CHAPTER : IV

SOCIAL REALISM IN THE WORKS OF R K NARAYAN

Narayan’s critics have gone all out study and have very clearly introduced Social Realism in R K Narayan’s novels and says ‘Social realism – the term itself is self-explanatory. Broadly, the realistic depiction of the society and delineation of life in its true sense is Social Realism. According to The Oxford Companion to English Literature:

“Social Realism is a distinct term used loosely to describe a realistic, objective yet socially aware and detailed method of artistic presentation.”

(Drabble, 917)

In this particular element of ‘social awareness’ lies the distinctive reactionary nature of the concept that distinguishes itself from other shades of realism. According to Engels realism implies

“truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances”

(Engel, p.60)

A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms traces realism in literary history, to be usually associated with the effort of the novel in the nineteenth century, particularly in France, to establish itself as a major literary genre.

“The realism of Balzac and the Goncourt brothers was essentially an assertion that, far from being escapist and unreal, the novel was uniquely capable of revealing the truth of contemporary life in society.”

(Fowler, 115)
To Lewes art originates from reality and

“Art is a Representation of Reality …. Art always aims at the representation of Reality, i.e. of truth, and no departure from truth is permissible …. Realism is thus the basis of all Art, its antithesis is not Idealism, but Falsism.”

(Lewes, 136)

To Leon Trotsky it is a complete victory of the new principle of socialism – it is not in a successful solution of the elementary problems of food, clothing, shelter or literacy. To him the development of art is the highest test of the vitality and significance of each epoch. Revolution cannot live together with age-old mysticism or romanticism. A new kind of realism, in the sense of philosophy of life, and not a realism in the sense of the traditional arsenal of literary schools is the need of the day.

“What are we to understand under the term realism? At various periods, and by various methods, realism gave expression to the feelings and needs of different social groups. Each of these realistic schools is subject to a separate and social literary definition, and a separate formal and literary estimation. What have they in common? A definite and important feeling for the world. It consists in a feeling for life as it is, in an artistic acceptance of reality, and not in a shrinking from it, in an active interest in the concrete stability and mobility of life. It is striving either to picture life as it is or to idealize it. But it is always a preoccupation with our life of three dimensions as a sufficient and invaluable theme for art. In this large
philosophic sense, and not in the narrow sense of a literary school, one may say with certainty that the new art will be realistic."

(Trotsky, 235)

Similarly, Social Realism too insists on more or less, say an exact documentation of the fact of life with sociological insight. Thereby, Social Realism basically opposed to the ruling class and its mores, predominantly selects as its subject matter the negative aspects of life under capitalism such as labour-conflicts, poverty, the greediness of capitalists, the nobility of long-suffering workers etc. Social Realism attempts to use art to protest and dramatize injustice to the working class and bring out the capitalist exploitation.

“In narrative content this was an art boldly and often fiercely anti-establishment….”

(Shapiro, 3)

The intimate connection between literature and life cannot be overlooked. The raw material provided by life gets an artistic form with the help of literature. Man can never live in a void. Invariably, he is bound with his time and society and therefore, the relation between literature and life is all pervasive. Critics have inferred that literature is essentially social, has social causes, contents and effects. The whole range of social forces become operative in literature. It is further seen that literature not only reproduces life but also influences it. The pattern of literary development is interwoven with the fabric of society. In order to present the real picture of society an artist must have a sense of social awareness.
Caudwell very nicely emphasizes this social aspect of literary creation. Language is a social product, the instrument whereby men communicate and persuade one another, thus literature cannot be separated from society.

“But the art work lives in a world of society. Art works are always composed of objects that have a social reference. Not mere noises but words from a vocabulary, not chance sounds but notes from a socially-recognized scale, not mere blobs but forms with a meaning, are what constitute the material of art. All these things have emotional associations which are social.”

(Caudwell, 108)

The immortal work of art transcends the limitations of time and space and its conceptions are mainly temporal and spatial.

“It is the work of an author fixed in time and space, answering to a community of which, he is an important and articulate part.”

(Scott, 123)

Sociological approach is well professed by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren and they say:

“Literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation. Such traditional literary devices as symbolism and metre are social in their nature … Literature ‘represents’ ‘life’; and ‘life’ is, in large measure, a social reality … The poet himself is a member of society, possessed of a social status…….”

(Wellek & Warren, 9)
Social Realism is not an art of the studio. A social realist carefully translates life into a piece of literary art. He may not react to the social, political, economic or religious conditions of his time but his work is an expression to his reaction. “He selects some significant and dramatic moments in the lives of ordinary people. These moments focus on the indignity or pathos of their situation – the hard work they perform, the inadequate rewards they receive for it, or the miserable condition they work under. There is implicit or explicit criticism made of the contemporary social system.

Social Realism, at its best, is not merely imitative of people or objects in the real world. Its point of view allows it to transform objective reality into symbols of transient meaning.

Social realists further believe that the works of art stemming from the attitude characterized as ‘art for art’s sake’ are the logical out-come of the conditions of life and art in modern industrial society. They take these artists away from reality which is the essence of their art, and are, therefore, to be forcefully shunned off. In addition, the conditions themselves have to be transformed. Socialism transforms art as well as life of the artist. A social realist seeks common cause with the workers. His role is to portray and inspire their actions. He must direct his work towards the mass of people. Self-expression and anarchistic individuality is the result of the isolation and alienation of the artist in capitalist society. Art has become a commodity like any other commodity in the market, and the artist has sold himself as well as his art. Instead of expressing his sense of loneliness and neglect, the artist must depict the values held by the people in their everyday lives. A social realist artist is not to practice the self indulgent, self expression encouraged by
a decadent capitalism for its own jaded amusement; instead, he is to use his freedom to interpret the aspirations of a free people. The new culture of the people dominates, with the artist their visual voice, their prophet. The literary artist must become the ‘conscious’ point of the contemporary drama and project it to the people so that they understand the potentialities of the age better. A new higher prophetic function is ascribed to realism. The critique of realism, therefore, includes not only a social historical reality, but a steady approach to a mystical reality. In this process he has to face the problem of commitment. He is not expected to propagate his personal views under the garb of reality but no great artist can afford to be uncommitted. Balzac and Tolstoy successfully deals with this apparent duality. Balzac has a soft corner for aristocracy and yet he lashes out at them mercilessly. Tolstoy, though a count, openly expresses his sympathy for the poor people. Both see in the decadence of an old social order, the seeds of resurgence of the dignity of man, the seeds of a progressive evolution of man. Humanism and realism, thus, become inseparable from each other in the socialist ideology and aesthetics.

