
LIFE INTO ARTS: R. K. NARAYAN

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Declaration

I do hereby declare that this work has been written entirely by me except for the reference and quotations which I have acknowledge duly.

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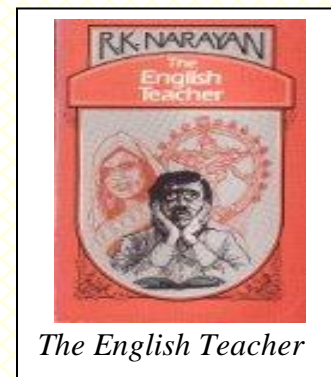
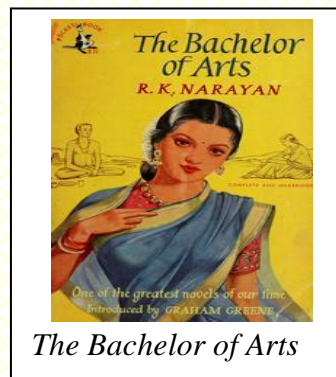
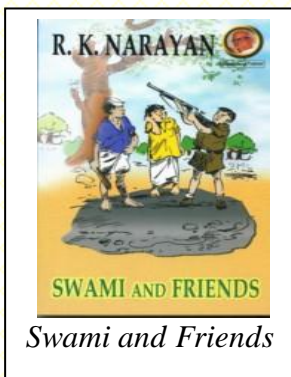
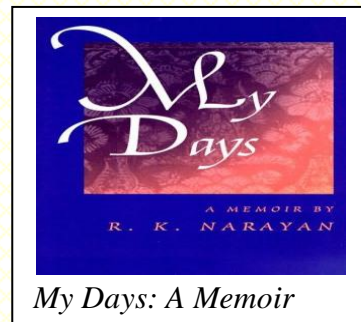
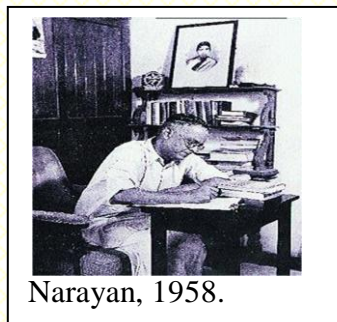
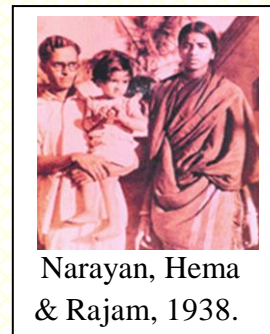
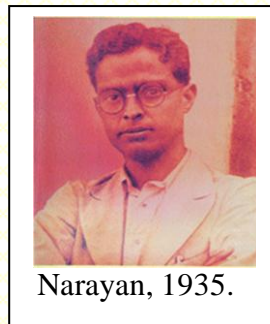
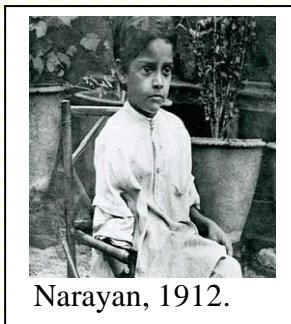
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Preface

This study attempts to prove that an artist may take material for his art from his own life and experience. Narayan certainly has taken material for his novels from his own experience. His first three novels are semiautobiographical. These trilogies tell the story of Narayan's life from childhood to adulthood. *Swami and Friends* tells the story of a ten year old named Swami. Swami's childhood experience is similar to Narayan's own childhood. *The Bachelor of Arts* shows the gradual growth of a boy towards adulthood. Narayan projected his feeling of young love through this novel. The story of *The English Teacher* is based on Narayan's own marriage and the early death of his wife.

LIFE INTO ARTS: R. K. NARAYAN



Chapter – 1

Introduction

An artist often based his art on his own life and experience. If somebody closely observes an artist's life he will find evidence that incidents which greatly affected the author have often been reproduced in his art. Jane Austen, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence have written about their experience and the world they are familiar with in their novels. Narayan, who is considered to be one of the greatest English language novelists in India, has always written about the world around him and about that of which he has full knowledge. Sahai (2006) says that Narayan's novels are convincing because he takes material from his own life.

1.1. Life of Narayan

R.K. Narayan, shortened from Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami, was born in Madras, South India on October 10, 1906. Although his family moved to Mysore when he was a child, he continued to live in Madras under the care of his grandmother, who taught him arithmetic, mythology, classical Indian music and Sanskrit (Narayan, 1974). While living with his grandmother, Narayan studied in a succession of schools in Madras, including the Lutheran Mission School in Purasawalkam, C.R.C. High School, and the Christian College High School. Narayan moved to Mysore to live with his family when his father, a school headmaster, was transferred to the Maharajah's Collegiate High School (Narayan, 1974). After completing high school, Narayan failed the university entrance examination and spent a year at home reading and writing (Narayan, 1974). In 1926, he

passed the entrance examination and joined Maharaja College of Mysore. It took Narayan four years to obtain his Bachelor's degree, a year longer than usual. After obtaining his Bachelor's degree he briefly held a job as a school teacher. After quitting the job he decided to stay at home and make a career in writing novels. Although writing at that time did not pay much, his family and friends respected and supported his unorthodox choice of career (Khatri, 2006). He managed to get several contributions accepted by *The Merry Magazine* (a short-lived offshoot of *Ananda Vikatan* in English), and by *The Hindu*, where he eventually obtained a weekly slot in the Sunday edition.

Narayan met Rajam, a 15-year old girl, in 1933, while he was visiting his sister's house in Coimbatore, and fell in love with her. Though there were many astrological and financial obstacles, Narayan managed to overcome them and marry her in Coimbatore on July 1, 1934. After his marriage Narayan became a reporter for a Madras based paper called *The Justice*. Unfortunately in 1939 Rajam died of typhoid, leaving behind a three year old daughter Hemalatha. Rajam's death affected Narayan deeply and he expressed his feeling of that time in the novel *The English Teacher*. This bereavement brought about a permanent change in his life and it took him a long time to overcome his grief. In 1945 Narayan emerged from the period of darkness and his work went to a new direction. He died on May 13, 2001 in Chennai at the age of 94.

