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ meant the same thing when he said, “Turn the other cheek.” (Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* 30).

Sriram found it impossible to follow the deep philosophical words of Mahatma Gandhi. He could not grasp what Gandhiji was saying, but he looked rapt, he tried to concentrate and understand the inner meanings of Gandhiji’s words. This was the first time he understood the necessity to try and follow something. Gradually Sriram understood the inherent goodness of Gandhiji’s philosophy and became a follower of Gandhism.

Sriram was astonished to see that Gandhiji did not stay at the palatial mansion of the Chairman of the municipality, instead he preferred to stay with the poor. In the language of the novelist:

The Mahatma entered his hut. 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, tinsheets, and shreds of coconut matting, all crowded in anyhow, with scratchy fowls cackling about and children growing in the street
dust. The municipal services were neither extended here nor missed, although the people living in the hovels were employed by the municipality for scavenging work in the town. They were paid ten rupees a month per head, and since they worked in families of four or five, each had a considerable income by Malgudi standards. They hardly ever lived in their huts, spending all their time around the municipal building or at the toddy shop run by the government nearby, which absorbed all their earnings. These men spent less than a tenth of their income on food or clothing, always depending upon mendicancy in their off hours for survival. Deep into the night their voices could be heard clamouring for alms, in all the semi-dark streets of Malgudi. Troublesome children were silenced at the sound of their approach. Their possessions were few; if a cow or a calf died in the city they were called in to carry off the carcass and then the colony at the rivers edge brightened up, for they held a feast on the flesh of the dead animal and made money out of its hide. Reformers looked on with wrath and horror, but did little else, since as an untouchable class they lived outside the town limits, beyond Nallappa’s Grove, where nobody went, and they used only a part of the river on its downward course. This was the background to the life of the people in whose camp Gandhi had elected to stay during his visit to Malgudi (Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* 37-38).
At last Sriram got a chance to meet Gandhiji personally. Bharati made the appointment. He was very nervous when he entered the room where Gandhiji was staying:

From the door to where the Mahatma sat the distance was less than ten feet, but he felt he was taking hours to cover it. His legs felt weak and seemed to intertwine, he seemed to be walking like a drunkard, a particularly dangerous impression to create in the Mahatma, who was out to persuade even the scavengers to give up drinking. In a flash it occurred to him that he ought to have a sensible answer ready if the Mahatma should suddenly turn round and ask, ‘Have you been drinking toddy or whisky?’ (Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* 66)

But in reality no such thing happened. Mahatma Gandhi looked up at Sriram and said: “Sit down, young man. Come and sit as near me as you like (Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* 67). There was so much unaffected graciousness in his tone that Sriram lost all fear and hesitation. He moved briskly up. He sat on the floor near Gandhiji and watched with fascination the smooth turning of the spinning wheel. Bharati went to an inner part of the hut, threw a swift look at Sriram, which he understood to mean, “Remember not to make a fool of yourself” (Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* 67). From the conversation with Mahatmaji Sriram came to learn that Gandhiji started to get up an hour earlier in order to be able to do the spinning, which was an important work of him and his prayer came only after that. Gandhiji also asked Sriram to take a
vow to wear only cloth made out of his own hands each day and Sriram promised to do it.

With the passage of time Sriram became a close devotee of Gandhiji. Sriram accompanied Gandhi in his tour of poverty-stricken villages and acquired first hand knowledge of the miserable condition of the poor peasants who were suffering from the scarcity and hardships caused by the Second World War. The Swaraj of Gandhiji’s dream was a “poor man’s Swaraj” in which the necessaries of life were to be enjoyed by the weakest segments of the society. In this context, Gandhiji had given us a wonderful message:

Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test: Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen; and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and self-melting away (quoted in Waghmare 17).

Sriram’s experience is vivid:

Sriram’s idea of a village was nowhere to be seen. Hungry, parched men and women with skin stretched over their bones, bare earth, dry ponds, and miserable tattered thatched roofing over crumbling mud walls, streets full of pits and loose sand, unattractive dry fields—that was a village. Sriram could hardly believe he was within twenty miles of Malgudi and civilization. Here pigs and dogs lounged in
dry gutters. Everything in these parts had the appearance of a dry gutter. Sriram wondered how people ever managed to go on living in such places. He wanted to stop and ask everyone: ‘How long are you going to be here? Won’t you return to Malgudi or somewhere else? Have you got to be here for ever?’ (Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* 89-90).

He also reached in close association of the victims of the ruthlessness of the profiteers and hoarders. Sriram became quite a changed man now. People began praising him finding a true Gandhian in him.

Before the departure Gandhiji told Bharati: “You will of course keep up your programme and write to me often” (Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* 94). So after the departure of Mahatmaji both Sriram and Bharati engaged themselves to fulfil the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi. Though Gandhiji’s physical presence was no longer with him, Sriram had a feeling that his movements were being guided. He now started to stay in a deserted shrine on a slope of the Mempi Hill, over-looking the valley. He remembered the sayings of Gandhiji: “Spin and read *Bhagavad Gita*, and utter *Ram Nam* continuously, and then you will know what to do in life” (Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* 96). Sriram carried a change of dress and went downhill to the stream and bathed. He felt so invigorated after the cold bath that he sang aloud all alone in his wilderness. He went on repeating Mahatmaji’s litany: ‘Raghupathi Raghava Raja Ram, Pathitha Pavana Seetha Ram’. When Sriram sang the litany he had a feeling of being near Gandhiji and doing something on his orders:
He was overcome with such a sense of holiness that he nearly danced with joy when he went back to his retreat. He carried the two pieces of dress he had washed in the brook and put them out to dry on the green fence surrounding the shrine. He was very proud of wearing cloth made with his own hand. Bharati had taught him how to insert the cotton thread, how to turn the wheel, and how to spin. Gandhiji had presented him with a spinning wheel in one of the villages with the explanation: ‘This is the key to your future.’ Sriram had felt too respectful to ask what he meant. But he took the wheel with proper reverence and literally put it close to his heart, although it was a heavy cumbrous apparatus (Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* 96).

Bharati taught Sriram how to use the spinning wheel. Nearly twelve weeks after Gandhiji had left, Sriram stationed himself for his novitiate at one of the spinning centres, about fifty miles from Malgudi. Bharati was perfectly at home there and proved herself to be a task-mistress of no mean order. Until Sriram had spun enough yarn free from entanglement for a dhoti and a short shirt, Bharati did not let go her grip on Sriram. It was a result of continuous work over weeks. But it was worth it. She became very excited at the success of his efforts. Sriram too started to feel that he was the inhabitant of a magic world where one created all the things one needed with his/her own hands.

After some time the historic movement of 1942 broke out and Gandhiji was arrested. The Gandhian young Sriram retired to a deserted temple on the slope of
Mempi Hill to escape the police. His devotion to Gandhian policy, his love of Bharati seemed to be forgotten history. Now he started carrying on the propaganda of the revolutionary and radical national workers. He joined his new friend Jagdish in his terrorist activities. Jagdish was not a genuine Gandhiman like Jagan of The Vendor of Sweets. He had his skull cracked while trying to pull down the Union Jack from the flag-post in gaol. This is true for almost all the revolutionaries of the time. Sriram helped Jagdish first in noting down the messages and speeches of Subhas Chandra Bose from Tokyo and Berlin. He began to distribute cyclostyled copies of them among the Indian soldiers. Afterwards he started overturning and derailing trains, cutting telegraph wires, setting fire to the records in law-courts, exploding crude bombs. He became a terrorist in the true sense, indulging in such other acts of violence which are against all Gandhian principles. As a result he was arrested and sent to jail. The suggestion in this picture is quite plain. Narayan is perhaps hinting at the fact howsoever unpalatable it may be—that a large section of the Indian public did not understand Gandhism properly at all.

After India got independence in 1947 Sriram was released from jail. He was a free man now. So the memory of his lady-love Bharati again began to haunt him. He went to Delhi and met her when she was staying with Mahatma Gandhi in Birla Bhavan. Both were happy to meet each other after a long gap. Sriram begged her to marry him. Bharati gave her consent. The two then went to Mahatmaji for his approval:

He threw a side-glance at Bharati in the hope that she might at least seize the precious hour. But she turned on him what seemed to him
a look of silent appeal. The Mahatma kept looking at them with an amused look. Sriram suddenly heard himself saying, ‘We are waiting for your blessed permission to marry.’ Mahatmaji looked from one to the other with joy. ‘Do you like each other so much?’ Sriram burst out, ‘I’ve waited for five years thinking of nothing else.’ ‘What about you, Bharati, you are saying nothing.’ Bharati bowed her head and flushed and fidgeted. ‘Ah, that is a sign of a dutiful bride,’ said the Mahatma and asked, ‘Does this silence mean yes?’ Sriram looked at her with bated breath. Mahatmaji observed her for a moment and said, ‘She’d be a very unbecoming bride, who spoke her mind aloud! Good, good, God bless you.’ (Narayan, Waiting for the Mahatma 252-253).

Thus Mahatmaji approved of their marriage and gave his blessings to them. Gandhiji at first promised to them that he would be present on the occasion of their marriage, but on a mysterious premonition expressed his unwillingness to do so. After a brief talk with Mahatmaji, Sriram and Bharati accompanied him to the prayer ground in Birla Bhavan and witnessed the ghastly scene of his murder:

As they stepped on the lawn, Bharati said to Sriram, ‘Let us attend the prayer today. There is a place for two of us.’ They stepped aside. As the Mahatmaji approached the dais, the entire assembly got up. As this moment a man pushed himself ahead of the assembly, brushing against Bharati, and Sriram cried petulantly, ‘Why do you push like that?’ Unheeding, the man went forward. ‘I’m sorry to be
late today,' murmured the Mahatma. The man stood before the Mahatma and brought his palms together in a reverential salute. Mahatma Gandhi returned it. The man tried to step forward again. Mahatmaji's granddaughter said, 'Take your seat,' and tried to push him into line. The man nearly knocked the girl down, and took a revolver out of his pocket. As the Mahatma was about to step on the dais, the man took him and fired. Two more shots rang out. The Mahatma fell on the dais. He was dead in a few seconds (Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* 254).

Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah in his book, *The Writer's Gandhi* (1967), rightly points out that Narayan has got his facts wrong when he shows Gandhi standing 'on the dais with his palms brought together in a salute' and when he describes the Mahatma's voice as 'booming in the amplifier' (Narasimhaiah 71). It is also easy to say that the hero of the novel seems to be waiting not so much for the Mahatma as for the 'Mahatma'—Kamadeva, the god of Love; that he seems to be more interested in Bharati than in Bharatmata. This is an irony in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, an aspect which is likely to be ignored especially by the Indian reader who normally expects an Indian writer to paint a complimentary picture of Gandhi and Gandhism. And to critique Narasimhaiah, Narayan was never writing the biography or history; the Mahatma in Narayan is a fictionalized protagonist, though the references to the real Mahatma cannot be denied. Like Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*, no creative writer can be taken to task for representing and fictionalizing.
In this novel Narayan’s depiction of Gandhism are three dimensional. From one point of view, it is to be said that the novel beautifully reveals Gandhism by the presentation of the character Bharati and here Sriram is nothing but an imitator of the principle for the sake of establishing a permanent impression in the mind of Bharati. This view paves the way for the second one, that is, the ironical implication of the theme of Gandhism. Thirdly, by the presentation of the revolutionary principles of Subhas Bose and Sriram’s partial acceptance of these principles the novelist somehow raises the conflict between Gandhism and revolutionary theories of the radicals like Subhas Chandra Bose, Balgangadhar Tilak etc which is a debatable subject till today.

