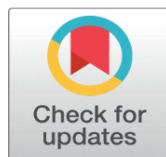
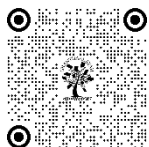


ROLE OF WOMEN IN R. K. NARAYAN'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

R.K. Narayan is the greatest Indian writers in English. He is essentially a writer of middle class characters of Malgudi, a place of his imagination in South India. He has given a wide gallery of both male and female characters in his writings. In each of his novel, there is at least one female character who occupies an important place in the story and Rosie is such a female character in *The Guide*. She represents a modern woman who is educated and ambitions and strives to attain independent economic entity according to her own taste and talent although she has to pay a heavy price for it. The other female characters in the novel are Raju's mother and Velan's sister. Raju's mother represents the conservative and orthodox women who follow tradition and culture. She is a dutiful wife and a loving mother. She advises both Raju and Rosie about what is right and what is wrong. But when no heed is paid to her advice, she leaves her home and goes with her brother to live with him. Velan's sister plays a very brief role but her role is important in making Raju appear as a saint in the novel. This paper is a humble attempt to study this aspect of R.K. Narayan's characterization.

Keywords: The Role of Woman, Fiction, Family, Stories, Novels, General Literature

1. INTRODUCTION

Rasipuram Krishna Swami Ayyar Narayanswami, shortened as R. K. Narayan, He spent his life in the city of Mysore in South India, composing fiction in English and the characteristic features of R.K. Narayan as an Indo - Anglian novelist. Collections, contributions to learned journals and magazines, review of single work in different facets, and filmed versions of some of his works; established him as the most popular of the three founding fathers of the modern Indian English novels. The new mind requires the new voice, and the new voice is discovered by the writer's genius for intimately registering the idiom of his own world. He was a sensitive storyteller of the world he exclusively created and concentrated in fictional South Indian town Malgudi. Malgudi is his Casterbridge. It was a land of fantasy. It was the reverie of relaxed awakening, contemplation of commonness and –a little bit of ivory||. The inhabitants of Malgudi are having kinship with humanity at large and they celebrate the humor and energy of middle class in a simple, unpretentious and witty native flavor. It is followed by the focus of this study which in turn leads to a brief glimpse roll of women in K. Narayans novels. Finally in the scope of this study, the feminine image in R.K. Narayan's novels and the methodology of this study are briefly presented.

2. FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The focus of this study is the roll of women in R.K.Narayan's novels. It is a general view that in the conception and portrayal of women characters, Narayan shows a typical Indianness. Many critics have branded R.K. Narayan's women characters as 'insignificant beings'. As R. K. Narayan does not encourage any open talk about his works, it is quite risky to arrive at any definite conclusions about his characters. He is among the most widely read novelists. The huge qualitative critical response to his literary works contains nearly 900 publications, monographs, and essay. R.K. Narayan, being a reputed social novelist, many may wonder why an analysis on 'Feminine' rather than the human experience. It is true that this study could have been made simpler and easier if it had focused only on 'human experiences', which in turn no doubt would have led to an analysis of 'masculine experiences' alone. For centuries human experiences have been synonymous with 'masculine experiences'. The collective image of humanness has been one sided and incomplete. Women's experiences have interested man only as it has involved himself and he has defined her experiences on the basis of his encounter with the women in both his real life and fantasy life. In a male-chauvinistic society like India, it may be argued that the choice of the women as the subject tends to be restrictive and lopsided, Patriarchy.

3. STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

The personality of typical Indian women is being crushed by the deep rooted dominating nature of the Indian men. Her hands are tied in the name of tradition and culture. She is even forced to feel glorified in the sufferings which are inflicted on her. She continued to be the ever- suffering Sita until very recently. Such women, who are steam rolled and flattened into the family roles are tend to be dehumanized in so far as they are invariably stripped off all the individualising traits of a sentiment being. As in the words of Showri Daniel, the 'female incarnate', has no shape or form: She is everything or nothing. She is fluid. Pour her into any mold she takes it ... Idles and principles lie outside her nature. As she is the void, the hole she becomes a being only in so far as she can be regarded as an object in relation to man who is of course the subject. In the midst of this entire generalization about Indian women our aim in this work is to trace out the steady growth in the outlook of Indian women as perceived by R. K. Narayan in his novels. Due to the Western influence the social, political, economic and cultural aspects of India have undergone a tremendous transformation. Even the most submissive, docile and self sacrificing Indian women have started thinking about their selfhood and identity. The banner ofinsurrection which has already been hoisted in the West has reverberated through the East. Abuse of power cannot continue for long. The random cannot exist for ever. The greed for power that has kept woman down for ages has been rudely shaken. Woman the weaker and the most injured of all is also on the warpath. She is bent upon improving herself without the help of man. She is trying to help herself. The struggle in her life has spread to many fields of society, politics, education, work and the most important of all 'her home'.

