CHAPTER 3

REFLECTION OF THE IDEA OF NATION

IN R.K. NARAYAN
In his essay *Imaging India: Nation and Narration* K.C. Baral attempts to decipher various cognitive pictures of Indian nation and nationalism that have been painted by authors and writers such as Nirad Choudhuri, R.K. Narayan, V.S. Naipul and others. The picture of India given by these authors is a constructed one. Baral argues that the imaginative discovery of India’s cultural greatness and consequent self-awareness on the part of its people gave a moral booster to India’s freedom struggle. But at the same time various intellectual constructions of India have remained only at the cognitive level. For Nirad Choudhuri, there is nothing to be very happy about India as a nation.

As a typical westernized Indian, Choudhuri draws comparison between everything Indian with the British. In the process, he ends up in puerile generalizations. His view that the nature of Indians will not change whether it is B.C. 3000 or 2000 A.D. is another example of Choudhuri’s hatred for his own countrymen. Even he does not hesitate to call them little better than primitives...Chaudhuri feels that the loss of Indian self is irrevocable (Baral 73).

But for R.K. Narayan, India is something different. He sees the possibility of India’s restoration. He appreciates the achievements of India’s classical culture and displays a mindset that helps him to rediscover the meaning of the Indian selfhood. He is convinced that our national consciousness is fundamental to our ways of living...Narayan feels happy in a compassionate absorption of himself in the lives of ordinary Indians. For this reason alone, Narayan’s Indian microcosm Malgudi, his
ficational world, mirrors the life of the sub-continent in all its
diversity (Baral 73-74).

So, his novels finely portray the issues raised and faced by the people in India during
the Struggle for Independence.

Narayan had started writing at a time when the Indian scenario was
throbbing with high idealism, freedom movement and revisionary
cultural activities. Indian minds were full of Gandhi’s teachings and
Nehru’s dreams. The writers on their part, were trying to establish
some or the other cultural, social or political statements. Great
numbers of autobiographies, which were success stories of the
individual struggle for self-improvisation and enlightenment had
come out (Biswas 127).

Through his writings, Narayan tries to highlight the then foremost national issues and
these issues are still relevant. He writes in favour of the ‘Three Language Formula’ as
a national language. In the novels of R.K. Narayan we find an agreement with
Gandhian thoughts and principles. Throughout his novels one can enjoy the fragrance
of Indian ethics, values, and culture and these ideas related to nation and nationalism
remained deeply-rooted in him throughout his life.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayanswami Iyer, popularly known as R.K. Narayan
(1906-2001), one of the founding pillars of Indian writing in English is an institution
in himself. He was the first Indian novelist to seize and hold the attention of a large
number of readers outside of India. Works by him have been translated into some
fourteen different languages. Like Rabindranath Tagore, R.K.Narayan was introduced
to the Western readers by a famous writer, in his case, Graham Greene, who suggested the title of his first novel, *Swami and Friends* (1935) and facilitated its publication in England. Graham Greene remained forever a close friend and supporter of Narayan. But after the first few novels had appeared, Narayan’s career was self-sustaining.

Narayan was born and brought up in a traditional Tamil-speaking South Indian family in the city of Madras (Chennai). But he spent most of his life in the city of Mysore, where Kannada is the dominant language. He was fluent in both languages, but he preferred to write in English, the language in which he had been educated. Narayan is a true Indian both in spirit and thought. There are lots of writings highlighting Narayan as an outstanding story-teller. A vast number of research papers have already been published on his unique narrative technique and his art of characterization. If Raja Rao is termed as a novelist of “metaphysical ideas” (Das 8), Narayan is often applauded as a painter of vivid Malgudi, a microcosm of Indian social milieu. He has always been claimed as a novelist par excellence in matters of social criticism of India. But little has been written on how Narayan incorporates the profoundest ideas of nation and nationalism in his writings.

As Narayan belonged to “the purest Brahmin stock” (Walsh 1) of South India, he naturally gained a deep root in religion which ultimately helped him to portray India as a nation with great religious and traditional background in his writings, particularly in his novels. His maternal grandmother was instrumental in introducing him during his childhood to classical Indian and Tamil cultures, languages and literature, defining the traditional Brahmin values and ways of life. His traditional family and social
background thus initiated him in early stage of his life in the knowledge of Hindu philosophy, religion and culture. He has translated and published shortened prose versions of the two great Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and a few mythical tales in Gods, Demons and Others.