While Narayan’s picture of Gandhi is complimentary enough, he highlights the Mahatma’s concern for truth, his simplicity, his sense of discipline, his dignity, his love of children, his sense of humour—it seems to us that the real focus of the novel is the ironic portrayal of the response of various Indians to Gandhi’s thought and philosophy. The irony in the Municipal Chairman’s ridiculous attempts to bask in the borrowed lime-light of the Mahatma is of course too obvious to be missed. The religious aspect of Indian reality is mirrored in the doings of Granny, who being a pious Hindu, refuses to touch the canvas chair, made out of the skin of dead animals. When Granny came to learn from the schoolmaster that her grandson Sriram was in Mahatma Gandhi’s camp she felt nervous:

‘Ah! What was he doing there?’ asked Granny alarmed. For her the Mahatma was one who preached dangerously, who tried to bring untouchables into the temples, and who involved people in
difficulties with the police. She didn’t like the idea. She wailed, ‘Oh, master, why did you allow him to stay on there? You should have brought him away. It is so late and he has not come home. As his old teacher you should have weaned him away.’

‘Don’t worry, madam, he is perfectly safe. How many of us could have the privilege of being so near the Mahatma? You must be happy that he is doing so well! Our country needs more young men like him.’

Granny replied, ‘It is teachers like you who have ruined our boys and this country,’ and turned in, slamming the door (Narayan, Waiting for the Mahatma 62)

What seems, however, to have generally been missed is the subtle irony which underlines the picture of the impact of Gandhi on the hero Sriram. It will be universally agreed that Sriram is a very unheroic hero. This makes him a typical specimen of the common educated Indian and his response to Gandhi. Sriram feels the magnetic pull of Gandhiji and joins the freedom-struggle, but it is clear, right from the beginning, that he has not understood either Gandhi or Gandhism properly; so that he only becomes a blind follower of a leader whose methods and policies are too subtle for his limited comprehension. When Gandhi is put into prison, Sriram starts talking orders from Bharati and when she also is jailed, he becomes ‘a blind slave of Jagdish’, under whose leadership he indulges in terrorist activities against all Gandhian principles. The suggestion in this picture is quite plain. Narayan is perhaps hinting at the fact howsoever unpalatable it may be—that a large section of the Indian
public did not understand Gandhism properly at all. It is even possible to see a fleeting touch of irony in Narayan’s portrayal of Bharati—a far more devoted and disciplined follower of Gandhi, but once again, a follower whose extreme devotion to the master makes her little more than a puppet whose actions are all manipulated by the strings in the master’s hand. The latent irony in *Waiting for the Mahatma* could not perhaps be properly understood when the novel first appeared in 1955.

**THE GUIDE**

*The Guide* is R.K. Narayan’s eighth novel. It was published in 1958 and won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1960. Gandhism is not presented directly in the novel but the idea is implicit in the novel. The novel portrays the transformation of a Railway Guide to a Spiritual Guide and in this process Gandhism, ironically, makes an indirect appearance in the action of the novel. Here no Gandhi occasionally figures in the text, or, from the background, but the story deals with the fake imitation of a fraud who wants to exhibit Gandhism to hide his previous guilt as well as to create a grand image in the minds of the simple, rustic folk of Mangala, a small village.

*The Guide* narrates the adventure of a railway guide, popularly known as ‘Railway Raju’. The narration in *The Guide* proceeds at two levels. Raju narrates the story of his life to Velan, a simpleton of Mangala. When his disciples, the village folk, prevail on him to face the ordeal of standing knee-deep in water without food for propitiating the god of rain, Raju confesses to Velan by narrating his story. This we notice in Section Six of the text. Sections Seven, Eight, Nine, and Ten constitute Raju’s free and frank confession of his past experiences and lapses. The concluding section
dramatizes Raju’s efforts to live up to the expectations of the image of himself he has raised in the minds of the village folk. In the first six sections, we have the narrator and Raju alternately narrating, so that the narrative voice may be taken as a chorus that enlarges and specifies the scope and the significance of what Raju has to say about himself and his activities:

Raju welcomed the intrusion—something to relieve the loneliness of the place. The man stood gazing reverentially on his face. Raju felt amused and embarrassed. ‘Sit down if you like,’ Raju said, to break the spell. The other accepted the suggestion with a grateful nod and went down the river steps to wash his feet and face, came up wiping himself dry with the end of a chequered yellow towel on his shoulder, and took his seat two steps below the granite slab on which Raju was sitting cross-legged as if it were a throne, beside an ancient shrine. The branches of the trees canopying the river course rustled and trembled with the agitation of birds and monkeys settling down for the night. Upstream beyond the hills the sun was setting. Raju waited for the other to say something. But he was too polite to open a conversation (Narayan, The Guide 5).

The above passage conveys the feel and the spirit of the rest of the narrative. The granite slab on which Raju sits assumes the position of a throne, suggesting that to the villagers he will be a Maharaja. The man who intrudes gazes at Raju’s face “reverentially.” Whether his face really inspires reverence in the onlooker or not need not trouble us. But the point to be noted is that it amuses and embarrasses Raju. The
words “spell” and “shrine,” while suggesting the man’s veneration for what is sacred, make the reader ponder and feel uncertain when the narrator says:

the villager resumed the study of his face with intense respect. And Raju stroked his chin thoughtfully to make sure that an apostolic beard had not suddenly grown there. It was still smooth. He had his last shave only two days before and paid for it with the hard-earned coins of his jail life (Narayan, The Guide 6).

The narrator doesn’t leave the reader in any doubt whatsoever regarding Raju’s bonafides. But he does suggest that Raju’s face has a certain bewitching charm that accounts for some of his troubles. This impression is reinforced by the words of the barber who gives a shave to Raju after his release from jail: “You look like a maharaja now” (Narayan, The Guide 8). It may not be a far-fetched inference to see an ironic link between Raju and Maharaja because the story of Raju’s past narrated as a flashback, confirms the pattern that the narrator’s remarks quoted earlier suggests. The problem that Velan tries to place before Raju for his consideration and guidance makes Raju think of his own problems.

Raju was born and brought up in Malgudi, the quaint small town which is Narayan’s habitual locale. Little Raju found the place very charming. The Railway came to Malgudi while Raju was a child. Raju’s father got a contract for a shop on the platform and “Railway Raju” grew up to be a “part-time shop keeper and full time tourist guide” (Narayan, The Guide 59). But Raju was widely popular as tourist guide. The coming of the railway to Malgudi is symbolic of the impact of an industrial and urban society on a predominantly simple, agricultural community with its new
problems which would mean the undoing of the old ways of living and the cherished values of life. The tamarind tree which was the seat of Raju’s boyhood and of village cartmen who unyoked their bullocks for the night is now full of lorries packed under it—for there is brisk activity because of the laying of the railway track. We see that Raju who grew up in a decent home has now picked up terms of abuse from the railwaymen and the father’s words “just my misfortune” (Narayan, The Guide 24) sound ominous in the light of the impending disaster. The railway meant the ruining of Raju and his old mother—a small shopkeeper’s son becomes a railway guide, starts living by his wits, runs into Rosie and Marco, two tourists, gets emotionally entangled, neglects honest means of making a living, and brings ruin upon himself as well as a married woman. The Gandhian principles that Raju’s father maintained throughout his life like the common Indians at that time received a jerk after the advent of materialism in the shape of Railways at Malgudi. Raju was the forerunner of the curse.

It was in this way that Raju came across Rosie and her husband whom he called ‘Marco’, because he was dressed as if he were an eternal tourist. Rosie, the ‘lovely and elegant’ wife of Marco was born of a devadasi. All his problems and troubles generated from his acquaintance with Rosie. At the first sight Raju fell in love with the lady. He wondered why she called herself Rosie. She was not a foreigner but an Indian in Indian dress. Raju had enough shrewdness to tickle her vanity by saying that as an orthodox dancer, she fostered the Indian cultural tradition. Not only did he assess the weakness in Rosie’s character but saw through the vulnerable personality of her husband. He utilized her passion for dancing to alienate her from Marco.
Rosie’s husband was a historian obsessed with the history of cave paintings. He came to Malgudi to study the Mempi cave paintings. His wife didn’t share his interests. On the other hand, she liked dancing, as it is mentioned earlier that she came from a family traditionally dedicated to the Hindu temples as dancers. In this context, one is reminded of Rangi in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. Rosie’s mother looked after her education. After obtaining a master’s degree in Economics, she found it difficult to decide about the next step in her career. It was through a matrimonial advertisement that she came into contact with Marco and married him, because of family pressure. This inter-caste marriage went wrong from the start, because the husband was absorbed in the study of painting and art, and he seemed to treat his wife not cruelly but indifferently. It never crossed his mind that his wife was educated and had tastes and aspirations of her own. Having noticed the rift in conjugal relationship between the wife and the husband and bewitched by the beauty of the wife, Raju exploited the situation and established a rapport with the wife. The couple used to quarrel constantly and openly, and Raju’s sympathy for the neglected and oppressed wife develops into an affectionate relationship in which they initially began to call each other ‘brother’ and ‘sister’. He took Rosie around Malgudi and always tried to impress on her his responsibility as the guide. He himself explained the situation:

I was accepted by Marco as a member of the family. From guiding tourists I seemed to have come to a sort of concentrated guiding of a single family. Marco was just impractical, an absolutely helpless man. All that he could do was to copy ancient things and write about them. His mind was completely in it. All practical affairs of
life seemed impossible to him; such a simple matter as finding food or shelter or buying a railway ticket seemed to him a monumental job. Perhaps he married out of a desire to have someone care for his practical life, but unfortunately his choice was wrong—this girl herself was a dreamer if ever there was one. She would have greatly benefited by a husband who could care for her career; it was here that a handy man like me proved invaluable. I gave up nearly all my routine jobs in order to be of service to them (Narayan, *The Guide* 113).

The above passage brings to a central focus the preoccupations of the characters and the socio-cultural framework in which they operate. Entertaining Rosie became the guide’s sole professional activity:

The only reality in my life and consciousness was Rosie. All my mental powers were now turned to keep her within my reach, and keep her smiling all the time, neither of which was at all easy. I would willingly have kept at her side all the time, as a sort of parasite (Narayan, *The Guide* 118).

But he found it difficult to understand the girl:

She allowed me to make love to her, of course, but she was also beginning to show excessive consideration for her husband on the hill. In the midst of my caresses, she would suddenly free herself and say, ‘Tell Gaffur to bring the car. I want to go and see him’. (Narayan, *The Guide* 119).
Later he found the reason for her melancholy and vacillation: her losing all hope to activate her talent as a dancer. The following dialogue unmistakably suggests this:

She asked me one evening, point-blank, “Are you also like him?”

“In what way?”

“Do you also hate to see me dance?”

“Not at all. What makes you think so?”

“At one time you spoke like a big lover of art, but now you never give it a thought.”

It was true. I said something in excuse, clasped her hands in mine and swore earnestly, “I will do anything for you. I will give my life to see you dance. Tell me what to do. I will do it for you.” (Narayan, The Guide 121-122).