1.2. Works

Most of Narayan's novels are based on his own experience in life. His first three novels *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher* are considered autobiographical. These works depict the story of Narayan's life from childhood to adulthood.

1.2.1. *Swami and Friends*

Narayan's first novel *Swami and Friends* was published on October 24, 1935 in London for which Narayan got a cheque of 15 pounds and 10 shillings (Ram & Ram, 2006:159). It took Narayan two years to complete this novel. *Swami and Friends* is the story of a ten year old name Swami, a boy full of innocence, wonder and mischief, and his experiences in the fictional town of Malgudi, which is similar to Narayan's own childhood.

1.2.2. *The Bachelor of Arts*

On March 15, 1937 Narayan's second novel *The Bachelor of Arts* was published (Ram & Ram, 2006:186). It tells the story of a young man name Chandran's transition from adolescent through experience into adulthood. Chandran's experience in college and his experience of first love are similar to those which Narayan experienced in his own life. This novel is the sequel of his first novel *Swami and Friends*.

1.2.3. *The English Teacher*

The English Teacher is the story of Krishna the protagonist, an English teacher, and his wife Susils and his quest towards achieving inner peace and self-development after his wife's death. Krishna's anguish after his wife's death is similar to what Narayan himself suffered after his wife Rajam's death. This novel was published in late September 1945.

1.2.4. *My Days: A Memoir*

The term autobiography was first used by Southey in 1809 for an account of a person's life by himself. Dr. Johnson's opinion is no man is better qualified to write about his life than he himself. Certainly Narayan's only memoir *My Days: A Memoir* is an important account of his life experiences. It is an interesting revelation of his life and experiences. In a frank and truthful manner, Narayan shares his life story, his dreams and fears, his feeling about

school, his experience of first love and the agony he went through after the death of his wife in this book. The narration is quite simple and tends to draw the reader into the writer's surroundings and experiences.

1.2.5. R.K. Narayan, *The Early Years*

Dryden defined biography as the “history of particular men’s life”. Since the second half of the 17th century biography as a literary form became increasingly popular. The biography *R.K. Narayan, The Early Years* provides a splendid insight into the first four decades of his life. Beside Narayan’s published works and interviews and recollection of relatives and friends the biographer Susan Ram & N. Ram, also examine the correspondence between Narayan and Greene, and his past ten years conversation with the writer. Many sheets of ‘automatic writing’ from the period when Narayan tried to establish contact with his dead wife are also examined by Susan Ram & N. Ram.

1.3. Narayan’s Locale:

Pandey (2003) notes that the novels and short stories of Narayan’s reflect the social life of India. He says that Narayan has taken most of his characters and subjects from the urban middle class life. Mishra (2004) says that, in his novels, Narayan not only shows the life of south Indian ordinary middle class people but also presents the unique cultural character of that class. His stories and plots are based on the life of ordinary people; His protagonists are unheroic people who are controlled by fate and circumstances. Pandey (2003) says that Narayan portrays in his novel the process of the growth of a character and shows, how contact with the world changes an individual.

1.4. Malgudi

Narayan is the creator of the fictional town ‘Malgudi’, which is the setting of all his novels (Khatri, 2006). Malgudi is supposedly a small town in South India, which is situated on the bank of a river. Khatri (2006) says that Narayan’s Malgudi represents South Indian semi-urban life, people and culture. In Khatri’s (2006) opinion Narayan has deliberately created a town for his novels, a semi-urban locale that has both the qualities of urban and rural India because Narayan is familiar with this location. He notes that Narayan drew a vivid picture of Malgudi with its past, present and a growing Malgudi which became a part of living tradition, a representation of the whole of India. Narayan says about Malgudi:

‘I wanted to be able to put in whatever I liked, and wherever I liked – a little street or school or a temple or a bungalow or even a slum, a railway line, at any spot, a minor despot in a little world.’

(Ram & Ram, 1996: 106)

1.5. Narayan’s Prose Style

Narayan always used simple language to describe the characters of his novels. This is the reason behind his popularity as an artist. Narayan is best known for his use of clean, lucid and wonderfully expressive language and he never complicated his English by mixing the flavor of Tamil or any other Indian language into it (Singh, 2006). Narayan, says Singh (2006), is an acute observer of society, and through his art he conveyed the good as well as the evil in society. Singh (2006) says that Narayan expressed human follies and eccentricities by mixing satire with gentle humor but he neither directly comment nor react to them.

Chapter – 2

The World of a Child

Narayan's *Swami and Friends* is a semi-autobiographical novel that depicts the growing pain of an adolescent boy, the tears shed by him after he is hurt and the fears he has of losing a friend. Although the ordinary tensions of maturing are heightened by the particular circumstances of pre-partition India, Narayan provides a universal vision of childhood, friendship and grief. Set against the fictional backdrop of Malgudi, the book is an emblem of the journeying of mankind through the maze of reality. Appropriately titled, Narayan depicts the relation of Swami and his friends.

2.1. *Swami and Friends*

The first of a trilogy of novels, *Swami and Friends* is set against the backdrop of pre-independence India. The story is about an adolescent boy growing up at that time. It is the story of Swami, a small boy who is a student at Albert Mission School. It not only tells the story of Swami but others like, Shanker whose specialty is to top every exam; 'Pea' and Somu, who occupy the middle positions and Mani, who is Swami's best friend and who always sits on the last bench and takes more than one year to pass some classes. Together Swami and Mani rule over the class and barely manage to scrape past the exams. These boys live for summer vacations when they can play all the time in the street with friends. This peaceful setting is disturbed occasionally by the stern headmaster of the school and sometimes by the religious study teacher, Ebenezer and also by a stern father. The 10 year

old boy grows up when Rajam joins the school. The monotonous school life of Swami then gains excitement when together with Rajam, he dreams of forming a cricket team. Young Swami gets caught up in the anti-British movement and manages to get thrown out of school. When he runs away from school for the second time, he feels that there is nothing left and so he also runs away from home. Eventually Swami returns home to the relief of his parents. The story attains its climax when Rajam moves out of the town without even uttering a word to Swami.