4. WOMEN IN INDO-ANGLIAN LITERATURE

Even literature which has been dominated by men until recently has started reflecting her struggle. Women, who has been bound by tradition and culture has started looking at herself in a different angle. There is also a tremendous change in men and their attitude towards women. This change of attitude in both the sexes has found a remarkable place in literature. In the Indo-Anglian literature which was found along with the Western awareness, woman is no longer a symbol of self-pity, submission, retreat and personal regression but a symbol of growth and development. Literature has The Indo-Anglian novels are no longer novels of 'consent' in their treatment of women. They have become novels of 'dissent', as they reflect the change in the general outlook. The change reflects not only the change in the sensibility of the reader but of the writer as well. Indo-Anglian fiction is the inevitable outcome of the Indian exposure to the Western culture and art forms. In the early Indo-Anglian novels women were a far-cry from reality too moralized and too sentimentalised. The writers were unable to grab the reality. But later the demands ofreality pressed the writers. A slow but steady progress was seen in the Indo - Anglian novels of the early twentieth century. As Srinivasa Iyengar points out, in 'The Indian Writing in English, There is an increasing bolder approach to the actualities of life.

5. CHARACTERIZATION OF WOMEN IN R.K. NARAYAN'S NOVELS

- 1) Man-Woman R.K. Narayan's novels dwell upon the changing perceptions of man-woman relationship. In India, marriage is an important social institution. It is the foundation of the family which consists of parents and children. R.K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* is an attempt to rise the position of women in the patriarchal society. It depicts the plight of a traditional Hindu house wife, Savitri. She suffers silently in a dark room. Narayan feels that Indian woman has been relegated to a second place in Indian society.

R.K. Narayan's Malgudi novels present the social values, norms and traditional mores that play a significant role in shaping the lives of people in the Hindu society. Narayan tries to protect the age-old traditions and morals and social values ingrained in the society and exposed to the onslaughts of the west. To him any violation of norms and values amounts to desecration of Hindu tradition. The social custom of marriage is founded on mutual trust and marital fidelity.

In *The Dark Room* Savitri, a docile lady expresses her righteous anger by quitting her husband's house. Ramani, Savitri's husband is infatuated by Shanta Bai, a colleague of his and neglects his wife Savitri. Savitri refuses to be treated as a pet dog or slave and leaves the house. But she is unable to live in isolation and is prepared to return to her disloyal husband.

R.K. Narayan presents the two contrasting women Savitri and Shanta Bai react in different ways to the same situation. Savitri is simple, modest, gentle, loving and obedient. She is traditional and religious in her own way whereas Shanta Bai is flirting, more modern and unconventional in her views and behaviour. She doesn't care for traditional norms. The role of individuality in women is seen in both Savitri and Shanta Bai, but Savitri is unable to live in isolation and is prepared to return to her disloyal husband whereas Shanta Bai is capable of managing without anybody's support. Though Savitri's hopes and frustrations are truthful portrayal of a typical Indian Woman, her utterances echo the revolutionary voice of the rising womanhood. Susila in *The English Teacher* is the major woman character. She is the wife of Krishnan who teaches English Literature in Albert Mission College in Malgudi. The man- woman relationship between Susila and Krishnan is emotionally deep.

- 2) Women and Family, the family in India is a network of relationships among its members. The protagonists are presented against the background of their families and familial relationships. The mainspring of Narayan's fictional art is his abiding, humane and responsible interest in the people, especially the vast majority of the average and the ordinary, and in the limitless possibilities of their lives. Thus every character is given a recognizable identity.

The family forms in itself a little world. It includes husband and wife, parents, children, grand parents and grand children. Narayan makes use of the family sphere and family situations to study human nature and to depict complex inter personal relationships. The family is a chronic element in Narayan's novels. Significance of family for women is more important than for men. In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, Narayan depicts the conflict between good and evil. The novel begins with a detailed account of Nataraj's family and its background. He is the protagonist and also narrator. He lives in his ancestral house with his wife and little son Babu. They lead a contented and happy life. From his childhood Nataraj used to live in a large joint family of five brothers, their wives and children. As long as his grandmother was alive she kept the brothers together. It was my father's old mother who had kept them together, acting as a cohesive element among members of the family.

- 3) New woman Narayan's women characters discover their identity in the Indian middle class society. They possess the toughness, adventurousness and courage to manage their affairs by themselves. They are against the Legacy of orthodoxy and conservatism. R.K. Narayan in his novels *Waiting for the Mahatma* and *The Painter of Signs* defines the concept of new women.