Ultimately Marco came to know of the affair between Rosie and Raju and he became very much upset. Having heard the whole story from Rosie, Marco took a stubborn step and refused to acknowledge her as his wife. He told her:

You are here because I’m not a ruffian. But you are not my wife.

You are a woman who will go to bed with any one that flatters your antics. That’s all. I don’t, don’t want to hear, but if you are going to be here, don’t talk. That is all (Narayan, The Guide 152).

When he discovered that Rosie had been dancing before Raju as well as committing adultery with him, he abandoned her and returned to Madras. It was because her husband refused to take her along with him that Rosie came to Raju and stayed with him in their one-roomed house.
Raju’s mother had realized that her son would not listen to him, and that his infatuation with the ‘snake-girl’ would turn him out of the home. Outwardly, she remained calm and said nothing, but made her own plans for tackling her son. She wrote to her brother in the village who was a follower of Gandhian principles. One fine morning he was there. Raju was taken by surprise. He narrated:

Here entered the man himself, standing at the door and calling in his booming voice, ‘Sister!’ I scrambled to my feet and ran to the door. My mother came hurrying from the kitchen. Rosie stopped her practice. The man was six feet, darkened by the sun from working in the fields, and had a small knotted tuft on his skull; he wore a shirt with an upper cloth, his dhoti was brown, not white like a townsman’s. He carried a bag of jute material in his hand (with a green print of Mahatma Gandhi on it), and a small trunk. He went straight to the kitchen, took out of the bag a cucumber, a few limes, and plantains and greens, saying, ‘These are for my sister, grown in our gardens.’ He placed them on the floor of the kitchen for his sister. He gave a few instructions as to how to cook them (Narayan, *The Guide* 166).

Raju was afraid of him, though he tried to put on a brave face. He was coarsen and brutal within the hearing of Rosie. He used abusive and insulting language, and Raju had to put up with it. He advised Rosie brutally:

You should not walk into a house like this and stay on. Did anyone invite you? No. Even if you are invited you should go on staying
where you belong, and not too long here. You cannot stay like this in our house. It is very inconvenient. You should not be seducing young fools, deserting your husband. Do you follow? (Narayan, The Guide 169)

Raju was completely maddened by it and ordered his uncle to get out of his house. His mother blamed Rosie for all the trouble. The things became intolerable and so her mother left Raju’s house and went to her brother in her old village.

Living like a married couple to all appearances, they managed to organize dance programmes in and outside Malgudi, which brought fame and fortune to Rosie, who rechristened herself Nalini. She practised regularly and became one of the best Bharat Natyam dancers in the country. Raju found an opening for her. In her very first appearance she was a grand success. Raju began to live lavishly. In the midst of her success, however, Rosie grew increasingly alienated and remote from Raju. All were growing well till Raju forged Rosie’s signature to obtain valuable jewellery lying with her husband. His fraud was detected, he was arrested and imprisoned for two years. Rosie left Malgudi and went away to Madras, her home town.

On his release from jail, Raju took shelter in a lonely and forsaken temple on the bank of the river Sarayu, a few miles away from Malgudi and close to the village Mangala. The simple villagers took him to be a Mahatma, began to worship him, brought for him a lot of eatables as presents. Raju was quite comfortable there and performed the new role of a saint to perfection. To him, there was not much difference between the role of a railway guide and spiritual guide basically. The same gift of eloquence, the same ability to make grand mystifying statements, the same air
of knowingness enabled him to play his new role with success. He was a fraud, a rogue in reality, but he appeared every inch a Mahatma. He sat on a slab of stone as if it were a throne.

The Swami cum Mahatma became a public figure by establishing a night school in the temple. The Spiritual Guide or The Swami or The Mahatma was passing his days very comfortably with the gifts received from the simple village-folk of Mangala. Three years passed. Villagers were living a peaceful life supposedly by the grace of the Mahatma. Soon there was a severe famine and draught and the villagers expected the Swami would undertake a fast to bring down the rains. The innocent villagers were of the opinion that Raju, their Swami had magical powers and the ability to cure and heal: “You are not another human being. You are a Mahatma. We should consider ourselves blessed indeed to be able to touch the dust of your feet” (Narayan, The Guide 106). This is ironic. In this connection it is to be appropriate to mention Gandhiji’s very saying regarding corruption in religion. He once said:

Without living Truth God is nowhere. In the name of God we have indulged in lies, massacres of people without caring whether they were innocent and guilty, men or women, children or infants...I am not aware if anybody has done these things in the name of Truth? (quoted in Jack 463).

Raju was telling lies one after another to make his stature stable amidst the credulous villagers. But this was a serious guilt from Gandhian point of view. Gandhiji himself never uttered a single lie. It is a fact that Gandhiji was prepared to sacrifice everything for winning India’s independence, but not this ideal which to
him was much more crucial than even Swaraj for India. In his cottage in Sevagram, Gandhiji always kept before him the following quotation:

> The essence of lying is in deception, not in words; a lie may be told by silence, by equivocation, by the accent on a syllable, by a glance of the eye attaching a peculiar significance to a sentence; and all these kinds of lies are worse and baser by many degrees than a lie plainly worded (Ruskin 273).

Earlier Raju in disguise of the Swami had told the simple credulous villagers that rain can be brought down if one fasts for twelve days and stands in water for a few hours everyday. Raju had never expected that soon he himself would have to undergo this ordeal. Now the Swami Raju found himself bound to go on a twelve-day fast to bring down the rains. One of the villagers remarked:

> This Mangala is a blessed country to have a man like the Swami in our midst. No bad thing will come to us as long as he is with us. He is like Mahatma. When Mahatma Gandhi went without food, how many things happened in India! This is a man like that. If he fasts there will be rain. Out of his love for us he is undertaking it. This will surely bring rain and help us (Narayan, *The Guide* 102).

Moreover, Velan’s remark also shows how Gandhism is misused by these village-folks. Velan told Raju: “Your penance is similar to Mahatma Gandhi’s. He has left us a disciple in you to save us” (Narayan, *The Guide* 107).

The news of his fast spread out. A detailed account of it was published in the newspaper. Suddenly the small town of Mangala shot into fame. People came to it in
large numbers to have a *darshan* of the swami who was sacrificing himself for the sake of others. Each day the crowd increased. Soon it looked like a large fair. Children shouted and played about, women came carrying baskets filled with pots, firewood and foodstuffs, and cooked the food for their men and children. There were small curls of smoke going up all along the river bank, on the opposite slope and on this bank also. It was studded with picnic groups, with the women’s bright-coloured saris shining in the sun; men too had festive dress. Bullocks unyoked from their carts jingled their bells as they lay on the straw under the trees. People swarmed around little water-moles, even an American T.V. crew, came to have the *darshan* of the Mahatma.

Raju saw them across his pillared hall whenever he opened his eyes. He knew what that smoke meant; he knew that they were eating and enjoying themselves. He wondered what they might be eating—rice boiled with a pinch of saffron, melted ghee—and what were the vegetables? Probably, none, in this draught. The sight tormented him. He had managed to save little food, and on the first two days of the fast he cheated the devotees by stealthily eating some edibles in the nights. After that his fast was total. Each day, he would stand in the knee-deep water muttering prayers, while the crowd round him was enjoying itself. He wanted to end the ordeal but there was no way out. He still hankered for food, and food thoughts still haunted him. As there was no possibility of his getting any food, and as there was no way out of the dilemma, he decided to face the situation boldly. He tried sincerely to drive away food-thoughts:
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 a thing 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. The fourth day of his fast found him quite sprightly. He went down to the river, stood facing upstream with his eyes shut, and repeated the litany. It was no more than a supplication to the heavens to send down rain and save humanity. It was set in a certain rhythmic chant, which lulled his senses and awareness, so that as he went on saying it over and over again the world around became blank. He nearly lost all sensation, except the numbness at his knees, through constant contact with cold water. Lack of food gave him a peculiar floating feeling, which he rather enjoyed, with the thought in the background, 'This enjoyment is something Velan cannot take away from me' (Narayan, *The Guide* 238).

The crowds continued to increase, and a special train had to be run for the people who wanted to go to Malgudi. People also came by special buses. Never had that part of the country seen such large crowds. Officers of the Health Department came to see if there was any insanitation and consequent outbreak of cholera and other infectious diseases. They displayed their documentaries to the great delight of the children. Telegrams came in large numbers wishing success to the Swami. The place was soon swarming with press reporters, and the stories regarding the Swami and
his fast were carried all over the world. The roads were choked with traffic, country
carts, buses and cycles, jeeps and automobiles of all kinds and ages. Pedestrians in
files with hampers and baskets crossed the fields like swarms of ants converging on a
lamp of sugar. The air rang with the music of a few who had chosen to help the
Swami by sitting near him, singing devotional songs to the accompaniment of a
harmonium and tabla. This is totally an ironical depiction of sainthood in rural India.
The rustic people of Mangala intermingled the fasting of the Swami with the fasting
of Mahtama Gandhi for the greater cause of Indian Independence. The irony becomes
pungent when we see that the civilized people were also taking the matter seriously.
One of the press-reporters of America was also present there. He was a very busy
man. He interviewed the Swami, and took photos of him from various angles and
distances.

Being unable to bear the burning sensation of hunger Raju narrated the past history
of his life to Velan, one of his devotees. He underwent an act of vicarious suffering to
purify the sins of the others. During the early days of the fast he made desperate
attempts to escape, Raju contemplated running away from the whole show. What kept
him back was not practical consideration or fear of being caught; but very
surprisingly the faith of the people. He was moved by the recollection of the big
crowd of women and children touching his feet. At last the collective faith of the
people transformed Raju from what he really was into a worthy object of its devotion.
The 'picaro' turned Swami had become a world-figure. It is a fine piece of satire on
the credulity of the Indians, and on the false techniques of sainthood. Towards the
end, Raju lost the feeling of an actor performing an act; the act became the reality, the
mask became the man, and Raju the Railway Guide turned into a Spiritual Guide, like Mahatma Gandhi when he thought: “If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?” (Narayan, The Guide 237-238).

As the fast progressed, Raju grew weaker and weaker. On the tenth day of the fast, a couple of doctors, deputed by the government to watch and report, went to the Swami, felt his pulse and heart. They helped him to stretch himself on the mat. A big hush fell upon the crowd. Velan plied his fan more vigorously than ever. He looked distraught and unhappy. In fact, keeping a sympathetic fast, he was now eating on alternate days, confining his diet to saltless boiled green vegetables. He looked worn out. He said to the master: “One more day. I don’t know how he is going to bear it. I dread to think how he can pull through another day” (Narayan, The Guide 244). The doctor found his condition not very satisfactory. On the enquiry of Malone, the T.V. crew from California the doctor said:

- blood pressure is two hundred systolic. We suspect one of the kidneys is affected. Uremia is setting in. We are trying to give him small doses of saline and glucose. His life is valuable to the country (Narayan, The Guide 244).

On the morning of the eleventh day, the last day of the fast it was with great difficulty that Raju could stand. At five-thirty in the morning, the doctors again examined him. They wrote and signed a bulletin saying: “Swami’s condition grave. Declines glucose and saline. Should break the fast immediately. Advise procedure” (Narayan, The Guide 246). They sent a man running to send off this telegram to their headquarters. The narrator describes:
It was a top-priority government telegram, and it fetched a reply within an hour: ‘Imperative that Swami should be saved. Persuade best to co-operate. Should not risk life. Try give glucose and saline. Persuade Swami resume fast later.’

