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THE CONCEPT OF RENUNCIATION OR SANYASA IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF R.K. NARAYAN

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R. K. Narayan is one of the three important Indian novelists in English. Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao are the other two important novelists. He is the only writer who was included in *The Writers and Their Workshop* by The British Council. R.K. Narayan has Indianised the novel, which is essentially Western art form. According to William Walsh R.K. Narayan's "Writing is a distinctive blend of Western technique and Eastern material, and he has succeeded in a remarkable way in making an Indian sensibility at home in English art". (Walsh 54) Major part of his fiction is autobiographical and he gives his life experiences in his fiction. He writes about the middle class particularly South Indian middle class, his own class, because he is familiar with the ways, habits and aspirations of the middle class and so he limits himself to this middle class. In his fiction, Malgudi plays a major role and it is a live character. Millions of English readers have flocked to since 1935. Whether it is a novel or a short story, the setting is same Malgudi. As William Walsh says, "The Malgudi of his novelist's life, becomes an intense and brilliant image of India itself. Whatever happens in India happens in Malgudi, and whatever happens in Malgudi happens everywhere". (Walsh 56) It is the same pace of life, same locale and topography without monotony. This is the result of his great craftsmanship.

There are traces of Indian philosophy, thought and sentiment in his fiction. Narayan has high creative power. It is because of this creative and imaginative insight, that he described Indian life and the Indian people, culture and traditions with a rare detachment without ever trying to moralize, or give his personal views.

Varnasrama Dharma is one of the basic principles of Hinduism. It is a peculiar characteristic feature of Hinduism. The word *Varnasrama* is a combination of *Varnas* and *Asramas*. The word *Varnas* tells the meaning of social origin of the society that is the origin of four classes in a society. The word *Asramas* or Stages tells the meaning of spiritual order of life in a *Vedic* society. The four *Asramas* or Stages are *Brahmacharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa*. The *Varnasrama Dharma* system is progressive detachment from material enjoyment. It gives discipline to a man in the society. The ultimate goal of the *Varnasrama Dharma* system is Bliss or Self- Realisation. According to *Varnasrama Dharmas* the human life is divided into four parts – the first part is *Brahmacharya* or Bachelorhood (Student Life), the second is *Grihastha* or Householder (Married Life), the third *Vanaprastha* or Detachment (Retired Life) and the fourth part is *Sanyasa* or Self- Realisation (renounced Life).

Sanyasa Ashram is the last and most important of Varnashrama dharmas. There are three novels on this concept written by R. K. Narayan i.e. *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The Guide* and *A Tiger for Malgudi*. The purpose of this paper is to examine in which of the novels the concept of varnashrama dharma is elaborated and strongly expressed.

The novel, *The Bachelor of Arts* intends to show the bachelor life of Chandran and his false love, attractions and reality. The theme of the novel is education of a young man. Chandran's education completes at college, at home and in the world at large. He perfects himself gradually after a series of incidents in his life and settles as a good natured young man in the society. His life as a college student is heroic and life out of college, falling in love is typical of any bachelor. He wants to get married to his beloved, Malathi, irrespective of the tradition. However, the horoscopes do not tally and the marriage does not take place. For this he is extremely frustrated and dejected and falls ill. He does not revolt against his elders because of the principles he learned from his respectable family. Out of grief he goes to Madras for a change to his uncle's house. But he goes to a hotel and stays a day without any particular intention in his mind. As a principled man he is free from bad habits. Even when provoked by a new friend to have a drink or visit a prostitute house, he very tactfully slips out and does not yield to temptation. That night he spent on the footpath, and by the morning he decides to become a Sanyasi, having donned the garb of *Sanyasi*, Chandran wanders aimlessly through the countryside.

Shelterless, foodless and strengthless is Chandran in the present condition. This is a perfect appearance for him now to play the role of a *Sanyasi*. Chandran spends eight months as a *sanyasi*, here he does some self-introspection and



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comes to a conclusion that what he believes as renunciation is not renunciation at all. In other words, it may be another form of suicide for which he does not dare to commit. He avoids suicide because of the social stigma attached to it. Further, he lacks the barest physical courage for resorting to it. He was a sanyasi because it pleases him to mortify his flesh. So, Chandran realises that it is his infatuation for Malathi which brought him to this ignoble position. He does not deceive any one additionally. The simplicity and innocence of the village folk touches his heart and makes him realise his self-deception. In other way he is deceiving and exploiting others too. He has become a cheat and now he hates his hypocrisy. All this is just because of Malathi and his love for her. After this retrospection he comes out of his love for Malathi. He realises that he stooped down to this stage due to his love towards Malathi. This thought in him makes him angrier. Out of a self-analysis and all foolish things he is doing, Chandran decides to leave the village and also the role of *Sanyasi*, and returns to Malgudi. Only then he realises how much his parents love and worry about him due to his disappearance. His illusions regarding love and marriage have been shattered. Thus step by step his eyes are opened to truth and from a raw romantic he matures into a realist. The remaining gap in his life is also filled when he finds to his pleasant surprise that there can be other girls as divine as Malathi, and the moment he sees Susila, whose horoscope has already matched his, he madly falls in love with her and all his sad memories of Malathi are wiped off in his new found joy. Here ends the story of Chandran, *The Bachelor of Arts*.