Such a mature piece of art naturally has a deep influence on its readers. It has been compared by James Berkley to an intelligent person’s

“listening to a symphony of Beethoven, or sitting quietly in a great cathedral, or conversing earnestly with a friend on an issue of real interest to them both…….”

(Berkley, 359)

A realistic novel gives such a deep pleasure because it results in enhanced understanding of life and its problems. It provides a kind of inner
illumination. Sometimes there is a total emotional identification of the reader with a character in the novel and he derives full pleasure from it. A realistic novel thus satisfies his soul.

“A discerning reader reads a romantic novel just as a child plays with a bauble, but turns to the study of a realistic novel for the satisfaction of his soul.”

(Bhatnagar, 4)

A modern reader’s liking and taste for it has helped in securing a place of importance for the realistic novel.

The realistic approach of R K Narayan and the ease with which his characters are plotted are immediately recognizable as all his characters are part and parcel of our society. His special contribution lies in the portrayal of social life in India. His picturisation of the middle class is an authentic expression of his deep insight into the social psyche. His concentration on Malgudi, his own creation, does not prove to be a limiting factor for him, but gives a rare authenticity and depth to his work due to his comprehensive vision.

Narayan possessed a wonderful ability to convey a feel of the people and the social context he wrote about. As a story teller, he was a natural, picking at the bedrock of everyday existence to uncover the barest truths and tease out the bold facts of life. He placed high value on spontaneity and ‘non-deliberateness’ in fiction.

R K Narayan, a novelist of international fame and repute, has to his credit more than fifty years of fiction writing. The most important fact about
his writing is that he is Indian to the core i.e. both in thought and spirit though he preferred writing in English over his own mother tongue. He is easy to understand, immensely absorbed in religion and family, unaffected and indifferent to the literary fashion of the west.

“Malgudi, the imaginary locale of his novels, is the clorama for changing Indian society. His fiction mirrors the microcosmic Indian caught in the crucible of tradition and change.”

(Singh, 81)

His realism was famed for his lightness of touch and a style that is lean, lucid, undecorated but wonderfully expressive and full of understated surprises.

Narayan’s social consciousness and thereby realism is conspicuous in his novels but his awareness is hidden below the blanket of irony. He maintains the well laid out norms of fiction writing and is free from all sorts of partiality. K R S Iyengar explains how his artistic excellence is maintained under a limitation:

“He is one of the few writers in India who take their craft seriously, constantly striving to improve the instrument, pursuing with a sense of dedication what may often seem to be the mirage of technical perfection. There is a norm of excellence below which Narayan cannot possibly lower himself.”

(Iyengar, 359)

Narayan’s fictional world is multi-dimensional and rich in color and tone but the basic under current of social awareness is always perceptible. As
class struggle is not the only and ultimate reality, Narayan’s social novels transcend this ideological boundary and present the real picture of society encompassing the broader humanity. Through his characters he vividly tries to enliven the contemporary Indian life. R K Narayan is a gifted artist who is extremely sensible to his surroundings, different kinds of people living in the society, their likes and dislikes, aims and objectives, their ways of thinking and living, their beliefs and the values they set before them. Narayan very sincerely portrays man in relation to society in his novels. Thus Narayan also passes the supreme test of an artist through his sincerity with which he portrays his characters.

In an interview given to Shri Balswaroop Rathi on the occasion of the Delhi Writers’ Conference, Narayan said that he likes to walk four or five miles everyday as a pedestrian could see his life at closer quarters.

Narayan’s realism is not just the surface realism. He essentially grasped the psychological essence which give his characters their reality. He delved deep into the minds of the people. He transcended the concept of realism on the critical and the socialistic planes and had evolved his own Malgudi Realism. In fact, his creation, Malgudi represents India. His greatness is his objectivity and his eagle’s eye observation with which he presents people in his writings. Narayan’s Malgudians are grateful to life and death, despite the incredible complications affecting even the most elementary aspects of their existence. At his best, he reveals in the heart and mind the already familiar as if we were seeing it for the first time. This is achieved mainly in comic terms but also with an understanding of the serious issues of
life. Narayan is a man who immortalized ‘utopian kasba’ called Malgudi which represents common Indian village and its surroundings. In fact, he tames greatness for Malgudi and hence both Narayan and Malgudi have become synonymous and inseparable. One can traverse through the lives of the real heroes of Narayan’s novels. His subject matter being man-in-society, he naturally deals with dispositions and conventions of his subject. Some critics feel that since the novelist’s subject is man in society, his subject matter must also be in the texture of manners and conventions by which social man defines his own identity.

“Narayan presents everything from the viewpoint of an individual and society.”

(Murti, 125)

His characters are deeply rooted in their social reality and they strive for some ambition grappling with their fate. With their own hopes they struggle hard to work out their destiny, sometimes in the process, even going out of the norms of the society. In this conflict of society and individual, always at the end the society or community triumphs and makes the individual aware that he is a part and parcel of a delicately and intricately woven social fabric and that he or she cannot exist in isolation.

A society demands a certain code of conduct from man as a social being. He is an integral part of the intricately woven fabric of life. And as such he has to adhere to the rules and regulations imposed by it. Man is not a loner by instinct and as such has to find his identity in society, as part of the whole.
“Man as a concrete individual can be identified only by the sort of role that he plays in the social productivity.”

(Goyal, 20)

Literature, in its dealings with society, may treat modern problems realistically or symbolically, as the ancient writings have done, revealing the good and evil inherent in human nature. These very forces which determine behaviour create in the aggregate the social conditions which become the writer’s subject.

Narayan’s social realism is born out of his innate understanding of human society. While writing, Narayan retains the characteristic balance because at that particular moment and situation in his fictional world, fantasy becomes a part of the reality. A character, in fact, is a synthesis of varied tendencies and hence there is no incongruity in the simultaneous existence of diverse or even opposing trends. The most interesting fact is Narayan, especially, carefully avoids all reference to caste, though most of his central characters are Brahmins.

An extensive and in-depth study of Narayan’s novels show as to how successfully he could project the true image of our country through his characters and situations in different walks of life viz., a child and his innocence, the youthful world, the complicated social world, the tricky commercial world and the ruthless political world and for the purpose of study we take these one by one.