They sat beside the Swami and read the message to him. He smiled at it. He beckoned Velan to come nearer.

The doctors appealed, ‘Tell him he should save himself. Please, do your best. He is very weak.’

Velan bent close to the Swami and said, ‘The doctors say’-

In answer Raju asked the man to bend nearer, and whispered, ‘Help me to my feet,’ and clung to his arm and lifted himself (Narayan, *The Guide* 246).

Raju got up to his feet. He had to be held by Velan and another on each side. In the profoundest silence the crowd followed him. Everyone followed at a solemn, silent pace. Raju went down the steps to the steps of the river bed, muttered a prayer and was lit up by a great shaft of light at sunrise. It was difficult to hold Raju on his feet, as he had a tendency to flop down. Velan and the other devotees held him as if he were a baby. He opened his eyes, looked around, declared that it was raining in the surrounding hills and then fell down exhausted. Apparently, his fast had actually brought about rain; but it was not certain whether Raju, the Swami was actually dead or merely fainted. The novel ended on a note of ambiguity.

From the social point of view *The Guide* not only depicts Indian society, its customs, traditions, culture, ostentations, superstitions and religious faith, but also
presents a conflict between the traditional and modern values which are symbolised by Raju’s mother and his maternal uncle on the one hand and by Raju and Rosie on the other. The novel also presents

a conflict between the Eastern and Western culture and synthesises the two through their assimilation which has been symbolised by Rosie’s transformation into Nalini. Like Anand, Narayan points out that one has to go to the West in order to come back to the East (Yadav 28).

When Raju dissociates himself from society and goes after Rosie, he has moral degradation and he faces unpleasant repercussions. But when he returns to society as a swami he achieves redemption:

Thus, it is seen that in the Western context, the individual can grow and develop, if he dissociates himself from society and becomes individualistic: whereas in the Indian context if an individual dissociates himself from society, he comes to grief, but if he takes society along with him, then he will be at peace with himself and his surroundings, and will be able to grow and develop (Soule 33).

Another thing is that *The Guide*, abounds with postcolonial elements. Postcolonial writings are attempts at reviving the ethnic cultures, traditions, beliefs, languages etc. The postcolonial literature inculcates pride in one’s own ancient culture and traditions. It abounds in patriotic feelings. Postcolonialism aims at developing the national identity in the wake of colonial rule. Narayan’s post-colonialism in *The Guide* is revealed neither through rejection of Westernisation nor through celebration
of tradition. In the politics of representation, his position is that of the critical insider who is alive to the need to negotiate the contradictions of the post-colonial predicament. Narayan is not only aware of the inevitability of change, but also of the problems that attend the processes of change in a traditional society.

The interface between traditions and modernity is mediated with characteristic irony. Narayan is interested in looking at the extent to which the cultural life of the past can be viably integrated with the post-independence reality of India (Sen, *Critical Essays on R. K. Narayan's The Guide* 117).

To quote Paranjape:

This is how Narayan’s novels show Indian society negotiating the complex terrain of the modern. Malgudi, in that sense, becomes a laboratory where various possibilities and positions are tried. *The Guide*, undoubtedly Narayan’s best-known novel, as a narrative of modern India . . . is about the nature of an ancient Indian institution, that of the guru, which indeed has no exact English counterpart. R. K. Narayan’s use of slightly lighter, slightly more frivolous and certainly more ambiguous word, “Guide,” is therefore telling (Paranjape 174).

**THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI**

*The Man-Eater of Malgudi* was published in 1961. The novel has a definite mythical structure. R. K. Narayan loosely bases his tale on the ancient Indian myth of
a boasting demon Bhasmasura who terrorizes the world of mortals. The eternal war between good and bad gains a rather contemporary dimension here. The character of Vasu has been depicted here as a demonic one terrorizing mankind which is the recurrent motif in Hindu Mythology.

The novel is also set in the same background of Malgudi. The story is narrated in the first person by Nataraj who is the owner of a small, friendly printing press in Malgudi. He is a very polite person with no enemy as such. The smooth and congenial life of this small group is disturbed when H. Vasu comes to stay with him as a tenant in a room in the upper storey of the printing press. Vasu is a taxidermist. He brings an alarming stuffed collection of hyenas, pythons and tigers and an assortment of dancing girls who clamp up and down the printer's stairs. He is creating many problems to Nataraj's life. Vasu never gives him money nor does he sign any rent slip. During the story's progression Vasu encroaches into Nataraj's life in all aspects. The story comes to an end when Nataraj decides to organize a function on the release of a book of his friend. But very soon someone informs that Vasu is going to kill the elephant at the procession. Nataraj decides to talk to Vasu for the last time but he finds him sleeping. But on the next day Vasu is dead. Although Nataraj gets a clean chit from police still his friends start avoiding him. Eventually he knows from Rangi, a prostitute that Vasu was not murdered but he had damaged one of his nerves on his head with his powerful hands while smashing a fly and died instantly.

As myths and spirituality are implicit in Hindu society, the world of Malgudi is full of mythical elements. Throughout the novel, The Man-Eater of Malgudi, comparisons and references are made to various Hindu myths to compliment these
mythical elements. These elements act as indications to the significance of what is going on in the story itself. The myths referred to give us greater insight into the action and into the characters themselves, by showing us more subtle aspects of the story which are juxtaposed against the myths. The battle between Vasu and Nataraj is framed perfectly in the context of myth. The action that occurs in the novel bears many similarities to other myths that are either mentioned or hinted here, viz, the *Ramayana* and the myth of *Bhasmasura*. The structure of the story is the same as a myth, with the protagonist facing an inexorable enemy who finally meets his end by his own hands. To harmonize the mythical structure of the book, many references and allusions are made to other myths.

In the mythical structure of the novel Sastri plays an important role. He is an orthodox-minded Sanskrit scholar. He narrates many stories from the time-honoured Hindu scriptures, myths and legends. He narrates to Nataraj tales of *rakshasas* which says that “to deal with a *rakshasa* one must possess the marksmanship of a hunter, the wit of a pundit and the guile of a harlot” (Narayan, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* 94). The narrator writes:

“He shows all the definitions of a *rakshasa*,” persisted Sastri, and he went on to define the make-up of a *rakshasa*, or a demoniac creature who possessed enormous strength, strange powers, and genius, but recognized no sort of restraints of man or God. He said, “Every *rakshasa* gets swollen with his ego. He thinks he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him.” He stood expatiating on the lives of various demons
in *puranas* to prove his point. He displayed great versatility and knowledge. I found his talk enlightening... (Narayan, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* 94-95).

The death of Vasu is compared to the death of the demon Bhasmasura who is tricked into placing his hands on his head by Krishna (disguised as a dancer) and is scorched to death by his fatal touch. Vasu's death mirrors that of Bhasmasura in more than just that respect. Rangi's name (which comes from Ragna or Ragnatha) means Krishna; she is the temple dancer, and she is present at the death of Vasu (whether a direct cause or not). Thus, the novel "has a clear Mythical design (order-dislocation of order-restoration of order) reiterated by references to the *Puranic* conflict between Sura and Asura" (Mukherjee 155).

The text represents the eternal conflict between the Good and the Evil personified in the two characters pitted against each other in peculiar circumstances. The story of Vasu makes it clear that R. K. Narayan’s conception of life is essentially an Indian one in that he shows through his story, as in Indian classical writings, that “Dharma protects those who protect Dharma and Dharma destroys those who destroy Dharma” (A famous Sanskrit aphorism). The *rakshasa* is endowed with enormous strength; but he uses it for destruction. He is invincible. The sins and crimes he commits have to accumulate to the optimum and then come the end. God is always represented as weak and submissive in the face of overbearing evil and evil triumphs for a time. God in various shapes appears to punish the bad or the evil. Nataraj, who represents the good, maintains the love-hate relationship with Vasu as he is torn between his friendship for Vasu and his desperate dislike for Vasu. Vasu has committed sins
which horrify Nataraj. Vasu hits his teacher (Guru) and runs away from him. He attempts to improve upon nature by stuffing animals. In the end he is ready to commit the sacrilege of killing the temple elephant. Kumar, the elephant, is the cause of tension for both Nataraj, who he is anxious to save and Vasu, who is eager to kill. Vasu, in the end, while waiting to kill a big and strong animal is killed because of an extremely tiny and weak mosquito. Herein, lies the irony of the novel.

There are some political references in the novel. First of all, it is about Vasu’s earlier involvement in the National Movement of India. Like Swami, Sriram, Jagan and others he had joined the great mission of freedom movement:

That was in the year 1931. Then he had joined the civil disobedience movement against British Rule, broken the laws, marched, demonstrated, and ended up in jail. He went repeatedly to prison and once when he was released found himself in the streets of Nagpur (Narayan, The Man-Eater of Malgudi 16).

Another interesting political reference in the novel is Mr. Sen’s anti-Nehru discussions. Mr. Sen is a journalist. He comes practically everyday to the parlour of Nataraj in his press. He is always criticizing Nehru. Sometimes Nehru’s third FiveYear Plan is on the agenda of criticism and Mr. Sen tries his best to condemn it by saying: “Three hundred crores— are we counting heads or money?” (Narayan, The Man-Eater of Malgudi 10) His debate with Vasu on this subject is both interesting and significant:

Sen, the journalist...had been unwittingly caught on the very first day, while he was expanding on Nehru’s Five Year Plan. Vasu, who
had just come in to collect some stationery, listened to his talk for a moment and, turning to me, asked, “Who's he? You have not told me his name.”

“A good friend,” I said.

Vasu shook his head patronizingly. “If he is so much wiser than Nehru, why doesn't he try and become the Prime Minister of India?”

The journalist drew himself up haughtily and cried, “Who is this man? Why does he interfere with me when I am talking to someone? Is there no freedom of speech?”

Vasu said, “If you feel superior to Nehru, why don't you go to Delhi and take charge of the cabinet?” and laughed contemptuously.

Words followed, the journalist got up in anger, and Vasu advanced threateningly. “I came between them with a show of bravery, dreading lest someone should hit me. I cried, “All are friends here. I won't allow a fight. Not here, not here.” (Narayan, The Man-Eater of Malgudi 28)

The part of Nataraj, the narrator in this debate is the replica of Narayan's own role which is both ambiguous and compromising.

Thus, it is found that in this novel Narayan’s main concern is to show several evils of society that hampers the peaceful life of the people of Malgudi by introducing allusions to The Bhagavad Gita and Indian legends which spawn out a peculiar Indian setting with a political undercurrent.
THE VENDOR OF SWEETS

R. K. Narayan’s *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) depicts the experiences of an Indian sweet vendor, Jagan, the follower of Mahatma Gandhi in the company of his only son, Mali, who is the product of a culturally hybridized society in postcolonial India. At the very outset of the narrative Jagan is seen belonging to a double space of a syncretised culture. He is religious minded and has been considerably influenced by *The Bhagavad Gita*. He is a conservative man and a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi and tries to live up to the Gandhian way of life. He wears khadi and spins charka. He wants to devise some ways and means to earn handsome profits with high-minded Gandhian principles. Being a true Gandhite, Jagan uses only “non-violent footwear”, chappals made out of animals dying a natural death and not butchered for the purpose. Beef-eating to him is a sin. It is similar to the *five deadly sins*, according to Hindu Shastras. Gandhiji once said:

> They (the people in ancient India) kill no living beast in sacrifice nor they think not that the merciful clemency of God hath delight in blood and slaughter, which hath given life to beast to the intent they should live (Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* 190).

