

## Portrayal of 'Male Female Relationship' in the Fictions of R.K. Narayan

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### Abstract

He is among the few authors in India who truly take their craft very seriously, working hard to refine their craft and pursuing what can often seem like the impossible goal of technical perfection. R.K. Narayan is unable to fall short of a certain standard of excellence. Narayan observes society in great detail and paints the most realistic portrait possible, one that is tinged with light comedy and subtle irony. His method of approaching the subject is consistently infused with inspiration from the mind. His straightforward approach and genuine explorations are what define his artistic excellence.

**Key words:** Male Female, Relationship, R.K. Narayan

### 1. Introduction

Narayan's early novels examine pre-independence society's customs and mindset from a sociological perspective. *Swami and Friends* emphasizes customs that are in place as well as how the National Movement has affected everyday people. *The Bachelor of Arts* explores both the strange conventional standards of society and the everyday events that occur in a Hindu family in south India. *The Dark Room* highlights the plight of typical housewives and illustrates the typical Indian perspective on family life. Savitri, the heroine, is a symbol of all the oppressed housewives in our society that are taken advantage of at every turn. With an opening motif that parodies the flaws in the current educational system that "makes us (nothing but) idiots, cultural fools, but efficient administrators for all your business and managerial offices," *The English Teacher* narrates a tragic love story about the divine split of two souls. (*The Dark Room* 206).

Narayan's examination of post-independence people's manners and behaviors can be found in the middle novels. According to Graham Greene, "the novels highlight the people's modern desire for wealth" (Greene 8). The tale of Mr. Sampath revolves around a crafty outlaw who, lacking any commensurate skill, seeks to amass vast riches in a very short period of time. "The Financial Expert is an accurate account of village extortion and city fraud and a controlled examining into the motivations of money-making," says

William Walsh. (Walsh 72) Sampath and Margayya both stand in for the modern man who wants to leap to the stars but eventually returns to earth. In *Waiting for Mahatma*, the socioeconomic situation during the National Movement era is presented. It also emphasizes Mahatma Gandhi's influence on the various social classes. The most discussed book, *The Guide*, is praised for "depicting the paradoxes of modern Indian life." (Walsh 114) says William Walsh.

## 2. Literature Survey

**Sinha (1979)** argues that unlike Mulk Raj Anand who is irate, and unlike Raja Rao who is philosophical, R.K. Narayan is not, in his novels, Narayan displays a strong social conscience, but irony obscures this awareness. He stays impartial in his fiction writing by upholding a boundary of conventions. **Iyengar (1996)** describes how he maintains his artistic excellence in spite of a constraint. Novels by Narayan are rife with social awareness of interpersonal relationships. As **Sinha (1979)** correctly notes, "R.K. Narayan is acutely aware of the basic, unavoidable contradictions that confront us in life and the wider world."

**Singh (1977)** elaborates that Narayan acknowledges reality as it stands in front of him. He views society and its advancements with a detached irony and accepts reality without resistance. As he states in *Mr. Sampath*, it seems to him to be "an ineffective and presumptuous occupation to analyze, critique and make an effort to get things right anywhere," so he sees no purpose in trying to correct or criticize things. The main character in Narayan's work depicts everything that goes on in all spheres of society. **Singh (1977)** further describes the craft and subject matter of Narayan's fiction writings: "The male characters in Narayan's works are conscious of political and social shifts, but they remain impartial and do not subscribe to any particular ideology. They only acquire a sense of responsibility and social awareness from Narayan to the extent that it aids in highlighting their humanity." He explores and exposes society's ills, but not for sadistic gratification or to incite readers' disgust. His main goal is to expose the hypocrisy of ambition, pride, and ideals; he does not intend to lead our society in a specific manner, but only to make us aware of it.

**Walsh (1983)** opines that Narayan's novels, which are primarily based on Indian myths, exhibit his metaphysical spirit. William Walsh adds, "we see that Narayan's grasp of reality, his unique perspective on human life, and his unique method of categorizing and arranging human emotion and experience are all influenced by the religious meaning found in Indian myths. Without reservation, Narayan is the embodiment of the unadulterated Hindu spirit."