A Child and his innocence: Narayan’s journey as a writer starts with his novel *Swami and Friends* (1935) which is a realistic portrayal of the
children’s world. It seems that Narayan is a psychologist who knows every nook and corner of a child’s mind. The world of children has been presented by Narayan with minute details. Most of the characters in the novel belong to the middle class. Only Rajam, the Police Superintendent’s son belongs to the higher class.

“He was the only boy in the class who wore socks and shoes, fur cap and tie, and a wonderful coat and knickers. He came to the school in a car.”

(Swami and Friends, 14)

Mani seems to belong to lower middle class as there is a reference of his low-roofed, dingy house in the novel. These children are presented in their own capacity as human beings and not as lifeless representatives of their class. Their joys and sorrows are real, their friendship and quarrels are genuine. Narayan presents them with live blood and flesh without socialistic slant. Nowhere in the novel do we find Rajam’s parents prohibiting him to mix with other children belonging to the middle class. Mani, Swami and Rajam are very good friends. Swami is the central figure, attention is focused on him throughout, and is shown constantly with his friends whose company he enjoys, and from whom he cannot stay away for any length of time. Even when he is at home his mind is occupied with the thoughts of his friends. His happiness results from the fact that he has good friends. Swami is proud of his friendship with Mani who is ‘Mighty Good-for-Nothing’ fellow. While others crouch in awe, Swami can address him ‘Mani’ with gusto and pat him on the back familiarly. His friendship with Mani shows that he has a feeling of security in his company. His other friend, Rajam is a newcomer who becomes
Mani’s rival. Mani looks upon Rajam as a ‘Menace to his position.’ Mani becomes upset at the thought that Swami appears to be taking interest in Rajam. Narayan artistically highlights a child’s innate tendency of possession. Swami has to pacify him by assuring that Mani is still his hero:

“Swaminathan broken into loud protestations. Did Mani think that Swaminathan could respect anyone but him, Mani the dear old friend and guide?....... Oh, there was no comparison between Rajam and Mani.”

(Swami and Friends, 15)

In his mind Swami admires Rajam but has no courage to admit it before Mani. Mani hates Rajam to the point of killing him and throwing his body in the river. Their struggle is not presented as a class-struggle but a competition between two individuals:

This Rajam was a rival to Mani. ..... There were sure indications that Rajam was the new power in the class. Day by day as Mani looked on, it was becoming increasingly clear that a new menace had appeared in his life.

(Swami and Friends, 14,15)

Soon Rajam extends a hand of friendship, Mani accepts it and they are reconciled easily:

“There was an awkward pause. “If this is all the cause of your anger, forget it. I won’t mind being friends.” Nor I, said Mani.

(Swami and Friends, 21)
There is no callous enmity between them. Rajam is intelligent and has inborn qualities of leadership. He acts with tact and firmness. It is he who brings about a reconciliation between Swami and his former friends – Shankar, Somu and Pea. When Mani and Rajam are united

“Swaminathan felt at perfect peace with the world.”

(Swami and Friends, 21)

Swami’s attachment to his granny is a typical feature of the Indian family. Swami is more attached to his granny than to his parents. He talks to her freely, opens his heart before her. He enjoys discussing with his granny the adventures of his friends.

“ ‘Oh, granny!’ he cried ecstatically, ‘you don’t know what a great fellow Rajam is.’ He told her the story of the first enmity between Rajam and Mani and the subsequent friendship.”

(Swami and Friends, 22)

Swami’s granny too, loves him very much and his evenings happily pass with her.

“After the night meal, with his head on his granny’s lap, nestling close to her, Swaminathan felt very snug and safe in the faint atmosphere of cardamom and cloves.”

(Swami and Friends, 22)

She tells him stories from Hindu mythology and it is in this way that Swami acquires knowledge of Hindu Gods, and the well-known figures and episodes of Hindu mythology. When granny suffers from colic and wants
Swami to get for her some fresh lemons from the market, Swami, in a hurry to reach the cricket field does not obey her. All the time he suffers from the pangs of his conscience, for his granny may be writhing with pain, while he himself is enjoying cricket. After returning home, he is much relieved to find her better. When Swami disappears from home, his granny is restless and walks up and down the room.

Swami’s innocence is his characteristic feature. He acts upon the suggestions made by others. He is easily taken in by the story of the coachman that he can easily turn twelve paise into six rupees, and so procure the hoop for which he yearns. Thus he is easily befooled and robbed.

Mimic tendency springs from innocence. Children like to imitate their elders. When Swami and Mani go to Rajam’s house he keeps them waiting.

“He had known that his friends were waiting for him, but he liked to keep them waiting for a few minutes, because he had seen his father doing it. So he stood for a few minutes in the adjoining room, biting his nails.”

(Swami and Friends, 29)

Again in front of his friends he tries to display his authority by scolding the cook. Swami and Mani are impressed very much by Rajam’s big room, the cupboard full of toys and the timepiece on his table.

“What impressed them most was a timepiece on the table. Such a young fellow to own a timepiece! His father seemed to be an extraordinary man.”

(Swami and Friends, 29)
Narayan beautifully portrays the simple joys and sorrows of these children. Not only Swami and Mani but other boys like Shankar, Somu and Pea are also disturbed by Rajam’s arrival in the school. They are rather hurt that after Rajam’s arrival Swami has gone away from them. Their act of teasing Swami by nicknaming him ‘Rajam’s tail’ is the result of their hurt conscience. There is a pang in their heart that they are inferior to Rajam.

‘We aren’t good enough for you, I believe. But how can everyone be a son of a Police Superintendent?’

(Swami and Friends, 35)

These innocent little ones are not free from the fascination of glamour. Of course, their world is not morally degraded. They want to show off just to impress their friends. When Rajam promises to come to Swami’s house Swami makes grand preparations to receive his high class friend in his middle class home. Children have no duplicate policy. Their candour is blunt. Swami tells his granny not to call him or come to his room when Rajam is with him. When she asks the reason Swami frankly says her,

“The fact is – you are, well you are too old.”

(Swami and Friends, 41)

Then Swami’s attention is turned towards his father’s room. He requests his father to lend him his room to receive his friend. Though he has his own room he cannot show it to Rajam. Even father is amused at this answer.

“Who is this Rajam, such a big man?”
‘He is the Police Superintendent’s son. He is – he is not ordinary.’