His women are against the orthodox roles and dominate over their male counterparts. They are ambitious and aspire to carve out an independent economic entity according to their talent. Bharati is the main character in the novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*. She is entirely different from other female characters of Narayan's earlier novels. Women like Savitri in *The Dark Room* and Susila in *The English Teacher* are portrayed in a tradition-bound atmosphere of the Indian middle class society. Bharati is a modern and educated woman, a time disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. She is an orphan having lost her father in the 1920 movement. Bapuji named her Bharati, the daughter of India. Another important female character in this novel is Sriram's Granny. She is a lovable, traditional and superstitious old woman. She is sharp tongued and forthright in her opinions like Bharati. Sriram says to her, 'you have the same style of talk as my grandmother'.

- 4) Women in the short stories Narayan portrays different kinds of women characters in his short stories. In his short story "Selvi" he presents Selvi as an oppressed woman. In "Salt and Sawdust", he presents Veena as an ambitious woman. In "The Shelter", he presents the story of a couple in which the wife is an independent woman. In "A Willing Slave", he presents Ayah as a wife who is devoted towards her husband. The short stories "Mother and Son" and "Second Opinion" deal with the relation between a mother and a Son. Narayan presents the concept of motherhood in these short stories.
- 5) Swami and Friends The study of the portrayal of women characters in the novel reveals that the women are depicted as mothers, wives, daughters, daughters-in-law and servant with fixed roles and images. They are domestic exclusively. They cook, maintain the home, serve the husbands and children. They are various dimensions of traditional womankind in India. They are denied individual and independent positions and identity. This marks the bias of the creative sensibility of the author in characterization. It is true that these women are realistic but representation of this reality has the danger of reinforcing the ideal womankind.
- 6) Mr. Sampath, the printer of Malgudi Narayan's this novel was first published in 1949 at London and has been reprinted for nineteen times until 2009. The ideal of human relationship as the theme of Mr. Sampath, The Printer of Malgudi has very skillfully been dealt with in the depiction of the mutual help among four different families. The episodes of old man, Sampath, Srinivas and Ravi are very appealing to the emotions and sentiments. They merge with one another in some scale and manner to create an organic wholeness of the theme. But the depiction of women characters reveals that women are unimportant and irrelevant in establishing such ideals as if values are reserved only for man. No woman character is allowed to grow and occupy the centre of the plot. They are merely mothers, wives, daughters meant for bearing progeny, serving the man through cooking and other domestic chores.
- 7) The financial expert: The Financial Expert focuses mainly on the proverbial theme of reaping what is sown 'in the narrative of Margayya. He starts his career as a facilitator to the villagers for obtaining loans in the cooperative bank and adjusting the loans within the loans. He is embodied by the false self prestige and behaves arrogantly with the secretary of the bank. He changes his work only for the sake of self-respect and indulges in the unethical practice which causes deterioration to him ultimately. He loses all the wealth he has earned through foul means and is brought back to his original status and place.
- 8) Waiting for the Mahatma, It is true that Waiting for the Mahatma is a non-political novel that presents both Sriram and Bharati together just to seek the teachings of love from the Mahatma only superficially. If the novel is read from the women's point of view, the roles assigned to Sriram's Grandmother and Bhatai are that of the traditional and conventional Indian womanhood. They represent the stereotypical obedient, caring, subservient, orthodox and conventional Indian women. R.K.Narayan is governed by 70 patriarchal ideology and values. While he is realistic in portraying the women characters on one hand, he reproduces the age-old Indian conventional women on the other in Waiting for the Mahatma.
- 9) The Painter of Signs: The characterization of Aunt and Daisy is an example of Indian women in two different social sections. The aunt represents the conservative and orthodox Hindu Brahmin woman. As a woman she performs all her duties prescribed by the social system. She maintains the house, brings the grocery from the local shop, cooks food for Raman and visits the temple and narrates the family and her story repeatedly. As a Hindu Brahmin woman, she observes the norms of her caste. She opposes Raman's marriage with Daisy on account this factor only. She is like the granny and Raju's mother in Waiting for the Mahatma and The Guide respectively. In waiting for the 19 Mahatma, the granny leaves for Benares and in The Guide Raju's mother leaves for her parental home as a protest against the inter-caste marriage. Daisy is a village born girl. She is born in a large joint-family setup. Though she escapes from the arranged marriage and reaches Madras city all by herself without money and the basic requirements for the sake of achieving her childhood mission, she ends up as a woman who is seduced by a higher caste man and rejected by the system of the higher caste. With all her merits and accomplishments, she could not move from the identity as an object of beauty and vulnerability.
- 10) Talkative Man Narayan's Talkative Man was first published in 1983. He introduced a new and un-recurrent theme in Talkative Man. Though there are flirts and womanizers in the other novels, he has introduced a character whose intention is not clear in his deserting his wife and flirting with other women. It appears to be a new kind of obsession and infection which one could see only in films. The characterization of Talkative Man is invested with the mythological implication. He is responsible for the stay and his adventures with Girija and it comes to him to

solve this problem. Thus he is alluded to mythological Narada. With regard to the characterization of women in the novel, all the four women Sarasa, Girija, Station Master's wife and Girija's grandmother are treated as stereotypical. They are just puppets in the social system of patriarchy. Though they 37 have different roles in the novel, they are different in the disposition. They are different aspects Indian traditional woman.