In another instance Gandhiji pointed out the same issue and said:

> You cannot be free from this self-purification. You, too, have to bring your own sacrifice to this altar and that consists in the strict observance of the laws of sanitation—internal and external—and secondly, in giving up of carrion and beef-eating, wherever the habit still persists (Gandhi, *Caste Must Go and the Sin of Untouchability* 59).
A faddist and believer in the profound wisdom of our ancestors, margosa is to him an ambrosial plant, its leaves and fruit always to be preferred to aspirin. Twigs of trees made ideal tooth-brushes, not bristles made out of pig’s tails. He maintains a most humble style of living that is prescribed along the indigenous tradition of an exclusively swadeshi type that has been exemplified and encouraged by the Mahatma who is Jagan’s life force. The following lines from the text will show how Jagan tries to modulate his daily life to a swadeshi, Gandhian mould of existence. The novelist writes:

He wore a loose jibba over his dhoti, both made of materials spun with his own hand; everyday he spun for an hour,... he had begun the habit when Gandhi visited the town over twenty years ago and had been commended for it (Narayan, The Vendor of Sweets 9).

In his self-oriented world Jagan sees himself with a cultural authenticity of tradition: “Everything in this home had the sanctity of usage” (Narayan, The Vendor of Sweets 282). He is not outside of the social structure or on its edge, he is in the cracks within the social structure itself.

The apple of Jagan’s eye is his son Mali for whom he feels a deep but absurdly embarrassed affection which appears to go unrequited. Likewise as a businessman, i.e, as a vendor of sweets he is very careful about money and collects his money in two separate containers, one representing the sales for the official day ending at 6.00 pm, on which he pays sales tax, and one for money collected ‘out of hours’ on which he pays none. This money, we are told, he viewed as—
a sort of immaculate conception, self-generated, arising out of itself and entitled to survive without reference to any tax. It was converted into crisp currency at the earliest moment, tied into a bundle and put away to keep company with the portrait of Mr. Noble in the loft at home (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 14).

Earlier in the novel we are introduced to a family relic, the portrayal of Mr. Noble, the District Collector, who at one time had come to Jagan’s father for lessons in astrology, and for whom a chair had been built especially:

A signed portrait ripening yellow with time was among the prized possessions dumped in the loft; but at some point in the history of the family the photograph was brought down, the children played with it for a while, and then substituted in its glassed frame the picture of a God and hung it up, while the photograph in the bare mount was tossed about as the children gazed on Mr. Noble’s side whiskers and giggled all afternoon. They fanned themselves with it, too, when the summer became too hot; finally it disappeared back to the loft amidst old account books and such other obscure family junk (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 11).

With a metaphoric reading of this trope, the children’s action in removing Mr. Noble from the frame would seem to serve merely as an ironic reflection on the transience of power and the inevitable return of the eternal Indian values, which colonialism merely overlaid. This is how many such ironic moments in Narayan texts are read by nationalist critics who then have some difficulty in reconciling the ironic tonalities
within a reading of the text as de-colonized fiction. This is because in Narayan not all the ironies work to the benefit of the Indian verities. He believes that within the syncretic reality of a post-colonial society it is impossible to return to an idealized pure pre-colonial cultural condition. Jagan is an example of this.

Jagan is out and out a miser. He actually does not know what Gandhian way of life actually means. He loves money more than anything. He is a materialist in the real sense. The novelist humorously describes him as the worshipper of Mammon:

Jagan gave a final look at the cash in a drawer, locked it carefully, tugged the handle four times, and pushed his chair back with a lot of noise. He put a huge brass lock on the door, turned the key and put it in his pocket, and said, “Captain! See if the lock is all right.” The captain seized the lock in a martial grip as if it were a hand-grenade and gave it a final jerk. “This is a very strong lock, sir, can’t get it now a days. I know about locks; this must have been made in a village foundry.” He expatiated on the world of locks and locksmiths. Jagn cut him short with, “Well, be watchful.” The captain gave him a military salute, and that was the end of the day (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 14).

Jagan saw Gandhiji some twenty years ago when he visited their town and since then he has been living a simple life, i.e, life of a miser. He wore home-spun cloth and for this—

every day he spun for an hour, retained enough yarn for his sartorial requirements (he never possessed more than two sets of clothes at a
time), and delivered all the excess in neat bundles to the local hand-
loom committee in exchange for cash (Narayan, *The Vendor of
Sweets* 9).

He shoes his feet with thick sandals made out of the leather of an animal that died of
old age. His spectacles, his shawl—all are of very ordinary qualities. To conceal his
miserliness he pretends to be a Gandhian. To minimize his daily expenditure he, even,
gives up rice too. He cooks a little stone-ground wheat and takes it with honey and
cheap vegetables. From one point of view, Jagan is trying to implement Gandhism in
him. This is the first observational view. But the novelist gives an ironical implication
when he says that Jagan is exercising these principles to reduce his expenditure.

As a sweet-vendor Jagan is a successful one. He is devoted to money. He is also
devoted to his twenty years old son, Mali. Indeed, Mali is the cause of his misfortune.
He is a spoiled young man. He does not care much for his foolish father who dotes
upon him every moment of his life. Though a miser, yet Jagan spares no pain for the
education of his son; but on the contrary Mali feels no interest in it. So one fine
morning he quietly announces his decision to give up his studies so that he may write
a novel for a novel-competition and win a prize of Twenty-five thousand rupees.
Jagan is now very much upset. He believes that one must at least pass the B.A.
Examination to be an educated person. He repents saying that he had an eagerness to
attain B.A. degree but he could not; because he was compelled to give up studies in
response to the call by Gandhi to *Non-Co-Operation Movement*. For his joining the
Movement he had to go to jail and spend the prime period of his student life in jail.
(This statement of Jagan is not true, because we know that he failed several times in
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B.A. examination). He says all this only to inspire his son in the field of education. Mali gives up his studies. However his father soon discovers that no novel is being written, his dear son is merely wasting his time. Further, he comes to know from a cousin that Mali now wants to go to America to learn short-story writing there. For this he has already got a passport and booked his seat. To his great shock he discovers that Mali has purchased air-ticket and managed passport for America by stealing ten thousand rupees which he had saved with great hardships and hoarded in the loft.

When Mali determines, without his father's knowledge, to go to America, and appropriates the air fare from the 'immaculate' undeclared money which Jagan has hidden in the locked 'to keep company with the portrait of Mr. Noble', Jagan, though approving of his son's 'enterprise' considers 'transferring' what is left of the untaxed hoard:

"It must be very costly," said Jagan, like a prattling baby. "But he has doubtless found the cash for it," said the cousin.

"Naturally. What is the cash worth to me? It's all for him. He can have everything he wants," said Jagan, making a note mentally to count at the earliest moment his cash hoarded in the loft. He also considered transferring it all, in due course, to a casket behind the family Gods in the puja room (Narayan, The Vendor of Sweets 49).

Jagan consoles himself saying, Mali is the real successor of his whole property; so he need not follow such a wrong path, rather he could ask his father for the money he
needs. He should ask for more if he wants it, and of course, a monthly remittance later.

Now Jagan feels proud of his son who has gone to America. He boldly tells the people that his son is in America. He fondly shows them his letters. It delays his daily routine. Sometimes he forgets that he is a sweet vendor. He forgets regular reading of *Bhagavad-Gita*. It is replaced by the blue Air-mail letters of Mali. He reads and reads the letters and lets the customers know the subject matters of the letters. But he receives another shock of his life when in one of his letters Mali tells him that he has started taking beef. He also suggests that the Indians should follow his example. His idea is that if all the Indians start eating beef then it will solve the problem of useless cattle in our country and also, we shall not have to beg food from America. Jagan, a true follower of Gandhiji from whom he learns the lesson of worshipping cows as gods, is very much upset at the news. He receives a further shock when Mali returns home from America, not alone, but with his American wife Grace. Later Jagan learns, to his great grief, that Mali and Grace are not actually married, but have been leading an immoral and sinful life.

Mali now wants to set up a factory for manufacturing story writing machine. The factory will be built in their town with American collaboration. Though an American company is offering to collaborate, Mali demands two and a half lakh rupees from his father as his share. He presses his father to give him the money, for he is sure his father has earned that much of money by selling sweets at excessive rates and avoiding the payment of income tax. When Jagan refuses Mali is not disturbed. As the cousin reports:
“...he also says he knows where you keep cash not sent to the bank.”

“He says so, does he?” said Jagan, laughing within himself at the fact that he had changed the venue of the immaculate cash. “Money is an evil,” he added with great feeling (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 81).

Significantly, of course, the portrait of Mr. Noble proves a useless guardian once removed from the ‘frame’ and consigned to the attic, but the money is successfully protected by the gods who now inhabit the ‘frame’ of power and active presence. Yet their potency is also produced by the appropriation to them of the ‘frame’ of power they have inherited from Mr. Noble. The same applies to Jagan, who seeks to live by the laws of a modified Gandhian Hinduism but who must always be aware of the changed and hybridized reality within which such changes can be made effective or otherwise. And this is true of both sides of the equation, the traditional prejudices and laws which remain active despite Gandhi’s attempted reforms, and the European influences and economic controls which remain in place despite his successful struggle for ‘independence’.

Thus when Grace (Mali’s Korean-American wife) innocently comments that she had been frightened of prejudice under the caste system before she arrived, Jagan’s comments reveal his awareness of the gap between proposed ideal and actuality:

“Well, we don’t believe in caste now-a-days, you know,” Jagan said generously; “Gandhi fought for its abolition.”

“It is gone now?” she asked innocently.
“It’s going,” Jagan said, sounding like a politician; “we don’t think of it now-a-days,” hoping that the girl would not cross-examine him further (Narayan, The Vendor of Sweets 66).

Such a metonymic reading, whilst it recognizes the significance of Jagan’s loyalty to traditional practices, does not do so at the cost of being dismissive of Mali or his stand against the inadequacies of Jagan’s portrayal and flawed modernization on the Gandhian model.

The present action of the novel is sharply contextualized by the flash back account of Jagan’s own courtship, marriage ‘in the Indian way’ and substituent struggle to fulfil the demands of his father, his family, and the ‘ancient home’ they represent. The account of Jagan’s journey to the temple with his wife and parents to sacrifice for a son illustrates the inevitable and continuing struggle between ‘tradition’ and changing practice, a struggle which is continued in a different way in Jagan’s relationship with his own son. Jagan’s father is angry at being overcharged by the coconut-sellers who, by custom, supply the sacrifice material:

“If I had known the price of things here, I’d have brought all the stuff from home,” Father cried irascibly. Mother interposed from where she set, “That’s not permitted. Custom requires…”

“Yes, yes, it was written in the Vedas ten thousand years ago that you must be exploited on this spot of earth by this particular coconut woman. True, true,” he said cynically, glaring at his son and daughter-in-law sitting on another boulder, hinting that if only people displayed normal fecundity, one would not have to buy
coconut at an exorbitant price. Jagan squirmed at the look his father
gave him and felt more important than ever, and Ambika, at whom
he glanced, looked more defiant than ever, ready to bring out the
group photo of a hundred and three.