**Walsh (1983)** further elaborates that in all of his legendary novels, Narayan is impartial, something Raja Rao lacks. The Hindu mythological story of Bhasmasura serves as the

inspiration for *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. *The Vendor of Sweets* centers on Hindu ideas about the four phases of human life and cyclical existence. It draws attention to how tradition and modernity clash in Indian society at the same time. *The Mahabharata* mentions the tale of Santhanu, an ancient king, which *The Painter of Signs* skillfully uses to his advantage. The more recent book, *A Tiger for Malgudi*, explores Hindu philosophy through mythology and metaphysical parables. Narayan is well-versed in the happenings within Indian families, having grown up surrounded by both religion and family. William Walsh notes that, “The family is the present-day setting in which his awareness functions, and the treatment of family relationships in novels is notable for its subtlety and conviction.”

### 3. Methodology

The present paper is focused on the selected works of R.K. Narayan, and analyzes the portrayal of ‘Male female relationship’ in his fictions.

### 4. Portrayal of Gender based relationship in R.K. Narayan’s Novels

In *The Bachelor of Arts*, Narayan emphasizes the value of mothers and declares, “Mother is a sacred object.” As long as it is with us, its value is a commodity that we are unaware of (*The Bachelor of Arts* 98). He understands that he would not have been spoiled if Kailas had been a mother to care for him. Furthermore, Narayan asserts in *The Dark Room* that parents ought to discipline their kids harshly since “only a battered child will develop into a sound man.” (*The Dark Room* 36)

Mr. Sampath concurs with the author of *The Dark Room* that “boys must be punished, if not (they will) mature into devils,” and as such, he counsels his son’s tutor, “Don’t wait for me if you see them getting out of control.” Shake him; give him a good shake. No boy has ever achieved anything good who was never beaten.” (*The Dark Room* 93)

In *The Bachelor of Arts*, Narayan discusses his distaste for the dowry system and advises the young celibates that they should marry for love, if such a thing exists, or for financial security and conveniences. Closing one’s eyes to the realities of life is pointless. (*The Bachelor of Arts* 155)

The Indian caste system is criticized by Narayan. In *The Vendor of Sweets*, he shows us that caste or class barriers are the reason Grace is afraid to travel to India or Chandran’s desire to marry Malathi, his sweetheart. We can see how false Jagan’s statement that “we don’t believe in caste these days” (*The Vendor of Sweets* 72) and Raju’s statement in *The Guide* that “there is not caste or class today” are because caste and class sentiments are pervasive in our society.

Despite not being a feminist, R.K. Narayan has expressed empathy for the marginalized and oppressed women in Indian society. In Narayan's *The Dark Room*, the misery and helplessness of a Hindu homemaker are highlighted. Narayan clarified in an interview,

"I wanted to convey in *The Dark Room* how completely dependent women are on men in society. I guess I've changed with the times." (Krishnan 42)

Narayan defines "survival" as a fight for dignity against social norms and external circumstances rather than as the continuation of a merely physical existence. His main character Savitri is a victim of society norms, authority figures, or men. In today's patriarchal society, a woman's goals are primarily determined by her outrage at the discrimination and depression she experiences at the hands of men, followed by her quest for identity. Both of these elements contradict the passive woman's socially acceptable stereotype.

*The Dark Room* by R.K. Narayan depicts a dismal scene. Here, the novelist paints a moving portrait of a middle-class South Indian family, where the wife's life descends into hell due to her husband Ramani's frequent outbursts of annoyance and resentment. In *The Dark Room*, Ramani, the husband, has a major influence over the family's level of happiness, unhappiness, and calm or unease. Because of Mr. Ramani's tyrannical and domineering demeanor, the servants, kids, and even the wife are undoubtedly in an environment of extreme fear in the house. More bad luck befalls Savitri, Ramani's wife, following Shanta Bai's appointment to Ramani's office. When Savitri can take no more, she flees her husband's home at midnight and throws herself into the Saryu River out of frustration and wrath.