R.K. Narayan’s career as a novelist and short story writer spans almost eight decades from Swami and Friends (1935) to Grandmother’s Tale (1992) until his death on 13 May 2001 at the ripe age of 95. Of all the Indo-Anglian novelists, Narayan alone has the distinction of being a pure artist, one who writes for art’s sake and not for propagating his views, political, economic, moral or religious. In A Writer’s Nightmare (1988), he speaks out against a politically aware, historically rooted, and culturally pertinent critique of Literature, indicating his preference for an aesthetic, universalist appreciation of literary works. His commitment was to produce in his works the India of cultural and narrative tradition. In each one of his novels, he presents a slice of life as he sees it, impartially and dispassionately. His perfect objectivity is to be contrasted with the partiality of Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. Both Raja Rao and Anand are writers with a purpose; the writers who write because they have some political or social or economic axe to grind, R.K. Narayan is a novelist who has no ulterior didactic purpose or any political ideology to project. He is the rare example of a pure artist, one who writes for the sake of art, and not out of any ulterior motives. But it does not mean that he is a writer without any vision of life. It simply means that there is no intrusive message, philosophy or morality in his novels. They are entirely free from didacticism. His distinctive sense of humour, his trade mark irony, his bemused, knowing, overseeing perspective, his rootedness in religion and
family values and his inescapable capturing of the essence of Indian sensibility all have been looked at from a refreshingly new perspective, hitherto only partly touched or left unexplored and unattempted. Narayan, by and large, is a penetrating analyst of Indian motifs and culture. His Indianness is reflected in various ways in his novels.

Narayan’s works are set in the fictional town of Malgudi, partly based on Mysore, but with its own characteristics. The fictional setting of R. K. Narayan has often been compared to Thomas Hardy’s Wessex or William Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County, but Narayan claimed that he simply invented a town he could mould to the needs of his stories without needing to do research. It is a quintessential small South Indian city, big enough to have a variety of petty industries and a wide variety of characters, but small enough for people to know each other (Brians 61).

Narayan’s stories begin with realistic settings and everyday happenings in the lives of a cross-section of Indian society, with characters of all classes. Gradually fate or chance, oversight or blunder, transforms mundane events to preposterous happenings. Unexpected disasters befall the hero as easily as unforeseen good fortune. The characters accept their fates with an equanimity that suggests the faith that things will somehow turn out happily, whatever their own motivations or actions. Progress, in the form of Western-imported goods and attitudes, combined with bureaucratic institutions, encounters long-held conventions, beliefs, and ways of doing things. The modern world can never win a clear-cut victory because Malgudi accepts only what it wants, according to its own private logic. Malgudi vibrates with a life of its own.
The impact of Vedic thoughts as well as of other Hindu religious scriptures is rampant in R.K. Narayan’s works. While writing Narayan tries to maintain the old traditional values of life prescribed by the ancient Indian culture and embodied in Indian epics ‘Shastras’ ‘Puras’ Myths and Mythologies. He delineates his notions of traditionalism through the middle class life of Malgudi, an imaginary small town in South India, which forms the background to all his novels. In his novels Narayan tries to show that success and happiness in life lie in the acceptance of the Shastras and the Vedic values. The main purpose of human life has been suggested as a journey in pursuit of self-identity or liberation from the miseries of life.

Through his writings Narayan points out that Indians epics, Upanishads and Puranas are the depositors of ancient values of life and moral codes of conduct. The deep knowledge of Vedas was uttered by Indian sages, seers and saints who were divinely inspired and blessed. For leading an organized and ideal life they are commonly accepted even today. These epics and Puranas have been the sources of moral teachings to common man and of inspiration to the creative writers. Narayan, in his novels, expresses that the values of life sermonized in our scriptures are still relevant to human life in the present context. The impact of Vedas becomes more prominent in Narayan’s repeated allusions to Myths, Mythologies, Puranas and epics in his novels. The purpose behind the application of allusions is to show the conflict between good and evil.

In the novel, *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1961), Vasu, the taxidermist represents the symbol of evil. In Chapter 16 of *Bhagavad-Gita* what has been described about ‘Asura’, Vasu is a true manifestation of it. In appearance, he is ugly and ferocious. By
nature he is immoral and devoid of the sense of gratitude and sympathy. He possesses super human strength, and in inflicting pain to others he takes cruel pleasure. The novelist has projected him as a Man-Eater. The novelist says “The man eater is a man, not a tiger, a modern rakshasa” (quoted in Tiwari 31). It expresses the demonic qualities in man which leads to the destruction of the self. Vasu has an unquenchable craving for killing both dangerous and domestic creativity. This is against the Indian philosophy of Dharma.