But for the fact that he was a coward, Jagan would have asked
his parents, “Haven’t you enough grandchildren? Why do you want
more? Why don’t you leave me alone?” Meanwhile the woman was
saying, “Don’t grudge a little extra expense, the grandson will bring
you a lot of good fortune when he arrives.” At which the old
gentleman softened and asked, “How are you sure it’ll be a son, not
a daughter?” “No one who prays at that temple is ever disappointed
with a daughter.” (Narayan, The Vendor of Sweets 172).

As if in fulfilment of the coconut-seller’s prophecy Mali was born. And this Mali is
now breaking all the traditional ethos that Jagan maintains throughout his life. While
Mali is administering shock upon shock to his father, Jagan is composed and
shrewd enough not to commit himself. Mali wants to introduce story writing
machinery, the news of which creates a sort of frustration in Jagan. Jagan is a true
follower of Gandhiji who was against the use of machinery as such, in agriculture as
well as in industry. He explained:

Mechanization is good, when the hands are too few for the work
intended to be accomplished. It is an evil when there are more hands
than required for the work, as is the case in India (Gandhi, India of
My Dreams 101).
This is an erroneous notion and has caused unnecessary misgivings about Gandhian economic thought. To point out the fact, R.K. Narayan, probably, tells about Mali’s story of the short story manufacturing machine. Naturally a clash is created between two generations, between two tenets. It is universally acknowledged that “The old order changeth; yielding place to the new” (Tennyson 45). Here is an indication to shift from Gandhism to materialism.

So the Gandhite, Jagan finds no other alternative than to compromise with coming trends, may be it is far away from eternal principle, but it is ‘the way of the world’. He is confronted by the new world shockingly personified—a world where his cherished notions of marriage and morals seem to count for nothing. The tragicomic clash of the generations deepens with every chapter. Jagan’s final escape from the galling chains of paternal love comes as unexpectedly as every other twist in this delicious story. First, he thinks, it is much better to vend sweets than to vend story-making gadgets. So he brings down the price of sweets and thus offends other sweet-vendors of the locality. Then he makes up his mind to hand over his business to his son, and himself to lead a retired spiritual life in an Ashram across the river. From the electronics of novel-writing, Jagan is switched back to sanity by the bearded man—“this man from the previous millennium”—whose whole life is centred in bringing a deity to life out of a stone, and installing it on a vacant temple pedestal near a pond in the recesses of the Mempi forest. It is the Goddess Gayatri, the deity of Radiance that who is to come out of the stone. The very thought excites the image-maker, as the story-making machine excites Mali. Jagan decides to buy the place, make it his retreat, and help the old stonemason to realize his dream. The irony here is that he
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profundely takes a cheque-book with him to his retreat as it is not superfluous baggage. When Jagan learns that Mali has been arrested for the illegal possession of liquor, he authorizes the cousin to take the necessary steps, but adds significantly: “A dose of prison life is not a bad thing. It may be just what he needs now” (Narayan, The Vendor of Sweets 184).

Jagan is such a bundle of simplicity and shrewdness, of candour and fussiness, that he can be other-worldly and this-worldly at once. He reminds himself that “at sixty, one is reborn and enters a new *janma*”; and being sixty himself, Jagan is ready to give up vending sweets so as to be able to watch a goddess come out of a stone. One peculiarity in Jagan’s character is that good sense and oddity achieve splendid coexistence in him; and even Gandhism and the Gita are applied within reason. But at the end of the novel the real transformation comes in Jagan’s life. The cousin is amazed at the transformation in Jagan who does not blame Grace for the muddle created by his son Mali, and is willing to buy her a ticket if she desires to return to her homeland America. Thus at the end of the novel the fake Gandhiman learns the real values of forgiveness and tolerance which are the real assets of Gandhism.

Thus, in the novel The Vendor of Sweets, R.K. Narayan humorously portrays the influence of Gandhism on the character of the chief protagonist, Jagan. The central character’s imitation of Mahatma Gandhi as well as exercising of Gandhian principles without knowing the real depth of this grand ‘moral and ethical principle’ is nothing but an implication of the whim of both pre and post independence India where it has become a fashion to imitate Gandhi. The ironical presentation of the various activities of Jagan helps to expose his fake practice of Gandhism. We also
come across such typical figures in our day to day life. They, in reality, hide their immoral life style under the disguise of Gandhism.

Moreover, with a gentle, unpretentious style and straightforward plotting, Narayan portrays in this novel an ordinary people struggling to make sense of his life as Hindu cultural tradition clashed with modernity and a nascent nationalism eroded a colonial mentality. This novel testifies to Narayan’s complex use of the text which projects to some extent, a dialectical structure of values in a postcolonial setting on the light of cross-cultural interactions. Here Narayan tries to unfold how an ordinary individual’s naive concept of truth matures from a level of skin-deep perception to a veritable height of realisation.

**THE PAINTER OF SIGNS**

In *The Painter of Signs* (1976) a realistic picture of India in the post-Independence Era has been presented. It delineates the dilemma of the Indian masses caught in between two worlds—one dead, and the other powerless to be born. The traditional, conventional India is stream-rolled under the colonial imperial appropriation. The political ideas, philosophies, science and the Western attitude, while erasing the past, also enabled the courage to fight for “re-territorialization,” as Arjun Appadurai would comment. Before the full impact of independence sinks in and the colonial hang-over is erased Narayan posits his protagonists in this liminal zone. The novel also underlines the change in human outlook with regards to some of the cherished ideals, established institutions and accepted values. Broadly speaking, the trend of the time is
to be scientific and rational: the trend very well represented by Daisy and Raman who want to establish the Age of Reason.

_The Painter of Signs_ is noticeably a novel that highlights the problem of population increase and its consequent problems. After _The Man-Eater of Malgudi_, we see the use of an ancient Hindu legend significant here. Raman, the protagonist, himself mentions “The ancient king Santanu” in the later part of the novel. Remarkably, there is a likeness between the legend of Santanu and the love story in _The Painter of Signs_. Like Santanu, Raman is so much obsessed with love that at any condition he is prepared to accept marriage.

Daisy is presented here as a modern and sophisticated woman. Like Ganga her past is covered with ambiguity. She did not believe in love and for her it is simply a romanticism created by the literary men. Ganga’s real identity is revealed to Santanu only at the end and similarly Raman does not come to know Daisy’s real name at all, knowing only the name assumed by her. Daisy lays down two conditions of her marriage. One, that they should have no children. Two, if by mischance one was born, she would give the child away and keep herself free to pursue her social work.

May be Narayan suggests ironically that some modern girls of our society are in the same attitude of Daisy. The girls of our society like Daisy are now apt to have equal status and complete freedom in their matrimonial life. The days of the Sati-Savitric phase are gone. Bentham’s utilitarianism has influenced every walk of modern life and Daisy, like other modern girls of society is not an exception. The “love” believed to be the union of two souls has lost its meaning in true sense and is
now evaluated in the sense of utility. Already in *The Guide*, Narayan has broached the very post-modern relationship of living together.

Like other modern girls, Daisy is apt to bid farewell to the old traditions of her society. Daisy’s modernity is quickly known to everybody in Malgudi. She hates increase in the rate of population and publicity of birth control is her professional practice for which she works meticulously. People of Malgudi are amazed at Daisy and her mission. She works in her own office and receives visitors in her apartment. She moves from village to village with Raman where it is his business to write slogans advocating family planning. She points out the sharp increase in the population rate of the nation to her listeners. Her ambition is to prevent the population growth, and she pursues this aim with a religious intensity. Her sincerity and adaptability is astonishing. She travels tirelessly by taxi, bus and even by cart. She takes whatever food is available without any taboo. Daisy washes her clothes and takes bath in a public well without any hesitation, stays in the huts and is extremely undemanding. She believed that one would never understand the people unless she lives like millions of other Indians. Through Daisy’s socialistic doctrine and argument passed in favour of birth control placed on such a fanatical zeal, R.K, Narayan wants to stress the need of such education among the innocent and illiterate mass of Indian populace.

The rise of population is an alarming problem. Birth rate needs a massive hit if the national calamity is to be averted. However, Narayan does not mean the novel to be a propaganda for family planning since it has been conceived and executed much before the family planning campaign has assumed a ridiculous dimension. But the problem
he has dealt with in *The Painter of Signs* have undoubtedly represented a social change. However, along with these apparent and effective aspects of change or advancement it has very strong links with the past, the vestiges of which survive in the form of the temple priest and the Sarayu river. Narayan's own attitude towards the change is representative of the Hindu attitude—"unsure and ambivalent like the alternate denigration and idolization that the poor Sir Fredric Lawley received at the hands of the Malgudians" (quoted in Mathur 87). It is by natural therefore, that the "traditional values do often seem to prevail at the end...the triumph is superficial, uncertain and on a purely personal level" (Mathur 87).

The religious sense of the Indian myth is part of Narayan's grip of reality, of his particular view of human life and his individual way of placing and ordering human feelings and experiences. Narayan embodies the spirit of Hinduism and therefore, in almost all his novels Hindu custom and rituals are found vividly represented. Raman's aunt goes on pilgrimage with the motive shared by almost all religious spirited old men and women of Hindu religion. For every old people the most auspicious end to their life at Kashi and to be finally dissolved in the Ganga. Narayan presents the religious ambition of all Hindu old people through Raman's aunt's plan about pilgrimage:

At my age, with a few years left, people do not generally want to return. A visit to Kasi is the end. I may live for ten days or ten years or twenty years, it is immaterial how long one lives after this stage. It is the ambition of everyone of my generation to conclude this existence at Kasi, to be finally dissolved in the Ganges. That is
the most auspicious end to one’s life (Narayan, *The Painter of Signs* 152).

Narayan is a minute observer of society and its corruptions. The mixing of water into the milk by milkmen is a headache for everybody in society. Raman’s aunt watches carefully when milkman milks the cow, so that he may not add water into the milk. Being a Hindu by thought and spirit, Narayan shares a Hindu’s belief in reincarnation. The affair of Raman and Daisy fails to succeed. She deserts him for the sake of her mission. Raman becomes desperate and hopes to meet her in the “next Janma” (Narayan, *The Painter of Signs* 183).

Narayan presents a realistic portrayal of India’s poverty drawn by Daisy by way of asking Raman:

Don’t you see how terrible it is with everything crowded, and an endless chain of queues for food, shelter, bus, medicine, and everything, with thousands of children, coming with nothing to eat, no clothes to wear, no roof, no civilized existence being possible on such a mass scale—each one of us has to do our bit in the corner of the country allotted to us (Narayan, *The Painter of Signs* 56).

It is possibly this horrible crowded scene in his mind, Narayan represents the national cause in writing *The Painter of Signs*.

Narayan is a profound lover of humanity; he portrays with sympathy life in Malgudi in all its flaws and frivolities from a comic point of view, laughs and makes his readers laugh at the silly human follies and foibles, for indeed man is a toy in the hands of fate. Narayan’s view of life is one of practical wisdom; and he treats human
sentimentalism, selfishness, manners and meanness, with sympathy and compassion. Narayan’s *The Painter of Signs* evokes the atmosphere of orthodox middle-class life and society.