(Swami and Friends, 42)

Swami wants to be very perfect in the decorum as Rajam is a big man’s son. He tells his mother to prepare something very nice, something fine and sweet. He further says:

‘…….. Don’t make the sort of coffee that you usually give me. It must be very good and hot.’

(Swami and Friends, 42)

Then he remembers how in Rajam’s house everything has been brought to the room by the cook.

‘Mother, would you mind if I don’t come here for coffee and tiffin? Can you send it to my room?’

(Swami and Friends, 42)

Swami is not content even with this. He orders his cook to wear a clean, white dhoti and shirt. After the visit is over Swami is happy that everything has gone off smoothly but he is sorry that the cook has not changed his dhoti.

In Swami’s world fantasy becomes a part of reality. He sincerely invokes Gods to turn pebbles into coins. Narayan deftly captures the glimpse of Swami’s mind in his mixed feelings of anger, disappointment and fear.

‘The indifference of the Gods infuriated him and brought tears to his eyes. He wanted to abuse the Gods but was afraid to.’

(Swami and Friends, 80)
The Youthful World: The second phase in man’s life is youth, the spring of life. This phase is most realistically depicted in Narayan’s second novel The Bachelor of Arts. The remarkable thing about Narayan is that he has produced his three novels coinciding with the first three stages in human life. The first novel Swami and Friends dealing with the child world, the second The Bachelor of Arts dealing with the youth and the third The English Teacher dealing with the conjugal life. The critics opine that all these novels are marked with deep autobiographical elements.

The first part of The Bachelor of Arts gives a vivid account of the college-life of Chandran, the hero of the novel. Practically every aspect of college life is covered to illuminate the personality of the hero. Chandran is a brilliant speaker, and so he is appointed as the Secretary of the College Historical Association by the Professor of History. These extra curricular activities come in the way of his studies. However, he manages to pass the B.A. examination. While he is engaged in his work, he also learns many facts of life.

This is the way of the world. People are so indifferent. However, the hero also learns, in the course of time, to tackle people. He also uses the strategies to get his work done. Aziz, the college peon does not allow him to enter the Principal’s room, but Chandran’s mention of an ‘old coat’ does the miracle. Aziz offers Chandran full cooperation.

In the novel Narayan gives comic deflation of the professor. When Chandran is called by the Professor, he is at once frightened, but soon he consoles his mind.
“Why this cowardice? Why should he be afraid of Raghavachar or anybody? Human being to human being. Remove these spectacles, the turban, and the long coat and let Raghavachar appear only in loin cloth and Mr. Raghavachar would lose three quarters of his appearance. Where was the sense of feeling nervous before a pair of spectacles, a turban and a black long coat?”

(Bachelor, 26)

Friends play a very important role in the life of Chandran. Ramu, his college friend, is an inevitable part of his life.

“Chandran squeezed the maximum aesthetic delight out of the experience, and Ramu’s company was most important to him. It was his presence that gave a sense of completion to the things.”

(Bachelor, 13)

Chandran cannot even think of life without Ramu. But after graduation when Ramu goes to Poona, the vacuum created by Ramu’s absence is filled by Mohan, the poet. Still he remembers Ramu. He is very sorry that Ramu is frivolous-minded and

“won’t bother about a thing that is out of sight.”

(Bachelor, 117)

He hasn’t even cared to inform him that he has got a job. So for Chandran
“Friendship was another illusion like love, though it did not reach the same mad heights.”

(Bachelor, 118)

Chandran is lost in the thoughts about friendship. He realizes that people pretend that they are friends. In actuality they are not friends but simply fellows who are brought together by force of circumstances. The class-room or the club or the office creates friendship. When the circumstances change, the relation too snaps.

“Friendship – what meaningless expressions had come into use!”

(Bachelor, 118)

Chandran finds it very difficult to accept this blow on his friendship, but these are the realities of life. Even his father tells him that over thirty years he has not written to his friends and though one of his friends is living in the same town, he has not been to his house since four years, though in their college days they used to spend all their time together. Chandran expresses surprise over this, but his father philosophises:

“We can’t afford to be always together, you know. Each of us has to go his own way.”

(Bachelor, 119)

Father has reconciled with the new situation but Chandran finds it difficult to accept this bitter truth. He explains his devastating discovery that

“Love and Friendship were the variest illusions.”

(Bachelor, 123)
Narayan also presents another side of the relation through the figures of Mohan and the hotel proprietor. They are good friends since their bad days.

“....... In those days sometimes he would not have a measure of rice in the whole hotel; and I have several times borrowed a rupee or two and given it to him for running the hotel.”

(Bachelor, 122)

Now, when both are prosperous, Mohan can afford to take another room in another posh hotel, but he has no heart to leave his friend and the old room, as he is emotionally attached to both of them.

“I am paying five rupees more for this room. I insisted on this room being called fourteen. It is a lucky number ......... I thought of shifting to another hotel, but hadn’t the heart to do it. ..........”

(Bachelor, 121-122)

Narayan probably feels that friendship is what we regard it to be, an illusion or reality.

_The Complicated Social World: _R K Narayan’s novels are essentially south Indian in the sense that they truly exhibit the social pattern of life existing in south India. Belinsky’s remark about the secret of nationality highlights Narayan’s success in sensing the pulse of his native society.

“The secret of a people’s nationality lies not in its clothing or cuisine but in its, so to say, manner of understanding things. To correctly portray any society one must first comprehend its essence, its peculiarity – and the only way that can be achieved
is by actually learning and philosophically assessing the sum
total of rules governing and upholding that society.”

(Belinsky, 47)

Different customs, traditions, ways of thinking and living are so clearly
depicted in Narayan’s novels that even a foreigner, after reading Narayan’s
novels, can get a first-hand knowledge about south India. The south Indian
atmosphere is recreated before the minds of the readers. Graham Green, a
well-known English novelist, in the preface to Narayan’s Swami and Friends,
acknowledges the authenticity of Narayan’s portrayal.

“India, unvisited, has always been to be a literary region, the
region of Mr. E M Forster, of Kipling, vague memories of Flora
Annie Seele, of Henry…. It was Mr. Narayan with his Swami
and Friends who first brought India, in the sense of the Indian
population and the Indian way of life, alive to me.”