All the children in this novel have unique personalities. Mai is the daredevil, Rajam, though naughty, usually acts as a voice of caution, Swami is shy, but impish and impulsive. Through all this character Narayan takes us to the world of children.

2.2. School Life

In this novel Narayan has drawn upon his own childhood experience to recreate a child's perception of the world (Ram & Ram 2006: 30). The protagonist of *Swami and Friends* is Swaminathan, a school boy, whose attitude towards school is just like Narayan himself. The opening lines of the novel clearly sketch the moods, behavior and psychology of a young boy.

Swaminathan.... considered Monday especially unpleasant in the calendar. it was difficult to get into the Monday mood of work and discipline. He shuddered at the very thought of school: that dismal yellow building;the Head Master with his thin long cane. ...

(P.1)

In *My Days*, his biography, Narayan expresses the same attitude towards school. In his progress through school, Narayan acquired a lifelong dislike for traditional formal

education which is reflected in the novel. In the opening pages of *Swami and Friends*, Narayan convey the silent, jail-like atmosphere of the classroom.

Narayan's kindergarten experience resurfaces in the scene where Swami wanders into the infant sections of his school and watches the toddler's effort to shape models from wet clay. Like Narayan he is also baffled by this pointless effort. It seems to Swami a meaningless activity which they can do in their own home instead of coming 'to school to do this sort of things'. For him school was meant for learning serious subjects like geography, arithmetic, Bible and English. In his infant class Narayan was supposed to "sit on the floor and knead small lumps of wet clay and shape them". Later, he wondered how making shapes with wet clay helped him become educated.

Another incident from his life which resurfaces in this novel is Narayan's attitude towards drill class and the punishment he suffered for skipping them. Narayan used to regularly skip Friday afternoon drill class and consequently get 'six whacks' in his upturned palm from the headmaster's cane first thing on Monday morning. In *Swami and Friends* when Swami skips a few drill classes due to cricket practice he has to endure punishment from his headmaster. Swami had to attend drill class everyday after school while his friends played cricket. So he pretended to be sick to skip the drill classes and requested the doctor to talk to his headmaster. As the doctor did not make excuses on Swami's behalf, he got punished by the headmaster, 'six on each hand for each day of absence, and the next lesson on the bench'.

In *Swami and Friends* the boys formed a cricket team called 'M.C.C.'. Instead of 'Jumping Star', suggested by Swami the name 'M.C.C.' – short for 'Malgudi Cricket Club' suggested by Rajam was decided for the team. 'Jumping Star' is the name of Narayan's

own football team. His 'Jumping Star' experiences of the dust, sweat and excitement of practice sessions is reflected in *Swami and Friends*.

You covered the distance half running, half walking, moved by the vision of a dun field sparsely covered with scorched grass.... rays of the evening sun, enveloped in a flimsy cloud of dust, alive with the player stamping about.

(Narayan, 1973:45)

Swami's evening journey to the cricket field, beset by delays and school imposed obstacles, seems to carry the same urgency of the writer's own efforts to reach the lake everyday to practice football.

The leadership qualities of Jambu can also be seen in Rajam, the Captain of M.C.C.s. Jambu was the captain of Narayan's football team, who materialized every evening to conduct his team to the practice ground. Like Jambu, Rajam contributes hugely to the teams provisioning by taking money from his family to provide the team with necessary equipments like bats, balls and stumps.

2.3. Friendship

In childhood friendship are quickly forged and as easily forgotten, a reality which Narayan shows through Rajam's departure without saying farewell to Swami. Rajam is the son of the police superintendent and assume the leadership of Swami's group of friends. Rajam feels that they loss the cricket match due to Swami's absences and so he break's his friendship with Swami. Narayan provided insights into the varied manifestations and quirks of childhood friendship from his Madras childhood.

2.4. Examination & Vacation

Another feature of school life which according to Narayan is considered torture by students is examination. In *Swami and Friends*, the tension associated with the approach of exam is explored with sensitivity. The anxiety and sleeplessness of the night before examination is shown as Swami tries to deflect his rising trepidation by making a list of his examination requirements. The atmosphere of examination hall is grim and tension filled. After the examination the students speculate about the answers. On leaving the examination hall Swami begins to have doubts after hearing other's responses. The reader begins to share his sense of error and mild panic. Though there are trepidations about the result, the joy of having finished the exam is great. Swami and his classmates welcome the summer holidays with a glorious, ink soaked celebration of freedom. As a middling student, the writer finds the examinations a particular ordeal. Narayan expresses his dislike of exams in many essays. Through Swami, Narayan expresses the desperate nervousness and mental anguish one suffers at exam time.

2.5. Religion

In E.L.M. school Narayan suffered because of religious intolerance for non-Christian students. Staffed by Christian converts the school appears to have taken a somewhat proselytizing attitude towards its non Christian students. As Narayan was the only Brahmin boy in his class he suffered much unpleasantness from a teacher called Ebenezer. Swami too faces a fanatical scripture master called Ebenezer at the Albert Mission School in Malgudi, who regularly denigrated Hindu religion. When Swami tries to defend his faith he got his ears twisted for his effort. Swami's father writes an angry letter to the

headmaster, which express the writer's own sentiments about fanaticism and which affects the value of religious tolerance. The letter from the father belongs to the realm of fiction.

2.6. Childhood Fear

In childhood, fears, secrecies and furtive acts are necessary to survive in an adult dominated world. In his autobiography *My Days* Narayan recounts his fear of a fuel merchant who was famous for his belligerent traits and prowess in local forms of martial arts. One day young Narayan saw that merchant in his grandmother's garden and hid behind a pile of clothes in his uncle's study. As the evening develops, so does the child's fear and resolution not to reveal himself to his supposed assailant. At last the fear of the dark obscures his other fears and he emerged before his distraught family. In *Swami and Friends* a similar figure emerges to terrorize a substantially older child. The son of the coachman cheated Swami of some money. His pugnacious appearance and possession of a penknife create cold fear in Swami. Like young Narayan, Swami also spent a tension-ridden, terror- filled evening and finds it impossible to articulate his fears.