The holy Bhagavad-Gita says that God incarnates himself from time to time for the redemption of pious souls, for diffusing the light of religion for the suppression of evil through the destruction of evildoers and for infusing love and piety among the people through manifestation of his divine sports on the earth:

\[
yadaa yadaa hi dharmasya
glaanir bhavati bhaarata
abhyuktaanam adarmasya
tadaatmaanaa saajaamy aham (Chapter 4, Text 7)
\]

“Whenever and wherever there is decline in religious practice, O descendant of Bharata, and a predominant rise of religion—at that time I descend Myself” (quoted in Prabhupada 274).

Vasu makes a plan to kill Kumar, the temple elephant. But, strangely enough, he is found dead the next morning from concussion in a mysterious way. Rangi, the mistress of Vasu solves the mystery of his death. Actually, while trying to kill a mosquito settled on his forehead, Vasu slapped it with all his might and killed himself. Vasu’s fist was meant to batter thick panels of iron rod. In spite of any
provocation, he never hit anyone because he had to conserve all that might for his own destruction. Vasu is the modern counter part of demon Bhasmasura. According to Hindu mythology, Bhamasura was an asura, who was driven by ambition to be the most powerful asura ever. So he decided to win the favour of Lord Shiva and started praying for a long time. Lord Shiva was greatly pleased with him and asked him what he wished for. Bhasmasura pleaded Shiva to give him the power to reduce anybody to ashes by touching his or her head with his right hand. Lord Shiva granted him this boon. After getting the power Bhasmasura wanted to test it on Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva winced when he came to learn it. He immediately started running for his life and prayed to Lord Vishnu for help. Vishnu took the form of Mohini, the most beautiful woman in the world. As Bhasmasura reached there his eyes fell on Mohini. He instantly fell in love with her and asked her to marry him. Mohini told Bhasmasura that she was very fond of dancing, and would marry him if he could match her moves identically. Bhasmasura agreed to the match and hence they started dancing. Mohini soon had a move where she kept her hand on her head. Without thinking Bhasmasura did the same, and hence he immediately burnt up and turned into ashes, due to the power he had recently gained. Both Vasu and Bhasmasura are killed at last by the strange powers of their own hands, for their immoral, dissolute and anti-traditional conduct and character. R.K. Narayan tries to show here that even in the modern age there are Bhasmasuras like Vasu heading towards self destruction for their evil deeds. In Narayan’s novels there are plenty of examples to exhibit the religiosity of characters.
In the novel, *The Guide* (1958), the protagonist Raju tries several possible explanations for the movement of events in his life. What he says with a painful self-awareness shows his faith in pre-ordained fate: "It is written on the brow of same that they shall not be left alone. I am one such, I think" (Narayan, *The Guide* 55). Rosie in the same novel has firm belief in Karmic laws according to which everyone has to bear the consequence of his deeds. She thinks that she has led a religious life and she has not consciously committed any sin. So she will not be punished in the other world. This should be her strong faith in the theory of 'karma'. When Raju is arrested on charge of forgery, Rosie[Nalini] tells him "I felt all along, you were not doing right things. This is karma what can we do?" (Narayan, *The Guide* 216) The 'karmas' of human beings influence, control and condition their lives. Every action good or bad has its reaction.

Narayan who believes in ancient religion and philosophy has an altogether different view of life and death. He says,

Perhaps death may not be the end of everything as it seems personality may have other structures and other planes of existence, and the decay of the physical body through disease and senility may mean nothing more than change of vehicle (Narayan, *My Days* 151).

Apparently, it shows his faith in the immortality of the soul as well as in life after death. This concept is found in Chapter 2, Text 22 of the *Bhagavad-Gita* where Lord Krishna says:

\[
\text{vaasaamsi jiirmaani yathaa vihaaya} \\
\text{navaani grihnaati naro aparanaani}
\]
“As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones” (quoted in Prabhupada 127-128).