But at that moment, she was saved from certain death by a prowling blacksmith burglar. Savitri makes an effort to find some independent work for herself for about a day. However, she soon grows tired of her life and returns to her disdainful house to pout in the dimly lit room with little impact on her miserably mishandled husband, Ramani. It is never a description of emotion, but rather an indication. When Savitri goes back to her family and offers to take her place by serving her husband his meal, it is a significant gesture.

A car outside honked, and Kamala and Sumati hurried to the gate to make the following announcement:

'Mother has come': Has she?

After asking, Ramani entered the home. He paused on the doormat for a brief moment before entering his room. Savitri sat, shaky, in the dining room corridor. Now, what would he do? Would he come and forcibly remove her from her home? Ramani approached her an hour later. She got going. After giving her a quick glance and observing how disheveled she looked, he entered the dining room. "Hurry up, I have to be at the office," he told the cook. (*The Dark Room* 154)

In this book, Narayan describes the position of women in Indian society by drawing on Savitri's well-known pattern of domestic discord. Since women are often exploited because they are weak targets, Savitri is shown to be exploited by the temple clergy where she seeks refuge after leaving her home. Savitri made a flashing speech to convey her feelings, sharing the pain and suffering of all poor Hindu wives.

"I'm a human being", She said.

"That will never be granted by you guys. We are your playthings when you want to cuddle and your slaves when you don't. Don't think you can kick us when you want to and pet us when you want to." (The Dark Room 73)

Savitri further highlight the anguish of women by saying,

"What distinguishes a married woman from a prostitute? A married woman does not change her men; a prostitute does. That's all, but they both work for their food and housing in the same way." (The Dark Room 76)

The desperate situation faced by the Indian woman Savitri is depicted in this novel. She knows she is a mean person in her home life. In *The Dark Room*, Savitri responds appropriately and states,

"Nothing in this world belongs to women. Other than her body, what can a woman claim as her own? The rest of her possessions are either her sons' or her husbands'." (The Dark Room 75)

Ramani, an officer at Englandia Insurance Company, belittles and chastises his wife because he is the epitome of a male chauvinist in society. "Go ahead and work in the kitchen however you please; I'll take care of the maturing boy training." It is not a woman's concern." (The Dark Room 5) As K.R.S. Iyengar remarks:

The Dark Room, which served as a haven for "safe deposits" and a place of retreat, was once as essential to an Indian home as the kitchen. However, modern homes often do away with the dark room. The traditional nature of the "dark room" has been virtually destroyed by the addition of electric lights, even in older homes. Thus, Narayan has done a good job of preserving *The Dark Room* within the pages of his novel, much like the preserved curiosities of ancient Egypt. (Iyengar 371)

According to R.K. Narayan, wives in Indian households must accept their lot in life since their husbands is considered gods. This is the reason the temple's head priest offers the guidance.

"The best way for keeping women safe is to thrash them if they won't let them rest. You guys are mugs these days, and allow your women take advantage of you."

As a result, Savitri believes that nothing is truly her own and that her husband owns her children. "You gave the nurse and the midwife money. Their teachers and clothes are paid

for by you. You're correct. Do I not assert that a woman has no property? (The Dark Room 77)

Savitri rebels and flees the house in an attempt to prove her independence, only to turn around and make accommodations with the circumstances. Here, the author is attempting to give Savitri a hint of confidence and rebellion. Savitri stands in for hundreds of thousands of various Indian housewives who, at the mercy of their husbands, are miserable, defenseless beings. Husband Savitri humiliates her by saying, "Mind your own business, did you hear?" when she forbids her son from attending school because of illness. (The Shadow Chamber, 5) The issue of Savitri's existence, "how crucial it is at home and that following fifteen years of married life," weighs heavily on her unhappy mind. (The Dark Room 8) Savitri's situation is not unique; other housewives who live under their husbands' total control also experience this. At the book's conclusion, the social standing of an Indian housewife is assessed. The voice of Savitri reflects the state of women.