2.7. Pre-Independence Era

Narayan's observation and brief enlistment in the anti-imperial cause emerge as a theme in *Swami and Friends* as Swami participates in the freedom movement (Ram & Ram 1996: 20). Soon after the out break of the First World War in 1914, Madras experienced an early taste of hostilities. The advent of war brought about a quickening of the freedom movement. Student participation in the freedom movement emerged in *Swami and Friends* as Swami got caught in the political movement. Along with his friend Mani, Swami attends a public meeting in protest against the arrest of a prominent Bombay political leader. Swayed by the speaker's powerful oratory, Swami flings his cap into a Swadeshi

bonfire of foreign goods. In *My Days* Narayan tells about his own brief enlistment in the anti-imperialist cause through his participation in a procession ‘with patriotic songs and slogan shouting. Narayan’s uncle, an anti-politician, took strong exception in his nephew’s political excursion and forbade his further involvement. Swami’s father similarly urges the schoolboy not to get involved (Ram & Ram 1996: 50).

2.8. Grandmother

Ram & Ram (1996: 20) point out that Swami’s granny is the replica of the grandmother whom Narayan remembers from his childhood and who like Narayan’s grandmother Ammani is shown to share her kindness and passion for storytelling. Raised by his grandmother, he formed a special bond with her. In his biography Narayan has repeatedly underscored his debt to his grandmother, describing her as ‘the most abiding influence’ in his childhood (Ram & Ram 1996: 17). From Narayan’s description in *My Days*, Ammani, appears like a traditional South Indian grandmother while manifesting certain special qualities all her own. Narayan recreated Ammani in his *Swami and Friends* from his childhood memory. Swami’s grandmother, notably more aged and frail than the Ammani of Narayan’s childhood, also share her kindness and her passion for story telling. This shows that grandmothers are the sanctuary or refuge, in times of upheaval, crisis or excitement. Swami, while impatient at his grandmother’s moods and limitations, nevertheless find solace in her physical closeness and stories.

2.9. Father

Swami’s father, a lawyer, shares many traits of Krishnaswami Iyer, Narayan’s own father. The fictional father’s character shows a passion for education, strict paternal authority and some other interests like involvement in club activity; these are similar to Narayan’s own

father. Through Swami and his father Narayan illustrate the distance that used to exist in father-son relationship at that time. In his father's presence Swami displays wariness and apprehension. Swami greets his father's departure from home with hope and his presence at home with trepidation. Narayan also had a similar attitude towards his father in his childhood. Later in the novel, Swami's action of running away from home enables Narayan to explore deeper regions of father-son relationship. The caring and love a father feels for his son but is unable to openly express is shown in this novel.

In this novel the attitude and expressions of adult characters like Swami's father, his Granny, the Headmaster of the school and teachers are viewed through the eyes of a child.

Chapter – 3

Journey to Adulthood

The Bachelor of Arts is the story of a young mind gradually moving towards maturity. It illustrates the need of possessing a Bachelor of Arts degree and also portrays the dilemmas associated with it. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts* portrays the failing incongruities hopes and aspirations of the youth standing in the crossroad of life. Chandran, the protagonist of the novel, is struggling for maturity, survival and for psychological and economical independence. The very concept of the gradual growth of a boy and his acquiescence with worldly affairs is nicely depicted with utmost tenderness.

It is the story of Swami, now named Chandran, attending college and finding a place for himself in the world. The novel traces Chandran's college days, his unfortunate love story, his sanyasi life (ascetic life) and his finding a way to earn a living. Set against the backdrop of pre-independence India it captures the spirit of Indians at the even of the final days of the freedom struggle and also during the east-west clash.

3.1. *The Bachelor of Arts*

It is the story of a young guy name Chandran, who resembles a typical Indian upper middle class youth of the pre-independence era. Chandran is in his last year of collage and enjoying life when the novel opens. After completing his bachelor of arts in history he faces a dilemma about his future occupation. Everybody starts to give him advice on his future profession but he declines all offers and decides to wait a year to go to England for

further studies. He spends his times at home acquiring knowledge. His life changes when he sees a girl called Malathi in town and falls in love with her at first glance. He faces many social obstacles when he wants to marry her and is finally rejected by her parents because their horoscopes do not match. Distraught and heart broken, Chandran decided to visit his uncle in Madras. But there he slips away from his uncle's home. Later, he realizes the foolishness of running away from loved ones. He comes back to Malgudi and became responsible and starts his own business. At the end of the novel he gets married according to the wishes of his parents and fall in love with his new bride, Susila.

3.2.Father

Ram & Ram (1996) says that Chandran's relationship with his father mirrors Narayan's own experience with his father at that age. While the father is still a figure of authority, the son even fully acquires self-assurance. The grown up son is shown trying to discard his childhood apprehension of his father as he consults him on a range of issues, from his exam revision schedule to his choice of bride. Narayan conveys the tenderness of a father's feeling for his son.

3.3. Material Uncle

According to Mishra (2004:89) the character of Kailash in *The Bachelor of Arts* is molded on Narayan's maternal uncle who was a heavy drinker of wine. He was Narayan's mother's younger brother and was known as junior. He was an automobile salesman and occasionally helped his sister financially. He used to drink wine a lot every evening and behaved wildly. In *My Days* Narayan says that his uncle approaches to other human being, his aggressive talk wherever he went, his dash and recklessness and his fondness for alcohol in every form all through the day had provided him with insight in human

behavior. Chandran met Kailash while he was in Madras, trying to cope with his grief of losing his first love.