- 11) The Guide, R.K.Narayan's The Guide was published in 1958. It is right to state that Narayan's most highly acclaimed and widely read novel has been The Guide. Surely it represents the peak of the author's ability to manage ambiguity and irony, while it introduces a more daring narrative technique and allows for some contemporary satire, as well. The critical examination of the treatment three women characters from feminine point of view reveals some factors that are generated from the male's point of view. The readers and critics of The Guide alike look at the novel keeping Raju at the centre. The irony, ambiguity and satire employed in the characterization Raju do not fail to elevate his image but at the cost of the images of women characters. The characterization of Raju's mother successfully represents the orthodox Hindu womankind and reinforces such an image at the same time. No attempt from the author's side has been made to change this traditional image of a Brahmin mother. The characterization of Rosie is meant to represent and reinforce the Devadasi tradition, woman as an object beauty and sexuality. No change has been made in the characterization of this image of woman. On the other hand she is blamed for all misfortunes Raju experiences. The truth is the other way around; It is Rau who is responsible for the ruin of Rosie's life. The characterization of Velan's sister represents the typical image rustic womankind. These women are the stereo types of the woman in the society. Thus the depiction of women characters in The Guide adheres to the image created and constructed by the foundationalism.
- 12) The man eater of Malgudi, Narayan's The Man Eater of Malgudi was first published in 1961. It is observed that the mythological undertone is prevalent in almost all novels of Narayan. In The Man Eater of Malgudi, he has taken the mythological theme directly. It is also fore-grounded in the discourse of Sastri on Indian myths about Ramayana and Bhasmasura. Lord Vishnu is Natarajan; Mohini is Rangi; and Vasu is Bhasmasura in this narrative. But the study of characterization of women reveals that Narayan has not made to provide any reformation in the creation of characters in this novel. Natarajan's grandmother, mother, aunts, wife, and Rangi are different dimensions of traditional womankind in India. They do not form any integral part of the narrative. They remain at the periphery and fill the structure of Indian society.
- 13) The Vendor of Sweets Narayan's The Vendor of Sweets was first published in 1967. This novel deals with the spiritual evolution in the character of Jagan in the typical Narayan's style. The characterization of a couple of women characters needs to be critically examined in order to evaluate Narayan's treatment of women.
- 14) The world of Nagaraj, Narayan's The World of Nagaraj was published in 1990. Anisha Ali is very right in her observation that The World of Nagaraj has a tight and well-organized plot with integrated characters and incidents. The action is with integrated characters and incidents. The action is counterpoised between Nagaraj and Time. The action is circular in the sense that it ends where it begins. The opening of the novel shows Nagaraj taking pain to be – a man with a mission and the closing of the novel also depicts him working out his way to his mission. The circular action has a climax-anticlimax structure. The characterization of Nagaraj's mother, Charu, Sita and Saroja are four dimensions of the rational Hindu Brahmin womankind. They remain subservient and obedient to the patriarchal norms of their society. Nagaraj's mother belongs to the old generation of Brahmin womankind by her broadmindedness. Charu is possessive in nature towards her husband. Sita is mixture of all traditional qualities and Saroja is traditionally

6. CONCLUSION

In the gallery of women characters portrayed in the novels of R. K. Narayan, we encounter different facets of women. Sometimes they submit themselves to the dominant discourse for substantiation, and sometimes they favour inner corroboration in search of their free selves. It is true that R. K. Narayan conforms to his times and during the period he wrote, there was radical change in the status of women. Moreover, he maintains an objective detachment from his themes and characters. So, it is risky to draw any conclusion from his novels about his point of view and value system. What makes it more difficult is Narayan seldom comments on his works or is generally reluctant to speak about his inner convictions. But however detached he is from his characters, it is possible to draw out conception and portrayal of women characters taking definite shape through his novels. Narayan's concept and understanding of women in the

Indian society has given new dimension to his novels. Including granny, wife or a mother, Narayan also probes into synthesis of traditional and modern women, their strong concept of individuality and uncompromising attitude. His women discover their identity in the Indian middle class society. This study of the different portrayals of women in the novels of R.K.Narayan enables us to say that R. K. Narayan knew the undeniable.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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