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Managing Editor

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www.the-criterion.com

criterionejournal@gmail.com

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Woman Empowerment in R. K. Narayan's Novels

Dr. Madhuri Sood

HOD

Dept. of English

Jwalaji Degree College Jwalamukhi.

R.K.Narayan was post colonial writer. Winds of change had already begun in India. With the struggle for freedom being intensified and women taking active part in this truffle on the call of Mahatma Gandhi, the women had left their home not actually in search for the identity as is the trend in late twentieth century but they had bowed to the call of duty towards their country . It was not their search for identity as a woman. They were taking part in struggle for freedom due to the compulsions for the country and the other reforms which followed in the wake were by products of this process. The participation of women in freedom movement brought many changes in social set up and traditional mindset. The women literacy and financial independence followed with other social reforms. Literature of this period mirrors the changes in the social milieu. The prominent Indian English writers e.g.R.K. Narayan Mulk Raj Anand and others portray this changing India in their novels. Their women also reflect this change; if we examine the novels of R.K.Narayan chronologically a pattern evolves. The women characters of R.K.Narayan fall into two categories. One category is that of traditional Indian women who conform to the age old social set up and continue to lead their life according to age old total patriarchal tradition while there is another category of women characters who are educated and who are influenced by western traditions. R. K. Narayan had not much sympathy with the second group of women characters because he wanted a perfect balance in education, empowerment and Traditional values. His novels and his characters reflect the same attitude towards this value system. He sympathizes with the women who are suffering due to strict code of conduct passed by patriarchal conditions and he portrays their conditions with full sympathy. He advocates a change in their condition by bringing forth the insensitive treatment of women at home.

His novel *The Dark Room* is a testimony to this. Here he has full sympathy with Savitri. In the character of Savitri the writer condemns the patriarchal tradition that does not treat women at par with man . The women are treated as second citizens and the male feel no qualms of conscious while doing this. Savitri is not educated she has a great regret that she was not able to get a degree. She wants her daughter to study and achieve a university degree. She knows that her rage about her condition is a useless protest. She has to retire to dark corner of house when she feels agitated due to unsympathetic behaviour of her husband. Her husband is always finding faults with her. Ramani is a domineering husband .whenever Savitri's misery weighs too heavy on her heart she retires to her dark room in the house and keeps sulking there for hours. This dark room symbolizes the dark corner of her mind where she keeps locking continual insults and humiliations received from her husband. This dark room is a witness to her

misery and sufferings. The dark room serves no other purpose except being only objectified symbol for the state of women in patriarchal Indian society. She is punching bag for husband. She tries her level best to win the affection of her husband but he is indifferent towards her. Although he is proud of her beauty and likes to show off. This is clear when he asks her to go with him to see the movie. He considers her a possession. He is proud of her beauty but she has a heart and feeling, is beyond his consideration. When he starts spending his evenings with his colleague one Shanta Bai, Savitri protests but her husband does not take her threat seriously. She protests and tries to commit suicide but is saved by Mari, the village blacksmith. She remains out of her house for the night and comes back in the morning. The husband is so indifferent that he does not even ask her where she had been, he is certain that she has no way out. The following extracts reveal her state of mind.

Afraid of one's father, teachers and everybody in early life, afraid of one's husband, children and neighbors in later life-fear, fray in one's heat till the funeral pyre was lit, and then fear of being sentenced by yama to be held down in a cauldron of boiling oil.[page-116]

What is difference between a prostitute and a married woman? The prostitute changes her men, but a married woman doesn't, that all, but both earn their food and shelter in the same manner. [Page-120]

What a pity! I have three children. My son is just thirteen and knows a lot of things about electricity. My two girls are, reading in school very intelligent creatures, [page158]

If I take the train and go to my parents, I shall feed on my father's pension; if I go back home, I should be living on my husband's earnings, and later on Babu's. What can I do by myself? Unfit to earn a handful of rice except by begging. If I had gone to a college and studied, I might have become a teacher or something. It was very foolish of me not to have gone on with my education. Sumati and Kamala must study up to B.A. And not depend for their salvation on marriage. [Page 119-120]

The above extracts show how his women characters fell about their plight in society. Later in her novel 'The Guide' he goes one step forward where the heroine Rosie does not stop at only making verbal protests. She revolts and establishes extra marital relation with Raju who is a guide. Rosie is pulsating with life a dancer, an artist. Her husband Marco is more interested in statues and archeology; he fails to appreciate her interest in life and art. Raju takes advantage of this disharmony in their conjugal life. When Marco comes to know about her relation with Raju he deserts her. "Don't expect me to go with you. I can't stand the sight of a shake-your interests are morbid. Rosie has distaste for cold, old stone walls". Marco does not like her interest in dance which is clearly indicated in these lines.

At first Rosie is willing to reform herself and she tries to convince Marco but to no avail. Raju praises Rosie and tries to win her love. "I spoke my mind, I praised her dancing. I spoke out my love. What a glorious snake dance. [Page 84]

Rosie starts living with Raju. He leaps her to become a famous dancer Nalini .Rosie is a very talented woman. She is a master of arts in Economics; well versed in dance, a devdasi by birth she has studied the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The two men in her life try to exploit her. Marco is indifferent towards her. He does not care about her feelings and her interests.

While Raju seduces her to gain his personal ends “Plans”, said the sleeper awakening, “what plans?She smiled at this and said “There you are always lying on the mat or holding me in your arms, I have now had good practice. I can manage a show of four hours”. [175] This shows that he has no inclination to establish Rosie as a dancer.

R. K. Narayan is the upholder of traditional values but he questions the restrictions imposed upon women by the society. He does not however favor the western attitude towards life. His Daisy in ‘The Painter of Signs’ has to leave Malgudi towards the end of the novel because she is not accepting modernization within the folds of traditions. Rosie corrects herself towards the end of the novel and is ready to adjust her dancing with the traditional values. Towards the end she does not go to any of the males in her life. She leaves both her husband and lover unlike Savitri in ‘The Dark Room’. She asserts her free choice.“I knew I was growing jealous of her self reliance” (Page-222). Raju feels jealous when he notices her self reliance R. K. Narayan was boot a feminist the accepted sense of the word but he was conscious of status of women in traditional society of India. He comments in his autobiography ‘My Days’.

I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of woman as opposed to man, her constant oppressor; this must have been an early testament of “women’s lib movement. Man assigned her secondary; place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning that she herself began to lose all notions of her independence, her individuality starter and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances. [page119]

Savitri tries to revolt but her revolt is of no use. It is a weak protest. His next novel “waiting for Mahatma’ shows Bharti taking part in struggle for freedom of the country . this novel not only depicts the social change taking place during that period that also rejects the taboo which does not allow women to step outside four walls of the house.

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