(Green, Preface)

Narayan is a socially aware artist but his vision has a broad spectrum.
He sees beyond class-conflict. His domestic world is alive within the greater
circle of society. William Walsh significantly points out the centrality of
domestic life in Narayan’s fictional world.

“The family, indeed, is the immediate context in which the novelist’s
sensibility operates and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and
conviction with which family relationships are treated……”

(Walsh, 12–13)
Narayan has a great regard for family ties and pieties of the home. Therefore, domestic relationships occupy the central place in his novels. Father-son relationship is very important in all his novels. Most of his major characters are devoted fathers e.g. Chandran’s father in *The Bachelor of Arts*. Margayya in *The Financial Expert* and Jagan in *The Sweet-Vendor*. The relationship between Chandran and his father is very healthy or may be called ideal. There is a proper coordination between the two, Chandran can very frankly open his heart to his father. Even father is always ready to solve his problems and is always concerned about his happiness.

Chandran has a feeling of prosecution after his graduation when everybody tries to give him advice. So he opens his heart to his father.

“Why should everybody talk about my career?

Why can’t they mind their business?” (Bachelor, 53)

Father consoles him.

“It is the way of the world. You must not let that upset you. It is just a form of courtesy, you see.” Then they began to talk of Chandran’s future.

(Bachelor, 53)

In *The Financial Expert* and in *The Vendor of Sweets* the picture is different. The bond of love is one-sided.

“In Margayya, *The Financial Expert* and Jagan, *The Vendor of Sweets* we see paternal love carried to the point of imprudence.”

(Parameswaran, 76)
Margayya’s yearning for shaping the future of his sweetly spoilt son who grows into a silent, wayward and frustrated man is very pitiable.

“He wanted Balu to grow up into an educated man, graduating out of a college and probably going for higher studies to Europe or Australia. He could undertake any plan with ease; ........ His son might become a great government official.”

(Expert, 87)

Margayya’s dreams are totally shattered because Balu comes home with his progress-card marked zero (p.87). Narayan criticizes the educational world and Margayya’s wrong value scale through his remark:

“Margayya decided to take charge of the school. ...... After that one could notice a great improvement in Balu’s career. He never lost his place in the class and the teachers seemed to have adjusted themselves to his way of thinking.”

(Expert, 87-88)

Margayya cuts a sorry figure when his ridiculous effort to boost up Balu for one more attempt to take examination fails.

“The boy made a dash for the book, snatched it from his father’s hand before he knew what was happening, tore its entire bulk into four pieces, and ran out into the street and threw the pieces into the gutter. ‘.... They will not admit him in any school again, the last chance gone.”

(Expert, 118)

The relation between the father and the son is strained and Balu even demands his share of the property.
“I want a share of my property - ....

Because it is multiplied out of grandfather’s property and I am entitled to half by right.”

(Expert, 168-169)

It is the excessive love and wealth that separates Margayya’s son from him.

Even in *The Vendor of Sweets* the loving father gets disillusioned by his son’s ingratitude, the motherless son whom he has given love even at the cost of his personal happiness. He always tries to reconcile himself with the new situation but the last blow of Mali’s arrest is unbearable for him. Then he passes beyond all attachment and learns the fact of life. He apprehends that his lenient nature is the cause of his ruin.

Krishna in *The English Teacher* is the unique example of a father who, for the sake of his motherless small girl, turns his back on all the happiness of the world. The rarity of Krishna’s double role can be seen in his mother’s appalled amazement:

“That I should be destined to see these things in our life – I have never known such things in our family”

(Teacher, 117)

Narayan’s grasp over reality can be apprehended by the co-existence of idealism and pragmatism in his fictional world. To Krishna his devotion to his daughter is natural but not so to the old woman.
“But if Krishna and Sushila, the Headmster and his wife are Indians, so is the old woman, the perfect stranger who insists, on hearing that Krishna is a widower, that he should marry at once.”

(Sundaram, 37)

Though such a sacrifice is a common feature of Indian motherhood, it elevates Krishna as an ideal father-figure.

“I slipped into my double role with great expertness. It kept me very much alive to play both father and mother to her at the same time. My one aim in life now was to see that she did not feel the absence of her mother. …. I had to keep her cheerful and keep myself cheerful too lest she should feel unhappy.”

(Teacher, 117)

Family is not a set of disjointed individuals but a set of interlinked acting and reacting members. Everyone of them exists in his own individual capacity. As they live together their life currents cut across. Their emotions, thoughts and actions re-enforce one another when they take the same path, but collide against one another when they cannot bridge the intermittent gap. The generation gap is often revealed through the difference between beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, activity, customs and traditions. The study of this generation gap is an inevitable part of the study of human relationship. In Narayan’s fictional world this generation gap, at times, plays a crucial role. In his *The Bachelor of Arts* this gap moulds Chandran’s life.

As long as Chandran is a college student everything goes on smoothly, but when he tries to enter life, this gap becomes quite clear. When the centre
of his life changes, the earlier family centre comes in conflict with it. This rift is more perceptible in mother and son than between father and son. Father is more liberal in his opinions and outlook whereas mother is more dominated by old customs and traditions. Malathi is the girl of Chandran’s choice. But there are so many barriers and obstacles in the way of Chandran that leads him to Malathi.

“A headclerk’s daughter was not what she had hoped to get for her son.”

(Bachelor, 69)

This throws light on mother’s psyche. Man always craves for high social position because that is the recognized value-scale in society. It is a social custom that a marriage should take place between two families with equal status. Again from the talk of mother, it becomes clear that she is also much attached to the old belief of superiority complex of the boy’s side.

“Whatever happened they would not take the initiative in the matter; for they belong to the bridegroom’s side, and according to time-honoured practice it was the bride’s people who proposed first.”

(Bachelor, 70)

Chandran is very impatient for his marriage with Malathi, but mother is adamant.

“…. And as long as she lived she would insist on respecting the old custom ……. It was always a debate on Custom and Reason.”

(Bachelor, 70)
She is in favour of dowry. She recalls how her father gave seven thousand in cash to Chandran’s father and over two thousand in silver vessels, and spent five thousand on the wedding celebrations. Now she feels justified in having the same expectations. As per her policy:

“We can’t disregard custom”

(Bachelor, 85)

Whereas, to Chandran:

“the total expenses for a marriage ought not to exceed a hundred rupees”

(Bachelor, 85)

In spite of the fact that in the beginning mother insists on sticking up to the old south Indian customs and traditions, Chandran’s horrible and pitiable condition makes her ready to give up customs one by one. Her love for her son fills up the gap and she is ready to consider the proposal for the sake of her son’s happiness.