3.4. Friend

Chandran's friend Ramu is like Narayan's collage friend Ramachandra Rao (Ramu). Both the fictional and original Ramu had a gift for laughter. With Ramu, Narayan used to attend classes, go to the cinema, smoke, drink afternoon coffee and take long walks. Chandran's friend Ramu was not only his classmate but also his neighbor. Ramu was Chandran's companion in every activity. They used to go to the cinema late at night. Later in the novel Ramu moved to Bombay for his job and lost contact with Chandran.

3.5. Collage Life

In this novel Narayan portrays college life through the eyes of Chandran, a final year student of history and introduces many characters with new name from his own past (Ram & Ram, 1996). In his fictional account of college life, Narayan introduces, behind new names, several figure from his own experience. Professor Rollo becomes Professor Brown, a distinguished scholar, whose drama classes are acclaimed and who is endowed with a first rate sense of humor. Professor Raghavachari is the combination of Narayan's history professor Krishna and Venkateswara Lyre. Like them Professor Raghavachari was also a formidable teacher in classes and used to wear a turban and long black clock.

Narayan fails in his entrance exam and spends one year at home, reading and taking long walks. This life style was replicated in *The Bachelor of Arts*, as Chandran after completing his B.A. spent a year in similar fashion. Unlike the hero, Narayan did not graduate in his first attempt. He failed his history exam and was required to re-sit the exam, which left him free to travel.

Narayan has to confront the question of his future like Chandran after he passed the exam. There were many suggestions that he pursue law or the career of a minor civil servant. For a while he considers obtaining a M.A. degree in English literature and became a tutor in English in Maharaja's collage. In *The Bachelor of Arts* Chandran experience similar feeling after his graduation. In the novel Chandran decide to wait a year and go to England for further studies.

3.6. First Love

Narayan fell in love many times. He has projected the feelings of young love through Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*. Narayan once fall in love with a girl in a green sari who lived in a neighboring street. Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* also falls in love with a girl in a green sari.

"One evening he came to the river, and was loafing along it, when he saw a girl about fifteen years old, playing with her younger sister on the sands."

(P.54)

He meets her in the bank of the river, and thinks her to be the most beautiful girl in the world. He starts daydreaming about her. After inquiring from his friend Mohan, he comes to know that the girl is named Malathi, is of marriageable age and also belong to the same caste as his own. Narayan met his wife Rajam in similar fashion. One day he saw a fifteen years old girl drawing water from the street tap and immediately fell in love with her. Like Chandran he was also unable to talk to her. Rajam, like Malathi, did not notice the boy passing and re-passing in front of her to get attention.

3.7. Marriage Customs

Narayan portrays a truthful picture of the conventions of the marriage customs followed at the time. The bride and groom then did not have any say in their marriage. At that time love marriage was very rare. A girl had to be of appropriate age which means that she should be younger than fifteen years of age. If a girl was unmarried till sixteen it was considered that there was something wrong with her. Rajam was fifteen years old when Narayan married her. Chandran's mother highly objects to her son's marriage when she learns that the bride is sixteen year old.

Marrying out of caste was not acceptable then. Both the bride and groom has to belong to the same caste, community etc. A marriage would not be tolerated even between sub sects of the same caste. Chandran knew that his father would through him out if he tried to marry out of caste. The marriage proposal always comes from the bride's parents, anything contrary was not accepted by society. Narayan diverted from this custom when he took the bold step of declaring his feeling for Rajam to his future father in law. Then came the dowry arrangements where the bride's parents had to appease the groom's family.

The horoscopes are another crucial matter in marriage, as they had to match perfectly. The bride and groom's future happiness depends upon it. Narayan's own difficulty with the incompatibility of horoscopes while marring Rajam is similar to the experience of Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* (Ram & Ram, 1996). Like Chandran, Narayan's father also has no faith in horoscopes but for social purpose horoscopes are exchanged and 'Mars is found to occupy the Seventh House of the prospective bridegroom's life document' (Ram & Ram, 1996). This means that according to the astrologers life would be threatening for the bride unless her horoscope has similar flaw.

The depression Narayan faces when difficulties with the horoscope are shown through Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*. During this uncertain time Narayan indulged in a certain amount of self-dramatization and did all that one does when 'crossed in helpless love'. He loses interest in people and food, sulks and immerses himself in gloom and avoided his friends. He expresses his feeling by witting melodramatic and highly philosophical play examining the idea of love, resignation and death. Narayan was able to overcome the astrological hurdle and marry Rajam in Coimbatore on July 1, 1934. Narayan describes the marriage celebration that ...

....celebrated with all the pomp, show, festivity, exchange of gifts, and the over crowding, that my parents desire and expected.

(Narayan, 1973: 106)

Chandran was unable to overcome the astrological hurdle and was not able to marry Malathi. In a moment of desperation, misery and anger at his parents and the system, he decides to renounce everything and become a sanyasi and spend an ascetic life. For him becoming a sanyasi was a form of suicide. He soon realizes that living on other's charity was fraud. He feels ashamed of himself and decides to come home again and assume the responsibilities of the adult world.

3.8. Journalism

In *The Bachelor of Arts* Narayan has described his experience of his career as a journalist through Mohan, a poet friend of Chandran. Narayan's brief experience from 1934-35 as a Maysor city reporter for a small newspaper *The Justice* and its effect and his frustration is

clearly revealed in the process. Narayan's financial obligations had forced him to take up a career as a journalist. The daily routine of a city reporter left little time for creative writing. Mohan becomes the Malgudi correspondent of a Madras-based newspaper, *The Daily Messenger* to support himself. Much of his days are spent news hunting, which left little time for his literary work. Later, this exposure to various situations provided him with material for his fiction. Like Narayan his remuneration is three and a half rupees per column of twenty-one inches. In practice, the process of pruning reduces this to paltry sums. Narayan's columns were also heavily pruned and his copy was occasionally rejected. He was also indifferent of the matter of editorial policy like Mohan. Unlike Narayan, Mohan eventually prospers in his profession. *The Daily Messenger's* circulation soars, unlike that of *The Justice*. Under new management it become a prosperous paper, accepts more columns from Mohan and even publishes his poems in the weekly magazine. Narayan sent his resignation the day he knows that his first novel was going to be published. Narayan has given his reason for resignation through Mohan.