The important novel by R. K. Narayan on the same concept of Sanyasa is the Sahitya Academy Award winning novel, *The Guide*, which is published in 1958. The protagonist, Raju, is portrayed through the various roles he assumes throughout his life. His character continually adapts to shifting circumstances, taking on new identities as situations demand. Yet, a subtle but consistent thread runs through his journey—the instinct to guide others in their personal and social dilemmas. This underlying trait forms the core of the novel, which is why Narayan aptly titles it *The Guide*. Raju is, in every sense, the guide—both to others and, paradoxically, a failed guide to himself. The story begins with the introduction of the railways to Malgudi, which brings a steady flow of tourists to the region. Malgudi is described as a picturesque town, surrounded by verdant hills, dense forests, the flowing Saryu River, and ancient ruins lost in time. In this evolving setting, Raju transforms from a modest shopkeeper into a successful tourist guide. His charm, intelligence, and sociable nature earn him both wealth and popularity.

Raju's life takes a pivotal turn when he encounters a young couple, Marco and Rosie, during one of his tours. Marco, a reserved scholar, disapproves of Rosie's love for classical dance, considering it beneath their social stature. In contrast, Raju encourages Rosie to pursue her passion and gradually becomes deeply involved in her life. "Rosie is a woman of strong emotion and passion. She has a passionate ambition of becoming a dancer of name and fame". (Singh 68) He not only supports her artistic ambition but also manipulates her relationship with Marco, deepening the rift between husband and wife.

Eventually, Marco leaves Rosie behind in Malgudi and returns to Madras. Rosie, seeking support, moves into Raju's home, and the two begin living together. Raju becomes her stage manager and uses his marketing skills to establish Rosie as a renowned dancer. However, with success comes arrogance. Raju becomes possessive and begins controlling Rosie, primarily driven by pride and financial greed. His downfall begins when he commits forgery by signing a legal document on Rosie's behalf. Despite her efforts to defend him, Raju is sentenced to two years in prison.

After completing his sentence, Raju avoids returning to Malgudi in disgrace. Instead, he takes shelter in an abandoned temple near the village of Mangal. There, villagers mistake him for a sadhu (holy man), and he gradually assumes the role. Initially playing along for convenience, Raju begins to deliver spiritual advice and help resolve local disputes. Over time, he becomes a respected figure in the community.

Caught in a web of social expectation and newfound faith placed upon him, Raju continues his act. But slowly, this role leads him toward genuine introspection and transformation. Through solitude, contemplation, and the villagers' unwavering faith, Raju attains a state of spiritual awakening. He learns to surrender his ego and desires for the greater good, embracing selflessness. To the villagers, he becomes a Mahatma-like figure. One villager remarks: "If he fasts, there will be rain. Out of his love for us, he is undertaking it. This will surely bring rain and help us." (Narayan, p. 102)



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When a situation arises that a severe drought hits the village, Raju is asked to fast to bring rain, in which Raju is left with no choice but to undertake a fast for rain. He accepts the task, not as an act, but as a real sacrifice. Renouncing even basic necessities, he fasts for twelve days. On the final day, as his strength fades, he says to Velan: "It's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs." (Narayan, p. 247) The novel ends on an ambiguous note—whether it actually rains is left unknown. However, what is certain is Raju's profound internal transformation. From a man of deception and desire, he evolves into a figure of selfless devotion and quiet dignity.

Thus, in R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, Raju's journey is a transformation from a materialistic, manipulative tourist guide to a figure of spiritual significance, potentially achieving sainthood. While he initially exploits the villagers' faith for personal gain, he ultimately experiences a genuine shift in character and purpose. His selflessness in fasting to bring rain to the drought-stricken village suggests a deep spiritual awakening and a move towards a selfless state, akin to a saint.