“In a few days this hostility had to be abandoned, because Chandran’s parents could not bear for long the sight of an unhappy Chandran. For his sake they were prepared to compromise to this extent; they were prepared to consider the proposal if it came from the other side.”

(Bachelor, 70)

Narayan again deals with the theme of communication gap in other novels like The Vendor of Sweets.
“It is primarily the story of a doting father and an erring son.”

(Gilra, 65)

Jagannath and Mali are not incompatible individuals but representatives of generation gap in the Indian context. Jagan tries to realize his own dream in the figure of his son. He yearns Mali to be a B.A. especially because of his failure to do so. Mali’s blunt declaration, ‘I don’t want to study, that’s all’ shatters Jagan’s aspiration to see Mali to be a ‘high’ officer. Every time Mali acts against the wish of Jagan but self-abasing father tries to reconcile himself to the situation. Though Jagan becomes angry with Mali, he feels that helpless, motherless Mali should be protected.

“Poor boy, poor boy, let him be ….. I wonder what God has in store for him ….. must give him more love.”

(Vendor, 23)

Jagan’s tolerance is again strained when Mali returns from America. Jagan’s tradition-bound mind is deeply shocked when Mali comes home with his half-American wife, Grace. Shock is further intensified when he discovers that they are not married but are just living together. To his simple mind the relation appears to be immoral and sinful.

“He stood looking at the girl. She looked so good and virtuous; he had relied on her so much and yet here she was living in sin and talking casually about it. They had tainted his ancient home.”

(Vendor, 141)
He feels that this evil is the root-cause of the turmoil. He totally isolates himself from Mali and Grace. ‘He did everything possible to insulate himself from the evil radiations of the unmarried couple living together’. But Mali does not have the slightest feeling of shame. Grace gets separated but Mali casually remarks, ‘Grace has been getting funny notions. …… She is not in her right mind. She must go to a psychiatrist’. Thus difference of outlook between the older and the rising generation causes tension. Jagan strives hard for an understanding with Mali, and even adopts himself to the situation but ultimately emerges as a free man. He understands the truth that he is responsible for himself and Mali for Mali. He writes a cheque for two thousand rupees to get Mali released on bail but he refuses the responsibility of Mali’s action:

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

(Vendor, 190)

He experiences a new birth with his new realization:

“I am going somewhere, not carrying more than what my shoulder can bear. …. I am a free man”.

(Vendor, 190-91)

A close knit family is incomplete without man-woman relationship and this is also one of the prominent theme of Narayan’s novels. He portrays two types of woman characters who are firmly rooted in social reality. First there are typically Indian house-wives such as Krishna’s wife in The English Teacher and Savitri in The Dark Room.
“The family, indeed, is the immediate context in which the novelist’s sensibility operates, and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which family relationships are treated – that of son and parents and brother and brother in *The Bachelor of Arts*, of husband and wife and father and daughter in *The English Teacher*, of father and son in *The Financial Expert*, of grandmother and grandson in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, father and estranged son in *The Vendor of Sweets.*”

(William Walsh, 12-13)

They are religious and traditional in their ways. Indeed, they are the upholders of the ancient Indian way of life. Their only anxiety is the welfare of their husbands and children.

“Her thoughts reverted to Babu. The boy looked unwell, and perhaps at that moment was very ill in his class.”

(Room, 5)

Of these two, Sushila is fortunate enough to enjoy the love and full cooperation of her husband. There is proper coordination between husband and wife.

“I prepared such a large quantity thinking you would like it …. And I ate with relish just because she was so desperately eager to get me to appreciate her handiwork!”

(Teacher, 40-41)
How anxious and happy the husband is when Sushila comes with their baby.

“I cried: ‘Sushila, mind the door and baby, …. I looked at her apprehensively till she was safely down on the platform, helped by her father.”

(Teacher, 30)

Husband is anxious to return home after the college and even wife is very eager to welcome him home. Inspite of tussles there is perfect harmony between them.

I was too angry to answer. “You have no business to tamper with my things,’ I said, “I don’t want any tiffin or coffee.”

(Teacher, 30)

We treated each other like strangers for the next forty-eight hours – all aloof and bitter.

(Teacher, 57)

But this rift is a temporary phase which brings them closer.

“It came to a point when I simply could not stand any more of it. … By the time we were coming out of the variety Hall that night we were in such agreement and showed such tender concern for each other’s views and feelings that we both wondered how we could have treated each other so cruelly.”

(Teacher, 58)

Savitri of *The Dark Room* is rather unfortunate. She is the representative of thousands of Savitris of India who suffer mental torture at the hands of their husbands. Savitri is ofen insulted by her husband.
“Ramani questioned the patient himself and called ‘Savitri!’.

Before she could answer, he called her twice again, and asked,

“Are you deaf?’”

(Room, 1)

Even other women characters like Janamma try to convince that women are destined to suffer so. Their grief is mute.

“Janamma went on in this strain for an hour more, recounting instances of the patience of wives: her own grandmother who slaved cheerfully for her husband who had three concubines at home; her aunt who was beaten everyday by her husband and had never uttered a word of protest for fifty years; …...”

(Room, 46-47)

Ramani represents typically indifferent Indian husband who knows that his betrayal of his wife will not affect his domestic life in any way. Women cannot get shelter in the outer world and their weak point is their children. So they are bound to return home to take shelter inside the four walls and allow their husbands to continue their misdeeds.

“The futility, the frustration, and her own inescapable weakness made her cry and sob. “ ...... This is defeat. I accept it. I am no good for this fight. I am a bamboo pole. .... perhaps Sumati and Kamala have not had their hair combed for ages.”

(Room, 146)

Another aspect of Narayan’s Savitri in The Dark Room is that she also revolts against the callous domination of her husband and leaves her house.
“Do you think I am going to stay here? …. Do you think I stay in your house, breathe the air of your property, drink the water here, and eat food you buy with your money? No, I’ll starve and die in the open, under the sky, a roof for which we need be obliged to no man.”

(Room, 87- 88)

Savitri’s road brings her back to her domestic confinement because of her children.

“And she grew homesick. A nostalgia for children, home and accustomed comforts seized her. Lying here on the rough floor, beside the hot flickering lamp, her soul rocked with fears, she could not help contrasting the comfort, security, and unloneliness of her home.”

