

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN R. K. NARAYAN'S *THE DARK ROOM*

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Abstract

The most prevalent Indian writer Rasipuram Krishna Swamy Narayan Iyer, popularly known as R.K. Narayan was born in a South Indian conservative Brahmin family in the Madras Presidency on 10th October 1906. Narayan has covered the lean of human seasons from boyhood to the old age. He has depicted many varieties of characters with different ages and outlook. His characterization covers different levels of age from childhood, adolescent and age. Narayan tried to portray the real south Indian middle class society, their joys, sufferings, particularly of women. Narayan has shown his deep concern for women representing the middle class community. He has written novels in English, which is not the mother tongue of the characters. The approach is very realistic and genuine. Narayan has very light approach towards life which is resembled in many characters of his novels. With his native and fresh style of writing, Narayan has attracted the attentions of many writers like E.M. Foster, Graham Green and William Walsh. He presents his characters very natural with simple thought process which is easily understood by common readers. His characters speak in lucid English language which is easily understood by common readers. This made him easy to connect with south Indian middle class readers. They find themselves in the characters and own them. It's one of the reasons of Narayan's success.

Keywords: Domestic violence, tradition and culture, middle class and domination.

Introduction

Many novels of Narayan are around middle class community, educated and semi-urban issues. Country side women are rarely depicted in his novels. Since all the novels of Narayan take place in the imaginary town "Malgudi" and it is a semi-urban locality, the people of Malgudi are also educated, cultured but innocent. As the time changes Malgudi was also updated with railway station, power facility and educational institutions. Though Narayan is very realistic writer, he did not touch the ugly side of reality. The situations are not very problematic unlike the other contemporary novelist, Mulk Raj Anand, Narayan seldom touched the social problems like domestic violence, caste system, untouchability, feudal domination, dowry

system and other social inequalities. He quoted in an article that the mood of comedy, the sensitivity to atmosphere, the probing of psychological factors, are the necessary ingredients in fiction. Narayan strongly believed that life is illogical and man always tries to bring his fantasies into reality. Women of the society got adjusted to the patriarchal Hindu society and they are unaware that they are losing their rights and freedom. The family and society have tuned women that they have to accept and tolerate all their burdens, just because they are women. The male dominated society imposed them all for many years and they were not strange to them. Woman was always kept in a secondary place losing individuality, stature and strength as shown in Hindu religious books. As the characters are

from middle class community, Narayan tries to craft middle class women out of the old fashioned, who are home makers but uneducated. Narayan also came from educated middle class family but he has broad thinking towards women. Many female characters find maximum space in many novels of Narayan.

The Dark Room:

The Dark Room is the third novel of Narayan. This is a special novel because it tries to up bring the domestic violence and women worries in Indian marital system. This novel was written in 1930. It deals with the contemporary social issues and challenges. The Dark Room was an inspiration by Isben's "A Dolls' House" in which the heroine comes out of the house for self-education. The concept of equality and education for women was a revolutionary concept. Savitri, the protagonist of the novel tries hard for identity and freedom. In 1930, the idea of questioning the family conditions and cultural practices was a big thing. The domination of male in the society and family was high in society. Savitri explains the situation,

"Men are impetuous. One moment they will be all in temper and the next all kindness. Men have to bear many worries and burdens, and you must overlook it if they are sometimes unreasonable."

The above lines tell us the mood and attitude of men of that age. The instability in the mind set of men how they respond due to their worries and burdens. Though men face outside problems, they enjoy certain domestic privileges. The society has given them many duties and rights also. These rights are mainly used to dominate women at home and in society. Ramani, husband of Savitri gets attracted to another woman at the office. Ramani works for the Englandia Insurance Company. Those were the days when men and woman started working out at offices. Obviously the attraction between the opposite genders takes place. According to Indian customs extra marital relationship is considered as sin. If a man and a woman want to have physical relation it must happen only after marriage. That relation was restricted only to wife and husband. The strong ethical and marital system of India taught the same to the society. When Savitri knows about the extra

marital relationship of her husband with she cries,

"Do not touch me, you are dirty, you are impure.

Even if I burn my skin, I cannot cleanse myself of the impurity of your touch".

The physical relation between unmarried couple is considered to be very impure and sin. Savitri, who always bears all the pain in the silence breaks out with her husband and shouts. Savitri tries to control herself and tells him why she becomes like that. A family woman has to give birth to children and nurture them. She has to work for the house and family. She cannot follow trend and fashion. Just like a typical Indian woman, who believes that her whole life is her husband, Savitri jumps into a river. The timely arrival of Mari, a blacksmith and burglar who was crossing the river found Savitri floating on the water. Mari's wife Ponni tries to comfort her. The other choice to Savitri was to go to her parent's house and to live independently. But she doubts coming her bread and butter,

"If I take the train and go to my parents, I shall be living on my husband's earnings. What can I do myself? Unfit to earn a handful of rice except begging. If I had gone to college and studied, I might have become a teacher or something".