The Novel *The English Teacher* (1945) clearly demonstrates Narayan’s faith in life after death. In this novel the protagonist Krishna, through occultism, succeeds in establishing spiritual contact with the spirit of his dead wife Susila. Although she is not present physically, Krishna feels her presence and talks to her. He comes to know from her the nature and meaning of life and death. In answer to one of his questions she says,

> Our life is one of thought and experience. Thought is something which has solidity and power, and as in all existence ours is also a life of aspiration, striving and joy. A considerable portion of our state is taken up in meditation, and our greatest ecstasy is in feeling the divine light flooding us (Narayan, *The English Teacher* 130).

Her spirit gives a detailed description of the spiritual world and shows how it differs from the material world. Susilas’ spirit tells Krishna, “When I think of you or you of me I am at your side” (Narayan, *The English Teacher* 132). Krishna is fully convinced of the existence of life after death in some form or the other.

Saving this, in Narayan's other novels also we find these sort of philosophical musings and a fear for the other world. “Savitri’s fear of torture in the Other World in the novel, *The Dark Room* and other philosophical musings of other characters on life
in Narayan's novels confirm their beliefs in life after death” (Tiwari 37). The comments made by Srinivas on the de-arrangements of Ravi's mind in *Mr. Sampath* (1949) also show his faith in a series of births. Another beautiful illustration is from the novel *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983). In this novel when the tiger (Raja) describes the sufferings of his imprisoned life in the cage of a circus, the Master comments:

> You probably in a previous life enjoyed putting your fellow-beings behind bars. One has to face the reaction of every act, if not in the same life, at least in another life or a series of lives. There can be no escape from it (Narayan, *A Tiger For Malgudi* 48).

The dialogue shows the masters' reliance not only in present and previous lives but also in the 'karma' which affects the shapes of life in general. Thus the concept of Vedas are revealed in its various forms encompasses almost all of the novels written by R.K. Narayan.

Perhaps the most startling discovery in reading a Narayan novel is that language poses a synthesis of east and west. Narayan's language as reflected in his English belongs to the everyday world of ordinary people. It is the “language” in which the average Malgudian’s dream, love and engage in their small wars, laugh and lament. He hardly needs a glossary to give an explanation of the words and phrases that he has used in his novels. Where he writes specifically of Indian customs or objects as he often does, no western, or for that matter, no non-South Indian reader will ever find it difficult to understand. No use is made of variations in accent or wrong usage of the many Indianisms that Narayan, as much as anyone else, could have heard on all sides in every part of the country. The significant fact is that while all his characters speak
English, Narayan manages to express through this rather colourless medium of his, not only the general Indian sensibility but a whole range of characters, personality and temperament within it. He himself defends the status of the English language in India. In “To A Hindi Enthusiast”, Narayan writes:

For me, at any rate, English is an absolutely swadeshi language.

English, of course, in a remote horoscopic sense, is a native of England, but it enjoys, by virtue of its uncanny adaptability, citizenship in every country in the world. It has sojourned in India longer than you or I and is entitled to be treated with respect. It is my hope that English will soon be classified as a non-regional language (quoted in Goswami 67).

Narayan obviously tried to raise a major national issue when he advocated for Hindi as “our national language and given to us by Mahatma Gandhī himself” (Narayan, A Tiger For Malgudi 66). Narayan used many commonly used Hindi and Indian words in his novels. This made Hindi and Indian words known to those who did not know Hindi and other Indian languages, but were reading Narayan’s works regularly. His fondness for India and Indian values led him to deliberately and freely use the words of Indian origin, most of them being Hindi words.

The Indianness in R.K. Narayan’s language is a matter of scholarly study today. In her research paper “Indianness in R. K. Narayan’s novel—The Man-Eater of Malgudi”, Susan Nirmala made a very interesting survey of R. K. Narayan’s wide-ranging use of words of Indian origin. Some of the words like Pulav, Mela, Pandal,
Lungi, etc. were used more than 100 times by him, and that also in a single novel, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. She writes:

R.K. Narayan’s ‘Indianism’ includes words some of which have already become part of the vocabulary of the English language like *saree*, or *sari* and some other words which are on their way to become a part of the English language like *Deepavali, ahimsa*, etc (Nirmala 18).

Susan Nirmala lists the following words. Page numbers refer to page numbers in the cited novel, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*.