The most important concept of *Sanyasa* or Self-Realisation appears again in R. K. Narayan's famous novel *A Tiger for Malgudi*. In *A Tiger for Malgudi* R.K. Narayan has portrayed the fourth stage, that of *Sanyasa* and self-realization. In this novel, the hero is Raja, an aged tiger who lives a carefree jungle life until he is chained by the humans. Starting with its cub hood, wild days in the jungle, he becomes a puppet in the hands of the Circus Captain. Later he becomes a hero in a film and works slavishly. He enjoys freedom when he breaks through the film, shooting camp and wanders into the town. Raja subsequently is picked up by a holy man, the master to whom he becomes a true disciple. The Master or *Sanyasi* protects him from a terror – stricken mob and brings about a change in him. He applies powers to save the tiger and transforms it inwardly. R.K. Narayan skilfully projects the *Panchtantra* technique allegorically in the depiction of the fourth and the last stage *Sanyasa* of the *Varnasrama Dharma*. Unlike other novels this novel has a direct flow of philosophical discourse.

A totally transformed form of a human being appears in the role of the Master in *A Tiger for Malgudi*. His profound realism in spirituality is found all through since his appearance at the school. This is the *Sanyasa* stage where the Master possesses some cosmic powers and uses them to transform a tiger. He practiced yoga and is now an enlightened soul because he left his home not out of wrath 'but out of an inner transformation.' He renounced his family and all material possessions one midnight just like '*Siddhartha*'. All the busy life he is leading seems senseless and abruptly leaves everything and everyone intolerably. He realised the ultimate reality of life, shed all his cravings and started living in isolation with meagre food and meditation. The essence of his teachings to the tiger is so practical that one has certainly to arrive at such realistic thoughts. He teaches that a sense of time is not required by a renounced person. Nobody bothers about the present but worries about the past and the future and loses what is existing. The Master is not tempted by his wife's invitation because he has to undergo a lot of hardship to reach this stage of *Sanyasa* and so rejects her. By this time, he has erased his name and identity from his mind completely. He says that one has to worship the Ultimate, i.e., God. He is reluctant to be called '*Swamiji*'. He has gained such a power of taming a wild animal.

In the Introduction of the novel Narayan "recalls the great event of Kumbha Mela which recurs every twelve years at the confluence of the three rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati in Allahabad where he comes across a hermit with his companion tiger. He does not hold the animal on a leash since he claims they were brothers in previous life". (Ramtacke 89) Giving philosophical touch to an animal, a new concept in Indian English Literature is used by Narayan in a convincing manner. It is a novel that shows the transformation of a Tiger and the Master who has already reached the stage of *Sanyasa*. Detachment of the self or ego plays a major role in *Sanyasa* or Self-Realisation. The suffering is equal to a man or a beast if led by the ego. Once it is shed off like the leaves of a tree, it is free from all bondage. This realisation occurs both in the Tiger and the Master. The Master is one who renounces everything and undergoes a complete change of personality. He has freed himself from all possessions and human ties. As M.K. Naik says "A Tiger for Malgudi begins as a simple and rather artless fable; it ends as a profound moral statement". (Naik 21) This stage is achieved first by the Master who leads the Tiger also into it by a beautiful comparison of old age to the extinguished lights before one goes to bed. By conquering his ego, the Tiger transcends the emotions of fear and anger and becomes free from



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the limitations of the physical world. The Master achieved this spiritual knowledge by his own experience of self-realisation whereas the Tiger is led into it by the Master with his power owned in the stage of *Sanyasa*.

Conclusion

R.K. Narayan explores the philosophy of *sannyasa*—or renunciation—in three of his notable novels: *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The Guide*, and *A Tiger for Malgudi*. In the novel "Bachelor of Arts" the main character, Chandran, renounces the world to become a *sanyasi* after a romantic disappointment. This aspect is a significant part of his character development and the novel's exploration of societal norms and personal desires. Whenever his opinion about love changes, he immediately realizes his mistake. He immediately reaches his home like a normal man. That kind of ascetic phase is only for a very short time in his life, but it's not as same as in the case of Raju in *The Guide*. Raju's transformation is deeply rooted in performance and perception. He begins as a reluctant actor in the role of a holy man, delivering sermons and advice based on common sense or borrowed wisdom. However, over time, the act becomes real. The villagers' faith in him and his increasing sense of responsibility start to change him internally. Raju's transformation into a *sadhu* is not entirely spiritual, nor entirely fake—it is layered, ironic, and deeply human. Narayan explores the idea that redemption is possible even for the most flawed individuals. Raju, once a self-serving man, dies a selfless figure, embodying the very ideals he once pretended to represent. While *The Guide* has often been the most discussed in critical circles for its portrayal of transformation and self-realization, it is in *A Tiger for Malgudi* that the theme of *sannyasa* is presented most explicitly and philosophically.

In *A Tiger for Malgudi*, Narayan delves deeply into the concept of renunciation through the character of a tiger, Raja, and his relationship with a saintly yogi. The novel becomes an allegorical reflection on detachment, self-discipline, and spiritual awakening. The yogi, who represents the ideal of a true renunciate, guides the tiger from violence and instinct toward peace and enlightenment. This spiritual journey offers a more direct and profound representation of *sannyasa* than in his earlier works.

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