(Room, 146)

Narayan’s Savitri is a realistic portrayal of the Indian society. Narayan’s concept of human relationship is not bound by the four walls of the home. He has a broader vision of humanity. Relationships beyond family also shape the lives of his heroes. They may be instrumental but their very presence at crucial moments makes all the difference e.g. the postmaster in The Bachelor of Arts. Chandran’s realization, at the end of his folly and his wish to return to the normal life giving up the stance of a sanyasi is brought into reality with the help of the postmaster to whom Chandran confesses everything.

All such things pictured so minutely and accurately present the panorama of social life in India.
**The Tricky Commercial World:** Lust for money one of the dominant themes of Narayan’s novels. Margayya in *The Financial Expert* and Raju in the *Guide* are striking examples of ‘money-hunting men.’ Margayya is a middle-aged ordinary money-lender, whose chief object in life is to rise in social status by earning enormous wealth. He has his own philosophy regarding wealth.

“It’s money which gives people all this. Money alone is important in this world. Everything else will come to us naturally if we have money in our purse.”

(Expert, 17)

He has innate faculty of earning money, but his thirst for more money is unquenchable. He is possessed with this obsession.

“His mind began to catalogue all the good things money had done as far as he could remember. He shuddered to think how people could ever do without it. If money was absent men came near being beasts. …. People did anything for money. Money was men’s greatest need, like air or food.”

(Expert, 22)

By chance or by luck, through the Puja performed as per the advice of the priest, Margayya succeeds in his venture beyond expectation and amasses wealth. Now he is in a position to buy all the joys of the world. He owns a car, contributes to the war-fund and moves about like a minor deity. He puts his son in the best school and becomes the Secretary of the school to secure a special standing for his son. Margayya’s craze for money makes him philosopher of wealth. Narayan comments:
“There was probably no other person in the whole country who had meditated so much on the question of interest. Margayya’s mind was full of it. .... Every rupee, Margayya felt, contained in it seed of another rupee and that seed in it had another seed and so on and on to infinity.”

(Expert, 94)

But in course of time there is an enormous change in the philosophy of Margayya. The same Margayya then comes to the conclusion. ‘But money is not everything’ (p. 95). Money fails to give him expected happiness. He loses his mental satisfaction. All his dreams regarding the future of his dear son are shattered. The poor Margayya enjoys the love of his son, but the rich Margayya only suffers insult at the hands of his impudent, stubborn, vagabond son who has grown so, most probably due to easy wealth. When his son runs away, Margayya brings him back and promises him:

“You eat, rest and grow fat – that is all you are expected to do, and take as much money as you like.”

(Expert, 143)

According to Margayya’s promise:

“Balu devoted himself to the art of cultivating leisure.”

(Expert, 147)

Money thus finishes Margayya and spoils his son. It is due to his son that his business collapses and he has to return to his old place.

In The Neighbour’s Help Narayan realistically portrays the influence of the commercial world but at the same time brings forth the universal truth
of friendship never dies. This is the story of true friendship. Ekambaram and Ram and childhood friends. They have grown up together and even got married around the same time. While Ekambaram has a large family and finds it difficult to manage with his meager salary, Ram inherits his father’s business and has a small family and is very prosperous. One day Ekambaram dies, leaving the family’s gold jewelry in Ram’s charge till such time his son grows up. Ram is helpful and starts to give money to Ekambaram’s family and also educates his children. But, within no time his crooked business mind takes over and he thinks that he should start charging interest.

In the quietness of his farmhouse he sits to calculate the interest, Ekambaram’s ghost suddenly appears and taunts him of being selfish and greedy. Ram is not only shaken by this but is also very scared of his ill deeds. He goes back and tells his wife about the ghostly visit of Ekambaram. His wife, being a kind hearted lady, laughs it out and tells him that it was not the ghost but his own conscience and that what he was doing was wrong. She then advises him not to be greedy and not to charge interest from Ekambaram’s family.

Ram realizes his mistake and makes it up. He does not charge interest and also ensures that Ekambaram’s son gets into a good job after his studies. He also gives back the jewelry that was in his custody. Ram’s guilt conscience disappears and thereafter he lives happily.

*The Career* is yet another marvel by Narayan. This is the story of an orphan, Ramu looking for a job with the merchant in the town. The merchant takes pity on the orphan Ramu and employs him. Ramu develops a very good rapport with the entire family of the merchant and they start trusting him
totally. The merchant allows Ramu to handle the entire business including sales and purchase and was planning to expand his business with his assistance. One day when the merchant was out of station and returns the next day, he was shocked to see his entire shop empty and know that Ramu had not only swindled the money but had also taken loan from the market and disappeared. The merchant was helpless and was forced to leave the town because of the heavy losses. When the merchant once went to the temple he saw a beggar, suffering with leprosy, with his arms stretched out. After going a little farther, the merchant realized that the beggar was none other than Ramu and turned but to his utter surprise he doesn’t find him there. Here once again, Narayan succeeds in showing how tricky and commercial the world is.

Raju and Rosie earn huge amount but all is wasted by Raju in drinking, gambling and maintaining a lavish style of living. He gives up everything for the sake of Rosie’s love, even his mother leaves him. But it is his lust for money which separates him from Rosie and thus finally lands him in jail.

*The Ruthless Political World:*

“Like religion in the past politics dominates the contemporary life of man.” (Bhatnagar, 24)

At present politics is one of the dominant forces in human life. While explaining the concept of society Thomas Mann highlights its expansive scope:
“Why not say at once, ‘The Artist and Politics,’ since the word society today is nothing but a screen to hide the political?”

(Bhatnagar, 24)

O.P. Bhatnagar envisions meaningful:

“existence, expression and relevance”

(Bhatnagar, 38)

of Indian poetry in English in the metaphorical extension of politics of aesthetics. The same is true in the case of fiction too.

Most of the Indo-Anglian novelists have used the Indian struggle for Independence as an integral background for their fictional world. Gandhiji figures prominently from Raja Rao’s Kanthapura to Chaman Nahal’s Azadi.

“Narayan shunned politics and sensationalism as themes of his novels”.

(Kapadia, 147)

cannot be totally accepted. Politics being a part of life, Narayan cannot ignore it. He, of course, does not use it for propaganda. In a newspaper interview, he has said:

“When art is used as a vehicle for political propaganda, the mood of comedy, the sensibility to atmosphere, the probing of psychological factors, the crisis in the individual soul and its resolution and above all the detached observation which constitutes the stuff of fiction is forced into background.”