- Deepavali (1)
- Sari (1)
- Paisa (2)
- Taluk (3)
- Pyol (8)
- Dhoti (4)
- Ramayana (8)
- Puja (10)
- Satyanarayana Puja (11)
- Phaelwan (16)
- Seer (16)
- Appa (18)
- Jutka (26)
- Bhagavad-Gita (33)
Moreover, In *A Tiger for Malgudi*, it is for the first time that Narayan touches upon a national theme and upholds the national policy on language - the three language formula consisting of the regional language, the national language and English:
When the monsoon set in, in October-November, the circus moved out of Malgudi to other centres in a long caravan, parading the animals, which made the circus known all along the way; the central office at Malgudi worked all through the year. At every show, captain made a speech, sometimes autobiographical and sometimes to boost a special act, such as mine. He delivered his message in at least three languages as he explained: "... in Hindi since it is our national language and given to us by Mahatma Gandhi himself; also in English because as our beloved respected leader Nehru put it, it opens a window on the world. In Tamil, because, it is, ah, our Mother Tongue, in which our greatest poets like Kamban, Valluvar composed, also the sublime inspiring patriotic songs of Bharathi, who can ever forget things?" (Narayan, A Tiger For Malgudi 66).

In his first three novels, viz., Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937) and The Dark Room (1938) Narayan highlights the problems with certain socially accepted practices. The first novel focuses on the plight of students, punishments of caning in the classroom, and the associated shame. The concept of horoscope-matching in Hindu marriages and the emotional toll it levies on the bride and groom is covered in the second novel. In the third novel, Narayan addresses the concept of a wife putting up with her husband’s antics and attitudes. An astonishing satire on imagining nations, maps, and Europe figure in R. K. Narayan’s Swami and
Friends where Swaminathan is trying to draw a map of Europe. Several issues and questions crop up in the boy’s mind:

It puzzled him how people managed to live in such a crooked country as Europe... how did those map-makers find out what the shape of a country was? How did they find out that Europe was like a camel’s head? Probably they stood on high towers and copied what they saw below (Narayan, Swami and Friends 63)

R.K. Narayan introduced the conflict between the British rulers and the ruled in colonial India very early in the novel, Swami and Friends. In his characteristic manner of comedy, he viewed this conflict in terms of cultural collision between Christianity and traditional Hinduism. Narayan concentrated on the deformity of characters of both British and Indians that resulted from this collision. Another event which declared the issue of nation and nationalism in Narayan’s novels is when in a chapter titled “Broken Panes” in Swami and Friends, Narayan announced very solemnly:

On the 15th of August 1930, about two thousand citizens of Malgudi assembled on the right bank of Sarayu to protest against the arrest of Gauri Sankar, a prominent political worker of Bombay. An earnest-looking man clad in khaddar stood on a wooden platform and addressed the gathering...”We are slaves today,” he shrieked, “worse slaves than we have ever been before. Let us remember our heritage. Have we forgotten the glorious periods of Ramayana and Mahabharata? This is the country that has given the world a
Kalidasa, a Buddha, a Sankara... But now what are we?.. We are slaves of slaves, ... Just think for a while. We are three hundred and thirty six millions, and our land is as big as Europe minus Russia. England is no bigger than our Madras Presidency and is inhabited by a handful of white rogues and is thousands of miles away. Yet we bow in homage before the Englishman!"... "Gandhi ki Jai," shouted Swaminathan involuntarily, deeply stirred by the speaker’s eloquence at this point (Narayan, Swami and Friends 109-110).

Fantasy is a common Indian quality, and so despite Narayan’s realism, fantasy is also an element in his novels. Fantasy may be defined as the absurd, the eccentric, the improbable, as something which is hardly possible in real life. It is as if the novelist gives free reign to his imagination, throws the laws of logic and natural causation to the winds, and the result is fantastic and absurd. Many popular superstitions, rituals and beliefs are frequently exploited in his novels. ‘Sadhus’, ‘Sanayasis’ and ‘Swamis’ are ever recurring characters. In The Guide there is fasting to bring down the rain, and Raju is easily taken to be a ‘Mahatma’ by the credulous villagers. One of the villagers of Mangala where Raju took shelter after long imprisonment 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 the same. “Velan said, ‘Your penance is similar to Mahatma Gandhi’s. He has left us a disciple in you to save us’.” ([Narayan, *The Guide* 107]) There is also the exploitation of such Indian motifs as cobras and dancing girls as ‘devadasis’ for example, in *The Guide*. In this novel Rosie reads *Natya Shastra* of Bharat Muni which is also significant. Moreover, frequent use is made of Indian myths and legends as in *Gods, Demons and Other Stories*. An Indian myth forms the background to *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. In *The English Teacher*, the protagonist Krishna returns to the Gurukul System of education. Here the novelist satirizes the present education system. In 1964, Narayan published his first mythological work, *Gods, Demons and Others*, a collection of rewritten and translated short stories from Hindu epics. All these signify the revival of ancient India wherein lies the theoretical framework of orientalism that nationalist discourse sought its justification.