I took up this work as a stop-gap till I should get a footing in the literary world.....Reporting has swallowed me up..... I hardly have any inclination to write a single line of poetry.

(P.153)

Mohan is a bachelor who lives alone in a mess, unlike Narayan who had a joint family to support and a wife to take care of.

3.9. Young Author

In college Narayan started reading in earnest the classics of English literature to enrich his writing. He read out his own pieces to a close band of friends, and after priming the

audience with coffee and snacks, asked for their opinion. The friends usually had a good opinion about his work as Narayan provided them with coffee and snacks. He kept on writing and submitting and thought that his work 'was going to add to the world's literary treasure' (Narayan, 1973:63). A few lyrical pieces went to publishers in England, and was returned in due or undue time, along with "...cold, callous rejection slips, impersonal and mocking". The life of an amateur writer in college is portrayed through Mohan in *The Bachelor of Arts*. Chandran's friend Mohan is a poet who is trying to publish his work. Though his works have been rejected by publishers all around the world, he is still spending 'a fortune in postage' in the hope that somebody would recognize his talent and publish his work. Like Narayan, writing is his passion. It is as important to him as breathing. He also read his poems to his friends and makes them 'suffer in the cause of poetry'.

Ram & Ram (1996:173) says that *The Bachelor of Arts* is called an autobiographical novel although all the experiences of Chandran, the hero of the novel, do not match Narayan's life. They call it an autobiographical novel because Narayan sketched this novel based on autobiographical material.

Chapter – 4

The Fickleness of Fate

The story of *The English Teacher* is based on Narayan's own marriage and his suffering after the early death of his young wife Rajam (Sahai, 2006). Ram & Ram (1996:229) feel that writing *The English Teacher* helped Narayan to reconcile himself with his great personal loss. Narayan (1974) says about this novel:

‘I have describedmy experience of her sickness and death in *The English Teacher*...so fully that I..... cannot, go over it again. *The English Teacher* is autobiographical in content, very little part of it being fictional.’
(Narayan, 1974:129)

Krishna, the central character in *The English Teacher*, undertakes an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual journey during the course of the novel. At the start of the novel he is an English teacher, living and teaching at the same college where he was once a pupil, and at the end we see him resigning his post, beginning work at a nursery school, and learning to communicate psychically with his dead wife. The journey takes him from a lifestyle which he found unsatisfactory to finding a set of values and a way of life that he feels he can believe in wholly.

4.1. *The English Teacher*

Krishna is an English lecturer at the Albert Mission College. He lives in the college hostel, while his wife and daughter live some distance away with his in-laws. When his daughter is seven month old, he rents a small house where his wife, Susila, and their child, Leela,

move in with him. Life suddenly changes for Krishna as he becomes responsible for his wife and daughter's happiness and learns to take care of his family. Life continues for Krishna with its happy domesticity and misunderstanding in marital bliss. They decide after a while to buy their own house. The day they go out in search of a new house, Susila contracts typhoid after visiting a dirty lavatory. Susila suffer for many days and eventually dies. Throughout the entire course of her illness, Krishna constantly tries to keep an optimistic view about Susila's illness, keeping his hopes up by thinking that her illness would soon be cured. After Susila's death life becomes devoid of meaning for Krishna. He thinks of committing suicide but cannot for the sake of his daughter, Leela. One day he receives a letter from a stranger who indicates that Susila has been in contact with him and that she wants to communicate with Krishna. He communicates with his dead wife with the help of the stranger acting as a medium. Eventually he learns to communicate with her on his own. After his daughter goes away to live with her grandparents he resigns from his post as a lecturer and begins work at a nursery school, thus finding inner peace and meaning of life.

4.2. Family Life

Narayan, like Krishna in *The English Teacher*, had an exceptionally happy marriage. He was a devoted husband to his wife Rajam and a caring father to his daughter Hema. Narayan used to feel anxious whenever they were separated from him and felt guilt for neglecting them. At this time Narayan was having difficulty establishing himself as a full-time author and suffering financially. His happy family life helped him to endure this period of despondency and low spirits.

Narayan was deeply in love with his wife Rajam. Though they had their arguments, it was clear that they really cared for each other. In *The English Teacher* Krishna has a similar relationship with his wife. Unlike Narayan, Krishna was financially secure and was happy in his profession as a lecturer of English. Their arguments centered on a clock and their suffering and patch ups shows that it is a normal aspect of married life.

4.3. Father-Daughter Relationship

Narayan was a devoted father to his daughter Hema. He has portrayed his love for his daughter through Krishna's relationship with Leela. Krishna is always anxious for the well-being of his daughter. This is evident in the scene when he tells his wife to be careful of the baby while she is getting off the train. He is very conscious about the eating habits of his daughter, as he is reluctant to buy her outside food. After returning from college Krishna spends a lot of time with her and after the death of his wife she becomes his only reason for living. Narayan was always anxious about his daughter's well being as well. When in January 1939 Rajam went to visit her parents in Coimbatore by train, their daughter Hema had slight fever. Anxious for his daughter's well being, Narayan requested his wife not to go to Coimbatore but to return home with him.

4.4. Fact become Fiction

In *The English Teacher* Narayan has described a scene in a railway station which was taken from his own life. In early March of 1939, Rajam and Hema were travelling to Mysore by train. Narayan went to meet them in Mysore station. His feeling is memorably evoked in *The English Teacher* through Krishna.

..... I was pacing the little Malgudi railway station in great agitation. I had never known such suspense before. I saw her sitting serenely in her sit..... I gazed at my wife..... her fresh face.... (P.30)

The anxiety and apprehension Krishna experiences while waiting for his family is similar to Narayan's own feelings. The love and tenderness of a husband after long separation is conveyed beautifully. Narayan has introduced some changes from reality in the novel. For Susila it was transfer of residence from village, whereas Rajam was returning home from visiting her parents. Unlike Rajam, Susila was accompanied by her father. The child Leela, daughter of the protagonist, is clearly younger than Narayan's daughter Hema in early 1939. Krishna's family returns home in a Victoria, a low light four-wheeled carriage which has seat for two passengers, whereas Narayan engaged a two-wheeled Tonga.