(Ibid., 147)
As a social realist R K Narayan is also aware of this stream of life underneath the political upheaval. He never aims at presenting himself as a devoted Gandhian. Really speaking, he has that rare skill of effecting the synthesis of attachment and detachment. In *Swami and Friends* Gandhiji is seen addressing the people of Malgudi.

“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 ….’”

*(Swami, 93)*

Narayan’s use of the lure of this dynamic figure is very subtle. The effect of Gandiji’s personality is so pervasive and deep that even an innocent child like Swami comes under his sway. Narayan highlights the inevitable rift between Gandhian theory of non-violence and natural violence in human response. Swami gets expelled from the school for breaking the window-pane of his school.

In *The Vendor of Sweets* the figure of Mahatma Gandhi is kept in the background and his influence on Jagan is shown indirectly through Narayan’s characteristic irony. Jagan is a strict follower of the Gandhian philosophy. One of the first page Jagan records his dissatisfaction with the world of taste and the senses. ‘Conquer taste, and you will conquer the self.’ Jagan tells his cousin. This advocate of abstinence lures the people by selling delicious sweets. Narayan also sees through the ritualistic stance of such pseudo Gandhians. They fail to appreciate that not the action done but the spirit behind makes it meaningful.
“I had to leave the college when Gandhiji ordered us to non-cooperate. I spent the best part of my student years in prison,’ said Jagan, feeling heroic, his reminiscential mood slurring over the fact that he had failed several times in the B.A., ceased to attend the college and had begun to take his examinations as a private candidate long before the call of Gandhiji.”

(Vendor, 33)

Narayan’s *Waiting of the Mahatma* has given rise to a controversy regarding its nature and its success. It is often regarded as a Gandhian novel like Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* and Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*, but far inferior to them.

“It is a Gandhian novel. Technically, Sriram is the hero of the novel and the plot revolves round him; but the predominant figure, even though he is seldom on stage, is Gandhi and the theme is Gandhian.”

(Parameswaran, 65)

Though Uma Parameswaran acknowledges the Gandhian essence of the novel, she regards it a failure, providing

“examples of the levels that Narayan’s art cannot reach.”

(Ibid., 74)

According to C.D. Narasimaiah Narayan has “made a muddle of the Gandhian Principle.”

(Narasimaiah, 155)

A. N. Kaul makes a similar remark when he says,
“to the extent to which it is a political novel ... it hasn’t enlarged our awareness of Gandhi or his era one bit.”

(Kaul, 227)

This type of criticism is not acceptable because it is based on a wrong assumption. Gandhiji’s portrait has been drawn clearly with all his subtleties by Narayan. Gandhiji’s liking for Hindi is seen.

“At the outset Mahatma Gandhi explained that he’d speak only in Hindi as a matter of principle. ‘I will not address you in English. It’s the language of our rulers. It has enslaved us. .....’

(Mahatma, 16)

Gandhiji’s sympathy for the poor and the downtrodden is also shown by Narayan.

“Mahatma saw one child standing apart from the rest – a small dark fellow with a protruding belly and wearing nothing over his body except a cast-off knitted vest, adult size, full of holes, which reached down his ankles.”

(Mahatma, 31)

Gandhiji’s rising early in the morning, his spinning, his Ramdhun and prayer, his fast, his love for children and untouchables, his regard for Hindi and regional languages of India, his stay in Bhangi-colony all go to complete the many-sided personality of Mahatma.

Many other Indo-Anglian novelists have delineated inspired response to his great figure and philosophy. As Narayan is a true social realist, he cannot bind himself to any one ideology, however grand and pervasive. As a social realist he captures both type of responses – inspired ones like Bharati
and ordinary ones like Sriram. This great period of the Indian history is also seen from a common man's point of view. This should not be interpreted as a failure because 'the average is great' in democracy. Sriram gets involved in various phases of the struggle for independence only because of his overpowering love for Bharati who is an active participant. He likes to be where Bharati is and needs her guidance.

“He whole being acquired a meaning only when he was doing something in relation to Bharati.”

(Ibid., 190)

It is true as argued by Meenakshi Mukherjee that Narayan should not be blamed on account of some pre-conceived assumption.

“Thus, to condemn Waiting for the Mahatma as an inadequate presentation of the Gandhian movement is to condemn it for not doing something Narayan never set out to do.”

(Mukherjee, 43)

Now it is felt not sufficient only to defend Narayan from wrongly directed criticism, but also necessary to access him on the truth of his presentation. Waiting for the Mahatma presents the whole truth of the Gandhian movement – the inspired and the ordinary response to the movement through the figures of Bharati and Sriram taken together. The relation between them delineates the undercurrent of life that contains such contrasting multitudes.

Narayan’s strength lies in his depiction of basic human themes, essentially in the context of the social situations. He finds his idiom assured and imagination free when he is nearer social issues.
His fictional world indicates the richness and depth of his apprehension of reality. He deals with various aspects of social reality. Various themes explored and analysed by Narayan have been dealt with in this chapter. He is as sure of himself while dealing with the innocent world of children and the youth as he is with the complex world of adult experience. Inspite of the generation gap, his characters are bound to one another with strong family ties. Narayan is also interested in human relationship beyond family. In his expansive world village folk find place along with the city people. He presents his tradition-bound Malgudi world with minute details.

As politics has become a metaphor of life in the modern time, Narayan’s novels record his consciousness of the political tensions experienced by the Indians. Narayan, thus, presents a panoramic view of the Indian life.

Narayan is not a didactic writer. He never tries to deliver any message consciously. He does not bind himself to any ideology but faces stark reality experienced in the given social structure. There is no attempt on his part to propagate any theory not even of social realism – of capital and labour, or the British exploiter and the Indian underdog. His novels are not the manifestoes of the proletariat. He aims to present not the working class but concentrates on the middle class people in the contemporary Indian society. He designates his hero in an essay in Next Sunday (‘On Humour’) as ‘the modern unknown warrior, who is the middle-class common man.’ With honesty and depth he enlivens in his novels his time and culture. Though his work is a true product of his age, it is not a time-bound replica of ordinary reality.
It is an artistic recreation of the social reality reflecting the broader humanity. The roots of this distinctive achievement of Narayan can be traced to his essential humanism.