The above lines tell us the woman position of financial status. Due to the dependence over the husband, they are forced to survive on their husband's income. In the pre-independence India, women had no financial freedom, no right for education and marriage. RK Narayan shows the contemporary woman problems and tries to find out the traditional and modern thinking of woman. He tries to promote the status of women very consciously. It is a great achievement of RK Narayan's creative thinking that he tried to portray Indian women and then way of life without hurting or damaging the soul of Indian tradition and culture. The typical Indian woman is seen in the character Savitri, when her husband got attracted towards another woman, she tries to check herself and compares with Sanatabai in physical appearance

"What is she like?"

"I am not bad, am I?"

“These strum pets with their power and paint!”

“Has she as clear skin as mine without her paint”?

When a husband is diverted to another lady, an Indian woman feels envious because she could not manage to attract her husband as the other woman does.

Looking at the mirror Savitri says,

“Perhaps I’m not good enough for him”.

“Let me admit my complexion has become rather sooty, and these dark rings under the eyes”.

“I am getting careless about my hair, and braid it any how”.

Instead of finding fault from the husband side Savitri finds fault with herself. That’s how the society has impact on the woman mind set and made her think that the problem and the root cause are taken and blamed herself. At the end of the novel, Savitri decides to give up her life to stop all these social and marital problems. But she gets a very brave idea, why can’t I live and survive on my own. Instead loosing life I can live away from him and lead life. She also thinks off her children who would become orphans, if she dies. The women of 1930s, 1940s, their thinking and the women of 1980s and their thinking can be clearly observed in his novels. The first generation women were very loyal to the old social customs; they strictly followed them without any hesitation and questioning. The second generation women are educated and matured, unlike their parents and grandparents, they are assertive and modern. It was the time the western women started raising their voice for their rights too, but Narayan did not try to bring the transformation in the Indian women abruptly, it was slow and gradual within the limits. The beauty in Indian marriage system is family. When a male and female get married, they make a family. In any society, family is very important and backbone to society. For a strong society, we need strong family system which develops human and social values needed to survive in society. Family system develops relationships, affection and concern among family members. The complete

responsibility shall be led by women in the family. The treatment to women characters is very assertive in his novels. We find almost all women characters as housewives and very few working with own self-image and desire for emancipation. The married women are found giving high respect to age-old traditions and practices. The typical Indian women are orthodox, submissive, docile, meek minded and follow age-old traditional, cultural and religious practices in the male dominated society.

Conclusion:

The women characters are very realistic and very close to reality. The mindset and ideology is apt to the contemporary religious, cultural and social conditions. The impact of rich Indian culture, influence of epics, Indian philosophy and the Hindu Dharma play a vital role in the thinking behaviors and decision making. The Hindu philosophy has made lot of impact on the ideology of Indian woman and in their lifestyle. In every stage of their life the reference of Hindu religious characters are set as an example. The women are traditionally good, carried the reputation of the family and more responsible for good and bad in the society. Responsibility is the main characterization of Indian woman social outlook, following strong believes and having patience is generally made ornaments to woman. The characters of Narayan also have all the above mentioned qualities. The women of the era are found with very good tendencies . The supreme and divine qualities of love, sacrifice and courage are found in the woman characters. Women are not supposed to rise above man and lead them. The contemporary constrains of social and cultural practices are strictly followed by the women. Sufferings and struggles commonly appear in every woman’s personal life and they are meant to bear with them.

Women are made responsible for all social and family circumstances. They never had the feeling that they were equivalent to men. Supremacy of man over woman is very natural and general thing. The trend got same change in the late 70s and 80s. Women have to accept life and society as it comes. R.K. Narayan’s writing style and supports and represents the

same in his novels. Narayan has originally depicted the original tendencies and realistic nature of society, because the characters of Narayan are very original and natural, so they accept and respond to the situations so normally. Imagination is not permitted in his characters. Illusion and revolutionary ideology are not seen in the behaviors of the characters. In his long writing career, Narayan has presented the changes in the society and conditions of women accordingly. They behaved and responded to the contemporary conditions. Narayan never portrayed them responding contrast to the contemporary mindset. He never tried to be a reformer or improver but just presented the conditions of the women as natural as they are without addition or obliteration. Narayan's natural and genuine characterization stuns the readers and takes them to Malgudi. It would have been better if Narayan had brought some awareness or criticism on the contemporary evil practices like domestic violence, dowry system and equality through his characters. But, Narayan showcased the conditions to the readers and constrained himself as a presenter.

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