Narayan's father-in-law wanted to buy his daughter a house, so in mid-1939 Narayan went house-hunting with Rajam. He provides a blow-by-blow account of this experience in *The English Teacher*. In the novel Krishna's father and father-in-law both want to advance the money so the couple could build or buy their own house in Malgudi. Krishna and Susila one day go house-hunting and after seeing some houses find the one they like. After seeing its interior and outside beauty, Susila alone goes to explore the house. When she does not return after a long time Krishna goes to find her. He finds her trapped inside a filthy lavatory which had a freshly painted door. This incident affected Susila greatly, especially because a fly had set on her lips. Narayan's wife Rajam went through a similar experience. She also got trapped inside a filthy lavatory and was attacked by a fly on her lip. Like Susila, Rajam also used to constantly rub her lip to brush away the loathsome fly. According to her brother-in-law Laxman, Rajam could never get rid of the fact that there was something on her lips. In Narayan's mind the incident with the fly is responsible for Rajam's typhoid. Rajam, like Susila in the novel, fell ill the same evening.

In the novel Krishna's colleague Sastri, a logic teacher and entrepreneur, shows them the houses in the new extension of town. Narayan enlisted the help of Sastri to find them a house. Sastri was an assistant professor in the Psychology Department of Maharaja's college and locating houses for friends and acquaintances was his hobby.

4.5. Illness in Family

In *The English Teacher* Krishna's, wife Susila dies from typhoid just like Narayan's wife Rajam. Through Krishna's actions Narayan portrays how he took care of his wife at that time and the excruciating agony he suffered and the precautions he had taken for his daughter's safety (Ram & Ram, 1996). Narayan was not totally convinced that the fly was the carrier of the disease which took his wife Rajam's life. In the novel he has hinted that Susila may have already been ill prior to the fly incident. However, psychologically the incident had a great impact on Rajam's life, as it may have aggravated her early symptoms.

In the novel Susila is feeling tired and has a flushed face before the couple can reach the new extension of the town to choose a house. Immediately after her encounter with the fly, Susila takes to bed and shows early symptoms of typhoid. The couple does not immediately realize the seriousness of the situation. As Susila has an unpleasant encounter with a doctor previously, they did not instantly consult a doctor. The old cook has an inclination that it is not a passing indisposition and urges Krishna to immediately call a doctor. The doctor observes the symptoms and diagnoses the disease as Malaria. He prescribes medication, although Susila's condition does not show any improvement. On the contrary the treatment seems to agitate her heart and makes her feel suffocated. The doctor considers it the side effect of anti-malarial pills. Later, he conducts a blood test to clear his own doubt about the disease. The test proves that it is not malaria but typhoid.

The news that his wife is suffering from typhoid sends Krishna into panic as it is more dreadful than malaria but the doctor reassures him. Susila becomes depressed after the new diagnosis and asks Krishna to write to her parents. Aware of the infectious character of the disease she urges her husband to be careful and to keep the child away from the sick room. Krishna transforms his wife's room into a sick ward and starts looking after her round the clock. He takes precautionary measure to protect himself by washing his hand with disinfectant before leaving the sick room. He takes a bath and changes his clothes before going to spend time with his daughter. In real life Narayan had also taken such steps and was vaccinated against typhoid. Like Narayan Krishna used separate sets of clothes in the sick room and outside and took baths after attending his wife. Before spending time with his daughter at night he thoroughly disinfected himself and took all these precautionary measures.

In *The English Teacher* Susila's parents come and help Krishna take care of their daughter throughout her illness. In real life Rajam's parents came after learning about their daughter's illness but left after a while and returned only when her condition deteriorated. Narayan arranged for a professional nurse to be with Rajan at night (Ram & Ram 1996), whereas in the novel Susila's father takes care of her at night.

The anxiety and helplessness which Narayan endured at this time is similar to Krishna in *The English Teacher*. Relatives and friends constantly reassured him that typhoid has not dangerous and could be overcome with careful nursing. Krishna's only satisfaction is being close to his wife and taking care of her in her illness. This constant contact creates a close bond between the husband and wife, and the patient and nurse.

There is a poem in the novel which Krishna writes when his wife Susila's condition deteriorates and he does everything to make her well. It becomes a battle against fate to cure his wife. He is told to apply ice to bring the fever down. Reducing the fever becomes necessary to save Susila's life.

The great fight goes on
.....
But so far it is not the fever which cools,
But Ice that melts.
(P.86)

In the novel Susila's mother brings an exorcist to banish the evil eye to get her daughter well; though Krishna does not forbid the proceeding, he is infuriated by it. This incident is pure fiction. Rajam's parents were modern-minded and would not have entertained such ideas. In the novel Krishna is visited by his friend Sastri to know his decision about purchasing the house the couple liked. In reality the project of buying a house was simply forgotten.

4.6. Death of Beloved

In spite of constant care and medicine the condition of the patient worsens. Despite her husband's best efforts Susila in *The English Teacher* pass away. Her husband Krishna is devastated by his beloved wife's death. In reality Narayan's care and love could not save Rajam. She died around the midnight of Tuesday, June 6, 1939. The atmosphere and feeling of that night was so painful for Narayan that he was unable to recount it in his autobiography. Narayan later told Susan Ram and N. Ram, his biographers, that he has already described the situation in *The English Teacher* in the form of an excerpt from Krishna's diary. Narayan provided Susan Ram and N. Ram with a number of handwritten

sheets where he had written down a strikingly objective account of the events following Rajam's death.