In the 8th chapter of *The English Teacher* (1945), there is a dialogue which is undoubtedly the epitome of Narayan’s views on education:

> This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage . . . What about our own roots? . . . I am up against the system, the whole method and approach of a system of education which makes us morons, cultural morons, but efficient clerks for all your business and administration offices (Narayan, *The English Teacher* 178-179).
It is significant that his novels portray many school children or college going boys or those who have just left college to enter professional life. Invariably, the profession happens to be journalism. Chandran is the first character of Narayan who had given up all other professions in favour of a newspaper agency in Malgudi. Srinivas of the novel *Mr. Sampath* (1949) was himself an editor of the Banner, a protest magazine. Narayan’s concern with the quality of life and education in India is reflected in his novel *The English Teacher*. His later novels also have many student characters. Sriram of *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) and Mali of *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) are among many other examples found in his novels.

A general perception on Narayan was that he did not involve himself or his writings with the politics or problems of India, as mentioned by V. S. Naipaul in one of his columns. However, ironical presentation of the freedom movement in India is beautifully illustrated in *Swami and Friends*. In this novel Swami, the protagonist, burnt his ‘cap’ in excitement, while participating in *swadeshi* Movement. In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, Mr. Sen, the journalist always criticized Nehru and his works and principles. Paul Brians, in his book *Modern South Asian Literature in English*, says that the fact that Narayan completely ignored British rule and focused on the private lives of his characters is a political statement on its own, tacitly declaring his independence from the influence of colonialism (Brians 60).

In *The Painter of Signs*, the attitude of the protagonist, Raman, is something similar to that of Anderson’s idea of a Nation. Raman, a college graduate, brings a sense of professionalism to his sign-painting, taking pride in his calligraphy and trying to create exactly the right sign, artistically, for each client. Living with his aged
aunt, a devout, traditional woman whose days are spent running the house and tending to her nephew's needs and whose evenings are spent at the temple listening to the old stories and praying, Raman prefers a rational approach to life, avoiding the explanations of life's mysteries which religion provides. As he begins to write his aunt's biography, which she is dictating, with all its portents and interventions by deities, Raman asks, "How could the Age of Reason be established if people were like this?" (Narayan, *The Painter of Signs* 20). For his own life, he believes that "ultimately he would evolve a scheme for doing without money," (Narayan, *The Painter of Signs* 13) and that he can "get away from sex thoughts," which he believes are "too much everywhere—literature, magazine, drama, or cinema deal with nothing but sex all the time" (Narayan, *The Painter of Signs* 14). His bias towards 'Reason' is a colonial influence but again his criticism of money and sex is a criticism of western nationalism.

In the study of nation and nationalism in Indian writing the theme of Gandhism naturally comes forward. The glimpses of the idea of nation and nationalism are depicted in Narayan's novel based on Gandhian thoughts. The values he held high in his characters are Gandhian. Narayan highlighted not only the traditional ideal of renunciation but also his values included moral uprightness, truthfulness and other issues that cover man's life in all areas, chiefly social, educational, political and economic. In *Swami and Friends* R.K. Narayan tries to tell us the impact of Gandhian thoughts on the minds of Swami and his friend, Mani:

With the lecturer they wept over the plight of the Indian peasant;
resolved to boycott English goods, especially Lancashire and
Manchester cloth, ... And Swaminathan was going to meet it out by wearing only khaddar, the rough homespun (Narayan, *Swami and Friends* 111).

This is how Narayan tried to tell how Swami, the hero of the novel, got initiated into the Gandhian way of national protest. The evening’s programme, as narrated in the novel, closed with the bonfire of pieces of foreign cloth. Gandhi’s ideas appealed to Swami in a personal way because of his demoralizing experience in the scripture class. Next Morning Swami involved in boycotting the class because as he was informed, “one of the greatest sons of the Motherland has been sent to gaol” (Narayan, *Swami and Friends* 113). Despite the Headmaster’s warnings, thundering shouts of “Bharat Mata ki Jai”, “Gandhi ki Jai” and “Gauri Shankar ki Jai” resounded through Malgudi streets (Narayan, *Swami and Friends* 114). Narayan expanded this political scenario further true to the spirit of Gandhi. Narayan’s simple language created a picture that could be corroborated by historic facts of how people’s apathy turned into their involvement with the national cause.