Therefore, *The Painter of Signs* is a study of a new generation educated girl whose tendency is to bid farewell to the tradition and existing norms of society. It highlights Hindu’s religious attitude and the problem of population increase.

**A TIGER FOR MALGUDI**

In *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983) R. K. Narayan tries to emphasize the philosophical foundations of Hinduism and their relevance to everyday life. The main concern of the novel is to delineate how the individual, fettered by his own self-delusion, works within a framework established by the Hindu concepts of *dharma* and *karma*.

By using a tiger as his central character, and by allowing the reader to see through a tiger’s eyes, Narayan portrays man as selfish and insensitive to the world, as well as totally unaware of his role in the great scheme of things. In his Introduction, Narayan tells us how the idea of writing the novel with a tiger as the chief protagonist actually came to his mind:

> During the Kumbh Mela festival, which recurs every twelve years at the confluence of the three rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati in Allahabad, a vast crowd gathers for a holy bath in the rivers. Amidst that ocean of humanity also arrives a hermit with his companion, a tiger. He does not hold the animal on a leash since he claims they
were brothers in previous lives. The tiger freely moves about without hurting or scaring anyone.

Such a combination seemed incredible when I read reports of it and saw the photographs. But as I got used to the idea, I began to speculate on its possibilities for a novel (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi*).

Again, the novelist remarks:

...humans have monopolized the attention of fiction writers. Man in his smugness never imagines for a moment that other creatures may also possess ego, values, outlook, and the ability to communicate: though they may be incapable of audible speech. Man assumes he is all important, that all else in creation exists only for his sport, amusement, comfort, or nourishment (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi*).

Therefore, Narayan creates a unique tiger possessing “a soul” within its “forbidding exterior”, in whom the *sattva, rajas* and *tamo* gunas, the four stages of life *baalya, yauvana, grihasta* and *vaanaprastha* and the three important ways of *yoga*, *karma*, *bhakti* and *jnaana* are skilfully blended. The other important characters in this novel are the Captain Madan and the Master with whom Raja, the Tiger’s life is closely related and in whose association Raja passes through the cycle of life – from freedom, captivity, and discipline to freedom again.

The novel is developed in three parts, each recounting a period of Raja’s life, and each expressing some aspect of the *dharma-karma* theme. The first part highlights on
Raja's life in the jungle, where as a hunter and predator he feels no repentance for what he does. According to Raja, it is "a time of utter wildness, violence, and unthinking cruelty inflicted on weaker creatures" (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi* 13). Raja is completely resolved to this role in the divine plan, and accepts that some things are beyond question and cannot be changed; as he says, "don't know why God has chosen to give us this fierce make-up, the same God who has created the parrot, the peacock, and the deer, which inspire poets and painters" (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi* 12). Here the nature of *dharma* is presented, not only as determining one's actions, but also as imposing certain expectations realizable only through individual initiative and action. Raja does not therefore automatically become "King of the Forest" (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi* 13); the submission of other creatures is worth nothing unless it is earned.

In the second part of the novel we see Raja's mate and cubs are killed by hunters. Raja's response to his loss is predictable and natural. There arose within him "a blind impossible anger" in which he "just wanted to dash up, pounce upon every creature, bite and claw and destroy" (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi* 24). But Raja also finds that preying on domestic animals is much easier than pursuing creatures in the wild. Crucial in Raja's make-up is his pride in being a tiger; now, however, he takes pride in carrying off the defenseless villagers' sheep. Much after the fact Raja recognizes his mistake in turning away from what he is by nature. "Looking back," Raja says, "I feel that I should not have chosen the easy path—of raiding villages" (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi* 31).
Captured by the Captain for his circus, Raja finds the vast difference between the “grand silence” of the jungle and the “noisy nature of humanity” (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi* 44) distressing. While under training Raja suffers humiliation and hunger, and views all circus animals as “cursed creatures weighed down with the karma of their previous lives” (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi* 49). The period of suffering lasts until Raja learns obedience. From one difficult task Raja is forced to another by the Captain. He gets bored and tries to escape when one day he gets success in his mission. But again he comes under the control of a monk. Having been saved from the angry villagers by the Master, Raja becomes the sadhu’s (i.e. wise man’s) devoted disciple, learning much about his own nature, his place in the order of things, and his relationship with God. In this regard, the Master, in saying to Raja, “Understand that you are not a tiger, don’t hurt yourself. I am your friend” (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi* 144), points to the ultimate freedom transcending the apparent freedom from conventional labels.

In the last part of the novel the Master describes God “as the Creator, the Great Spirit pervading every creature, a source of power and strength” (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi* 157-58). This contrasts with Raja’s perception of God as “an enormous tiger, spanning the earth and the sky” (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi* 158). The Master’s suggestion is that man, and for that matter the tiger as well, visualizes God in his own image, and that neither perception of the divine corresponds to what the divine is in its fullness. Rather they are objectified conceptions of the divine which is internal to us, and are conditioned by who and what we are. Thus Narayan connects the notion of the divine with that of dharma. Concerning the quest to realize the
divine within, the Master makes the further point that the goal is not easily realized. The Master's message is that, consistent with the law of *karma*, one must work to move through various stages of increasing spiritual awareness until one consciously turns away from the world to achieve *samādhi* (i.e., enlightenment). The Master is an embodiment of the renunciation ideal, philosophical aspirations and spiritual attainments, exemplified in the Hindu way of life. Like the "gurus" of ancient times who sought to guide and enlighten their disciples, the Master takes on himself the responsibility of educating and humanizing Raja.

Here we find the obvious connotations to the Hindu philosophy as exemplified in *The Bhagavadgita*. The characters of the Master, the Captain and Raja stand for *sattva, rajas* and *tamo gunas* and Raja himself progresses from one guna to the other by which he becomes a Sattvic at the end. From a state of total ignorance, fury, haughtiness and strength Raja passes through stages of humiliation, discipline and desire to please the captain, to a state of calm and peace through association with the Master. Raja treads the difficult path of improving his nature and what awaits such transformation can be nothing short of self-realization. The three ways of attaining salvation, through *jnana, bhakti* and *karma* are subtly presented in the Master, Raja and the Captain. The Master leaves his mundane life in quest of self-realization and attains it through penance, meditation and knowledge; the Captain who fulfils himself through his deep commitment to work is *karma yoga*, *yoga* meaning skill in works. Raja also attains this state through *bhakti* or devotion to the Master.

Therefore, it is found that in *A Tiger for Malgudi* R. K. Narayan combines Hindu mysticism with ripe Malgudi comedy and also with human ridiculousness through the
eyes of a tiger finding the human world too brutish and baffling. But above all, the novel delineates the cultural tradition of Hindu society which is a recurrent motif of Narayan’s idea of a spiritual nation.

TALKATIVE MAN

R.K Narayan’s Talkative Man is first published in 1986. This short novel or novella is the story of a man who talks irrelevant and sometime false. The plot of the novel is also set up at the same backdrop of the fictitious village Malgudi that R K Narayan has brought to life in an entire series of books.

This novella is about a con man, the ‘futurologist’ Dr. Rann, who claims to hail from Timbuktu and to be visiting Malgudi on a United Nations project. The story is presented through three narrators. Thus, there are figuratively speaking, three Dr. Ranns in this novella—the Dr. Rann who emerges from the story told by the Talkative Man (known to his friends as TM), the chief narrator; the Rann who emerges from the story told by Commandant Sarasa, his wife; and the Rann who emerges from the dialogue and journal entries of Dr. Rann himself. There is also, as a very brief vignette, Girija’s Rann—the Rann who emerges from the hysterical outburst of the girl whom he nearly seduced. All these Ranns are different from one another and so, it throws up interesting questions about the veracity of Rann’s story.

One day the Talkative Man meets Dr. Rann at the “Town Hall reading room” (Narayan, Talkative Man, 3). T.M. finds Rann too exotic for his homespun Malgudi taste, and yet he is completely fascinated by him and enjoys exaggerating Rann’s exploits because he loves to fantasize and tell a good story:
I’d choke if I didn’t talk, perhaps like Sage Narada of our epics, who for all his brilliance and accomplishments carried a curse on his back that unless he spread a gossip a day, his skull would burst (Narayan, Talkative Man 1).

Further, TM fancies himself a journalist, but confuses the function of the journalist with that of the subjective or personal essayist when he asserts that “The journalist...acts as the eye for humanity” (Narayan, Talkative Man 31).

As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that Mr. Rann is a womanizing predator who seduces young women and then abandons them without warning. The climax comes when the Talkative Man attempts to prevent the doctor from seducing a young Malgudi woman whom the Talkative Man has known since birth. The best feature of this book is Narayan’s delicate touch with characterization, sketching familiar types with just a few lines and that includes the old librarian and his wife, their granddaughter Girija, the agitated station master, the old porter, Varma who owns The Boardless Hotel, the Deputy Minister, and even the President of the Lotus Club.

What is most interesting in Narayan’s playing with meaning in Talkative Man is the way in which he plays even with traditional material—the analogues which he deploys from Indian mythology. In keeping with the complexity of the Rann’s story, even the mythological analogues seem to cancel each other out in the novella. Rann is obviously analogized by the picture on the coffee-shop owner Varma’s calendar—“a calendar portrait of that impossible demon Mahishasura, with serpents entwining his neck and arms” (Narayan, Talkative Man 1). He is equated with Mahishasura, the archetype of evil in Hindu mythology. Sarasa, his betrayed wife and pursuer would
then correspond with the goddess Durga who battled with Mahishasura and destroyed him: fittingly, her towering stature, physical strength and military associations are frequently emphasized. To TM she is “a six-foot woman...a dark-complexioned, cropped head...the first of her kind in the Malgudi area” (Narayan, Talkative Man 39). But the parallel disintegrates at the end when Sarasa fails to contain Rann—it is Rann who triumphs by escaping from her and eloping with yet another young girl, and Sarasa who is left defeated and disconsolate. And the analogue is completely subverted when Varma compares Sarasa’s pursuit and temporary recovery of Rann to the myth of “Savitri and Satyavan”:

> It reminds one of Savitri and Satyavan of our legends. How Savitri persistently followed Yama, the God of Death, when he plucked away her husband’s life...I think this Commandant is a similar one (Narayan, Talkative Man 115)

Satyavan was an ideal hero who escaped the clutches of Yama or Death as much through his own goodness as through his wife’s fidelity. So we face an ambiguity in the character of Rann because of the mutually contradictory mythological analogues applied to him. Though, Narayan firmly believes in the oral and moral dimensions of the traditionally Indian modes of story-telling, here he has used the strategy to foreground the fictionality of fiction and the textuality of the text, and to throw up questions about the very nature of storytelling by subverting the authenticity or reliability of the teller (Sen, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow in the Fiction of R. K. Narayan 99-100).
Thus, it is found that the Indian background, especially, the background of Malgudi lends a unique charm to this novel. *Talkative Man* is really an extended short story, but it is full of Malgudi as any of Narayan’s longer novels. The minor characters come to life at the magic touch of Narayan—the bewildered railway station master, the photographer, the librarian are all true citizens of Malgudi. The novel has offered a distinctive and highly engaging glimpse into South Indian life.