The fictional account of Susila's death and the real one of Rajam's are so similar that it becomes difficult to separate reality from fiction. According to Hindu religion the dead body has to be laid out on the floor, on Mother Earth. The relative's keeps vigil throughout the night but their fatigued body gradually sinks into deep sleep. In the morning they sent for the Purohit, the household priest, and the corpse bearer. In Narayan's personal account or in his autobiography there is no description of the dead body and cremation. In *The English Teacher* he has relived the moment and completes his account of the day. The most moving part of Narayan's account is when he is asked to take off the *thali*, to remove the gold beads in it and then retie it. It reminds him of his wedding day and makes him realize that within a few moments a fire is going to consume his beloved wife. There is no mention of this incident in the novel.

Like Krishna, Narayan also burnt the letters Rajam wrote to him between 1934 and early 1939. He did this in a fit of rage against fate shortly before Rajam's death. He says in *The English Teacher*:

‘Let life do its worst, this is my answer. Every shred of memory will be destroyed, I will avoid torment thus...

(P.117)

4.7. Hema's loss and adjustment

Narayan's daughter Hema, like Leela, the protagonist's daughter, was kept away from the death scene. Hema was sent to the zoo wearing 'her green velvet coat, bright and sparkling' like Leela. The resilient nature of children is shown when Leela does not ask about her mother and gets used to life without her mother's presence. The door of the room

where Rajam, Narayan's wife, spent her last days is closed permanently. When the child asks question regarding this she is told that her mother had been taken to the hospital. This manner of bluffing a child from finding the truth about her mother's death is described in the novel. When Leela says confidently to her father that she has looked at the empty room, she is told that her mother is in the hospital and will be back when she is well. Neither Narayan nor his family can recall when Hema learnt about her mother's death. Laxman, Narayan's brother, recalls that Hema told the neighbors, a few days after Rajam's death that her mother had died although she never told her family. Rajam's death created a strong bond between father and daughter. As shown in the novel, tending to his daughter's needs and being with her became the focal point of Krishna's life. At the end of the novel Krishna sends his daughter Leela to his parent's house to live permanently, whereas in real life Narayan never parted from his daughter Hema. He went to visit his sister in Madras for a while after Rajam's death but he took his daughter along with him. Hema was mostly looked after by Narayan's sister-in-law and his mother but he was expected to be home by his daughter at nine in the evening.

4.8. Dark Year

After Rajam's death Narayan suffered a period of melancholy and except his daughter he lost all interest in life. It devastated him so much that it seemed to banish his creativity. The advice to remarry from friends and relatives after the bereavement was described in the novel and used to infuriate him. As shown in the novel, after a while Narayan began to accept condolence and sympathy with 'professional casualness'.

After Rajam's death Narayan tried to communicate with her spirit through the medium of automatic writing just like Krishna does in *The English Teacher* (Ram & Ram 1996).

Krishna's communication with the spirit of his wife helps him to come to terms with her death and like Narayan he shows his love for his wife, his faith and trusts that she is with him even after her death (Sahai, 2006). Unlike Krishna in the novel, Narayan was introduced to the medium by a distant cousin. The medium deliberately used to sit with his wife in a dimly lit room once a week for half an hour. Narayan was invited to join them as he had recently lost his wife. From the first day Narayan felt Rajam's presence and he never questioned his belief that they are together even after death. This communication helped Narayan to move on in life. In the novel Krishna was sought after by the medium and he constantly asked questions to verify Susila's presence whereas Narayan never felt that need. At the end of the novel Krishna resigns his job. He is able to communicate with his wife on his own just like Narayan.

Ram & Ram (1996) think that through *The English Teacher* Narayan wanted to achieve 'immortality' for his life with Rajam. Narayan's loyalty and love for his wife is such that it outlived her and proved lifelong. This novel is based on reality, and though Narayan has introduced certain changes it almost looks like an autobiography.

Chapter-5

Conclusion

Art is the reflection of life. The experience of an artist is often reflected in his art. To understand the underling meaning of art we need a deeper understanding of the artist. If we observe the greatest artists of the world, we will find that their subject was based on reality, that is to say, the life they have observed around them. Art achieves timelessness when it touches people's emotions.

Literature is a form of art. These incidents which affect writers most usually find expression in their writing. Narayan has repeatedly talked about horoscopes in his novels because he felt they had a great impact on his life. Narayan always write about the world around him, about which he has full knowledge. He shows the harsh realities of life. In fiction we mostly expect a happy ending but real life is tough. The death of Narayan's wife at a young age proves this to be the case.

Narayan describes his childhood with its moments of happiness and fear in *Swami and Friends*. The irrational fear of the dark and the unknown is faced by every boy in adolescence. Children equipped with improvised bats and wickets playing cricket like Swami or football like Narayan is a common sight in the street of India. Though Narayan has taken incidents from his own childhood, *Swami and Friends* tells the story of every Indian boy. The aversion towards following rules and the desire to run away from home to avoid punishment is common among boys at this age.

In *The Bachelor of Arts* Narayan shows the gradual transformation of a carefree young student to a mature young man. The harsh reality of life and hardships help to mature a youth to face the demands of adult existence. The experience of first love and the devastation of loss is shown through Chandran. It is the story of every person who has ever experienced love. The universal feeling of agony when crossed in helpless love, which Narayan himself has felt, is shown in this novel. The selfishness of youth in love, in thinking only about their happiness or sorrow is shown as Chandran runs away from home to become a sanyasi without informing anyone.

The story of *The English Teacher* proves that people are ruled by destiny. Nowadays people do not believe in astrology. The death of Narayan's wife which was previously predicted by astrologers, make people question their conviction. In *The English Teacher* Narayan has shown how horoscopes can predict the future. The pain Narayan suffered after his wife's unexpected death is described in this novel. The love Narayan felt for his wife is shown clearly in *The English Teacher*.

Writers get inspiration for their writing from the world around them. They cannot produce great writing based on situations about which they have no knowledge. Not every piece of writing is autobiographical. The incident or people which have had impact on the author's lives are expressed through their works. Writing based on reality gives the reader a sense of authenticity, it increases their knowledge about different cultures and societies. It proves that reality is greater than fiction.

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