Gandhism is the very essence of the novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* but without didacticism. The novel is a sort of Gandhian bildungsroman that charts its protagonist’s growth from selfish privilege to local, committed activism. Sriram was initially a lazy young man who seeks only a secure middle-class lifestyle. Falling in love with the devout Gandhian Bharati, he serves in the Quit India movement, although he still has no consistent political ideals (at one point he becomes an anti-British terrorist). Gandhian phase of the anti-colonial movement for India’s freedom
finds frequent expression in this novel along with a large number of literary representations of the period.

The very title of the novel indicates 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 political life of India during the years that immediately preceded the Independence of the country in 1947. An unusual feature of this novel is the participation of Gandhi as a character. His revolutionary ideas and practices are contrasted with the views of traditionalists such as the town's notables and Sriram's grandmother. The political struggle serves as a background to Sriram and Bharati's unconventional romance which is concluded outside either's family circle. In this novel Narayan's depiction of Gandhism is 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 Sriram is only 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 Chandra Bose and Sriram's acceptance of these principles the novelist somehow raises the two major issues at the time of Indian Freedom Movement—Gandhism and radicalism.

However, Waiting for the Mahatma reflects certain ambivalence towards the freedom movement. There were many who were impressed by the more benign aspects of the British presence in India and Narayan's own writing came to depend heavily on patronage by British publishers and readers. He was apparently writing for
Swami Vivekananda, the great Indian philosopher once remarked that without emancipation of women in India we could not imagine India as a Nation. So, the idea of Nation always demands emancipation of women. In R.K. Narayan's novel, *Waiting for the Mahatma* we find this. Here the emancipation of women is mentioned in the context of Gandhian programme of the same. 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 male-dominated 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. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi: "Woman who knows and fulfils her duty realizes her dignified status. She is the queen, not the slave, of the household, over which she presides"
(quoted in Mishra and Narayanasamy 223). There is yet another point by Paul Brians in this regard. In his book *Modern South Asian Literature in English*, he says:

No one has ever called Narayan a feminist, and in fact he has been criticized for relegating women to marginal, often stereotyped, roles; yet in this he was a product of his times. But like Tagore, he was also clearly fascinated by creative, individualistic, rebellious women who rejected the restrictions of traditional social roles (Brians 61).

*The Vendor of Sweets* is the story of Jagan, a sixty years old prosperous widower and a vendor of sweets. He is religious minded and has been considerably influenced by *The Bhagavad Gita*. He is religious minded 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. The novelist writes:

He wore a loose jibba over his dhoti, both made of material spun with his own hand; 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. Because being a follower of Gandhi, he explained, “I do not like to think that a living creature should have its throat cut for the comfort of my feet” (Narayan, *The
Vendor of Sweets 9). His spectacles, his shawl—all are of very ordinary qualities. To conceal his misery he pretends to be a Gandhian. To minimise his daily expenditure he, even, gives up rice. He cooks a little stone-ground wheat and takes it with honey and cheap vegetables. This type of fake Gandhiman is available in India today. They, in reality, hide their immoral life style under the disguise of Gandhism. Moreover, the conflict between the old and young generation, their ideals and the generation gap makes The Vendor of Sweets a memorable story. The modes of constructing, imagining and representing the nation are also present here.

In The Vendor of Sweets, Narayan tried to portray the real picture of the then India through the person talking to Jagan:

“But this is a poor country, sir. Per capita income is three annas.”

He still stuck to the figure that he had got out of a book called Poverty and un-British rule in India, in his college days. But this figure restrained him from demanding of every parent in the town that he spent eight annas a day at his shop. “Poor country! Most people cannot afford even rice for two meals a day (Narayan, The Vendor of Sweets 26).