**THE WORLD OF NAGARAJ**

In his next novel, *The World of Nagaraj* (1990) R. K. Narayan has incorporated his experiences of life and a triple vision of man in relation to himself, his environment and his gods. This novel offers, artistically, an amalgamation of tradition and modernity. The ancient Indian society is “a world of thinkers, a nation of philosophers” (Philip 111). The society which has been portrayed in the novels of R.K. Narayan confirms it. In this novel, too, the characters are presented from different walks of life and they reveal, through actions, their belief in Indian philosophical thought and moral values. India, a nation of great tradition and moral values, has been depicted here.

The character of Nagaraj, the protagonist, is put forward to the reader as a person whose only aim in life is to pen down a novel on the life of the holy celestial Hindu sage, ‘Narada’. His wife Sita, like her mythical counterpart is devoted to her husband and her gods, while Gopu, his elder brother, who is materialistic and very ambitious, is keen to make a profit at whatever cost. The Townhall *Sanyasi* advocates and preaches Vedantic philosophy. The businessman, Bari, is also devotional. Most
significantly, the young people, Tim and his wife Saroja who initially reject the traditional Malgudian mode of life for the glittering world of Kismet-inn finally return back to Kabir street, the centre of Malgudi. The reflection of Kismet-inn resounding with loud music and loud gossips in favour of Kabir Street which is diametrically opposed to Kismet-inn culture is a reiteration of Malgudian culture and its social, moral or ethical value system.

Paradoxically, in this novel there is a reversal of the great Indian epic Ramayana. Nagaraj in his subordination to his brother Gopu offers a parallel to Lakshmana in the Ramayana:

After his graduation, Gopu spurned Nagaraj and ordered him about. Nagaraj did not mind it. He continued to be a devoted Younger brother. ‘You are like Lakshmana in the Ramayana, who stood behind Rama, his elder brother, all the time without a murmur or doubt’, remarked his father sometimes (Narayan, The World of Nagaraj 27).

However, Gopu can not be called the archetypal of Rama, the protagonist of the great epic. Unlike Rama, he is an egoist. Nagaraj, though childless, proves himself to be a lovable, kind, and patient partner to his wife Sita. Nagaraj imparts his parental love on his brother’s son Tim, yet he is detached in performing the Karma and does not ponder the consequences. Tim’s inconsistent and unpredictable actions are perceived by him in a stoic manner and therefore he suffers less than his wife who is devoted and attached to Tim as a worldly woman. The relationship of Nagaraj and his wife
Sita to their semi-adopted son Tim projects two facets of Hindu philosophy – the ideal and the illusory.

The relationship of Sita and Tim is contrasted to the relationship of Nagaraj and Tim. Nagaraj presents the ideal kind of relationship in keeping the principles and doctrines of Indian philosophy and therefore suffers less from the oscillating nature of Tim. In his relation with Tim, Nagaraj transforms from the illusory to the ideal world whereas in her relation with Tim, Sita struggles more within her illusory world of attachment. She can not detach herself from the material aspects of family relations.

In the novel the Vedantic tradition of Guru-Shishya is focused in the relationship between Nagaraj and the Townhall Sanyasi. Nagaraj fulfills his necessary pre-requisite for the pursuit and subsequent attainment of spiritual knowledge. The Townhall Sanyasi, his Guru advises him:

> Wear it (ochre dress) for an hour or a lifetime, I don’t care what you do, but only remember when you are wearing this ochre your mind should be only on God, not on money or the family. Your thoughts must be away from all sensual matters, free from kama, krodha, lobha and moha. ... Don’t look at your wife except as a mother, and don’t let your mind dwell on your night life (Narayan, *The World of Nagaraj* 11).

Nagaraj replies, “For over ten years we have been living like brother and sister” (Narayan, *The World of Nagaraj* 12). He follows the advice of his Guru and detaches himself from all the preoccupations of family and money.
R. K. Narayan seems to be offering a viable mode and model in Nagaraj, the philosopher and moralist in the modern context. The novelist has summarized the virtue of Satvah in the character of Nagaraj who is an archetype of steadfastness or dhairya in the face of all upheavals or crises in his life. Despite the adverse situations like the death of his beloved father, separation of two dear brothers, death of his mother, his childlessness and foolhardiness of Tim and his wife Saroja and even amidst the rejections of his brother, Gopu, he remains calm and poised without any grudges against his loved ones. All personal tragedies are borne heroically by Nagaraj in a mood of calmness.

Narayan has presented the philosophical ideas of Hindu culture exhaustively in The World of Nagaraj. Most Indian ethics including The Bhagvad Gita have advised men to practice indriya-nigraha or control of senses. This indriya-nigraha or control of senses is experimented by Nagaraj in the novel. He restrains himself from sensual pleasures such as indulgence in the sense of touch, smell and vision. He abstains from alcohol and stands in binary opposition to the dancing and ditching of Tim and others in Kismet-Inn. Gopu rightly compares Nagaraj to the ideal Saint Narada who is incidentally the ideal saint of Nagaraj who desires to write a book on Saint Narada who is a source of dhi or wisdom and vidya or learning for Nagaraj. Through Nagaraj, Narayan explores the various facets of human behaviour and temperament and the progress of man from the real to the ideal world.

In the novel, R. K. Narayan has presented the ideal and the real world in juxtaposition. On the one hand through the characters like Nagaraj and Townhall Sanyasi he tries to explore the ideal world as discussed and advised by Indian
philosophical schools and on the other hand he unfolds the real world of oddities and menace through the characters like Coomar, Bari and Kavu Pandit. Narayan believes in the concept of transformation from the real to the ideal in the process of his life. This transformation leads one to achieve peace and happiness.

The main centres for philosophical discussion in this novel are the abode of Townhall Sanyasi and Kavu Pandit’s house in Ellaman Lane, the pyol of Nagaraj’s house in Kabir Street, the shop of Coomar and Bari. These spaces correlate philosophy to daily life. Philosophy has been related to a domestic man in his home, a businessman in his commercial centre and a Sanyasi in Townhall. Philosophy for Narayan is not an intellectual activity, an activity or practice apart from life pattern, but it is a way of life. Thus, his Malgudi projects the Indian philosophical systems and ways of life. Raja Rao rightly avers in this respect:

India is the kingdom of God and is within one Malgudi, a microcosm of India is not only a political, social or economic entity but also a spiritual entity. India makes everything and everywhere as India (Rao 138).

Therefore, it is found that in The World of Nagaraj Narayan is accurate in his depiction of an India that is a paradox of binaries--of wealth and squalor, elegance and poverty, beauty and disease, erudition and ignorance--yet he renders Nagaraj’s little world to represent the entire big world where we love and strive, unable to realise that we are primarily responsible for our own lives.
GRANDMOTHER'S TALE

R.K. Narayan published his novella, *Grandmother's Tale* in 1992. In reality, this novella is the tale of the author's great-grandmother as narrated by the grandmother to the author. Like some of his earlier novels, Narayan has employed the motif of using some ancient Hindu legends in the modern context. In *The Painter of Signs* Narayan illustrates the mythology of Santanu and Ganga. Similarly, in *Grandmother's Tale* the author uses the famous Satyavan—Savitri mythology to justify the means employed by Bala, the great-grandmother of the author to get back her husband.

The great-grandmother's tale begins with her marriage at the age of seven with a boy, Viswanath, ten years old. Located in pre-independence India 'before the Sepoy Mutiny' of 1857. Narayan maintains:

> It is not possible for me to fix the historical background by any clue of internal evidence....One has to assume an arbitrary period--that is the later period of the East India Company, before the Sepoy Mutiny (Narayan, *Grandmother's Tale* 8).

He continues: "Those were days of child marriages, generally speaking. Only widowers re-married late in life" (Narayan, *Grandmother's Tale* 8). Child marriages are undoubtedly a social evil and India has tried to fight it by legislation as well as educational progress and social awakening. But it cannot be said that the evil has been completely eradicated even today.

We see once Bala tries to object to her marriage before her mother on the ground that her friends are making fun of her. In defence her mother puts forth an argument which would sound funny in the present day, namely, that Bala was old enough to
marry, something that could not be avoided by any human being. Another instance of the defence of child marriage is advanced by Viswa’s teacher when Viswa’s class fellows ridiculed him for getting married by shouting “Shame, Shame”. The teacher delivers his opinion to the students of the class regarding child-marriage in this fashion:

Why shame? I was married when I was like Viswa. I have four sons and two daughters and grandchildren. My wife looks after them at home still, and runs the family; and they will all marry soon. There is no shame in marriage. It’s all arranged by the God in that temple. Who are we to say anything against His will? My wife was also small when we married (Narayan, Grandmother’s Tale 14).

When teachers themselves would be holding such views, and women’s education level was zero, one can well imagine the predicament of women regarding marital freedom and choice in those dark days of Indian history.

From the mythological point of view the tale recounts the adventures of Bala, married at seven and then abandoned. A priest ordains that the child bride must stay away from the temple unless the husband can be shown to be alive: widows are unclean, and this priest could well know all about the practice of sati. Bala sets off in search of her husband. Years go by in the twinkling of a paragraph. She catches up with him in Poona, where he’s a thriving jeweller, married to someone else. She like Savitri of Hindu Mythology crosses the subcontinent to extract her husband Viswanath from the hands of his new wife, Surma.
Another interesting element of the novella is the presentation of the character of Surma, a perfect example of an Indian woman who sacrifices everything for the sake of her husband’s pleasure. Her character shines out luminously in the entire novel and that wins the reader's sympathy. The notable element of self-sacrifice in Surma's love is noticed in her surrender of her own husband to another woman whom she has befriended, just because she claims to be his wife. Surma could, if she so wished, have resisted all Bala's attempts to win over Viswanath, and successfully too. While parting also, she bears no ill-will towards either him or her. On the contrary she says: "May God bless you both" (Narayan, Grandmother’s Tale 69), and totally disappears from their lives. Such a pathetic end of hers reflects very adversely on both Viswa and Bala, especially on the former who loses his life at the end of the story in the hand of his third wife.

Thus, it is found that Grandmother’s Tale delineates a realistic picture of our nation, a traditional India during the last phase of British Raj where gender differences and child marriage were normal and annas were still the currency. This novella allows a reader to journey through an old India, which is filled with ancient traditions.

From the above discussion, it is pertinent to say that in R.K. Narayan’s post-Independence novels feminine sensibility has emerged as one of the most significant themes being treated by Narayan in his novels written in this period. Although the trend of depicting this was already set by the novelist, it did not occupy much important place in the pre-independence novels as it did in the novels written after 1950s. Revival of classical mythology was also a recurrent motif of the novelist in
this period. Another most important feature of the post-independence novel that distinguishes from the pre-independence novel is the frequent use of situations and characters that are global. References from politics and history, also, occupy a major portion of Narayan’s novels written after independence. But, Gandhism and the east-west encounter captivated the attention of Narayan’s post-independence novels as vigorously as any other theme. Through the social portrait of a single region, Narayan succeeds in presenting the larger picture of Indian society, both in its general features as well as in its specifically post-independence lineaments. All these contributed to rediscover a nation in all its fact and fiction, tradition and modernity, past and present—which is the prime concern of R.K. Narayan’s work.
Works Cited