These sentences portrayed the high rate of inflation during post-Independence years. In another event, Narayan makes his hero Jagan feel proud and heroic of going to prison during struggle for Independence: “I had to leave the college, when Gandhi ordered us to non-cooperate. I spent the best of my student years in prison” (Narayan, The Vendor of Sweets 27).
Patriotic feelings are often conveyed through Jagan. He often goes back to the past in his memories, when he was an activist in the freedom struggle keeping Gandhi as a role model:

When he remembered the word “service,” any activity became touched with significance... The first time he heard the word was in 1937 when Mahatma Gandhi had visited Malgudi and addressed a vast gathering on the sands of the river. He spoke of “service,” explaining how every human action acquired a meaning when it was performed as a service (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 41).

Jagan was so patriotic that he didn’t like the idea of going abroad and study and anything said in favour of America upset him. This is reflected in the sentence below: “Jagan was furious at this notion; it was outrageous and hurt his national pride ... Did Valmiki go to America or Germany in order to learn to write his *Ramayana*? (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 45).

An important feature of R.K. Narayan’s idea of nation can be interpreted in terms of his self-reflexive style in his novels. The complex narrative mode of self-reflexivity in his novels serves the postcolonial agenda of destabilizing the power of Eurocentric literary discourse, the discourse that marginalized literary traditions of subject peoples. Derived from ancient literary traditions, self-reflexive narrative asserts the cultural identity of colonized societies. It plays an important role in resisting Eurocentric literature and in legitimizing the experiences of a marginalized culture—Indian culture. The writers of post-independence India are eager to subvert the hegemony of the literary discourse of their former colonizers and to revitalize their
obscured oral and literary traditions, reflecting through narrative diversity, the
diversity of postcolonial experience of the subcontinent. To represent such diverse
experiences, postcolonial writers have recently developed a form of narrativization,
known as self-reflexive narrative, from the old tradition of storytelling.

According to Patricia Waugh, self-reflexive narrative aspires to “explore the
possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text” (Waugh 2). In
other words, it explores “the relationship between the world of the fiction and the
world outside the fiction” (Waugh 3). Thus, rather than reflecting reality, the self-
reflexive novel constructs it. It transforms realism by turning the traditional fictional
quest into the quest of fictionality (Waugh 49). Fictionality becomes the main focus of
the novel, rather than fiction itself. Contemporary self-reflexive narrative celebrates
the concept of frame as a device, as a Chinese-box like structure (Waugh 30). This
type of structure contains framed stories, the framing story and framed stories. The
frame story contains, within its fold, many other framed stories. By returning to the
old art of storytelling, the self-reflexive novel also differentiates itself from the realist
fiction of the modern period. The modernist novel portrays “man’s relations with his
environment,” focussing on the individual (Lukacs 28). But contemporary self-
reflexive narrative shifts its concern from the individual back to society, to social,
cultural, and political aspects of life.

In his novels, Narayan mingles two different literary traditions, the English novel
form and traditional Indian patterns of storytelling, both classical and oral. The fusion
of these two distinct forms, written in his characteristic ironic style, not only made
Narayan popular, but it also made the Indian literary tradition more accessible to a
Western readership. The Guide is a good example of this amalgamation, the amalgamation that has given rise to a third, hybrid form which is called the self-reflexive narrative form. There are two stories in the novel, a framing story and a framed story. The framing story narrates Raju, the protagonist's present life; the framed story, his past. To tell this two different, yet related stories, Narayan employs two different narrational levels—third person narration and first person narration. The Guide is modelled on various ancient patterns of story-telling and on mythic traditions. This novel employs a self-reflexive narrative mode as a counter-discursive strategy that resists totalizing colonialist literature and reconnects with their obscured literary past.

Postcolonial writers are increasingly using this narrative form as a counter-discursive strategy. Finding Eurocentric narrative forms unitary and incapable of articulating postcolonial cultural diversity, postcolonial writers turn back to their pre-colonial narrative practices. Derived from ancient literary traditions, self-reflexive modes of storytelling best represent the cultural hybridity out of which contemporary narratives from postcolonies must emerge (Zambare 13-14)

Thus, it is seen that in a modern multicultural and multidimensional world, the problems of cultural identity and nationhood have manifested themselves in a variety of ways and have led writers to explore both their colonial past and hybridized present. Narayan’s nationalistic and Gandhian thoughts occupied an important place in his writings, specially in the novels written by him. They also played a role in
creating political awareness to some extent. The novels of Narayan brought the concerns of national feeling among the English-reading individuals and groups including those up in administrative hierarchy serving the British Empire. The novels were written on the Indian issues in English language, which was the language of the educated and high ranking officials in India.
Works Cited