"Are we such vile creations of God that we require assistance to survive? I resemble a bamboo pole that needs a well to support it in order to stand."  
(The Dark Room 113)

R.S. Singh rightly says:

This is the kind of thing that occurs in thousands of homes across our nation: some Saviors hang themselves, burn, or drown themselves. Most people dare not to do it. (Singh 62)

Narayan typically depicts two types of women in his female characters: the conventional Indian housewife and the stylish, butterfly-type of woman. Like Savitri, his female character falls into the first group. This woman is submissive, modest, kind, devout, and affectionate. Her husband's and her kids' well-being is her only concern. In *My Days*, Narayan observes:

In some way, I became fixated on the idea that women should always be the oppressors of men. This had to be one of the first examples of the women's liberation movement. Man put her in second place and used such subtlety and cunning to keep her there that she herself started to lose all of her strength, independence, individuality, and stature. An ideal victim of these conditions was a wife, given the traditional environment of Indian society.  
(*My Days* 119)

The fact that Narayan was able to successfully describe the Indian people and their way of life without trying to preach or pontificate is a remarkable testament to his creative ability. However, Narayan has empathy for all of his characters. He draws every character, no matter how good or evil, with remarkable tenderness and delicacy. In his compassionate hands, they become fascinating characters whose presence and deeds give



the planet great significance. It appears that his outlook on life is that worrying about things that are beyond one's control is pointless. At its finest, life is merely an imperfect affair that must be lived; what makes life happy or unhappy depends more on how one lives or views it than on the actual nature of life.

The woman's perspective has been completely ignored by Marco in *The Guide*. As Rosie's character makes clear, a woman is not a gadget, she is full of spirits and desires. Consequently, there are rifts in Rosie and Marco's marriage. As Som Dev correctly notes: Somewhat, Rosie is not entirely at fault if she is pushed into a stranger's arms. Maybe their marriage would not have ended this way if he had taken into account the necessities of the woman he chose to be his wife. He has insulted womanhood, and in response, Rosie's womanhood lifts her hood and leaves "fran marks" on him. (Dev 115)

Marco truly wants a wife who is as wonderful as the servant Joseph, who he considers to be a wonderful man. Second, despite his appearance, he despises dancing and believes it to be a lower art form than his status and position:

Old prejudices never die, and despite his wealth of knowledge, Marco saw dancing as little more than street acrobatics. By depriving Rosie of her life and her love of art, he killed both of her instincts. (Krishna 16)

Despite coming from a family of dancers who are committed to the temple, Rosie manages to earn an M.A. in Economics. She also breaks with tradition and marries Marco, signing a contract together. She is shocked to learn, however, that he is more fascinated by the carved images on the cave walls and stones than by his wife, who is a living example of these things. He has always been drawn to things that are decaying and dead, but not to living things that move and swing their heads. She has no more standing in his company than an animal does. Day by day, Rosie "followed him, like a dog waiting on his grace." (*The Guide* 151) She does not do any better in Raju's company either. Narayan's realistic portrayal of a Hindu housewife makes her feel like one of those caged parrots at village fairs. She expresses her feelings of complete helplessness by saying, "It is far better to end one's life on his (Marco's) doorstep." (*The Guide* 201) The main characters in Narayan's works have a submissive attitude, but this is only the result of the Hindu culture and traditions having a profound effect on their minds; their willpower is crippled by the weight. They allow events to control them instead of controlling the events. They seem like helpless beings, ripped apart by desires and thrown this way and that by the whims of fate.

According to the narrative, Rosie stands for a new class of women who can be freed from traditional confinement and enrolled in colleges and universities. Considering her status in the Hindu caste system, Rosie's master's degree in economics is a noteworthy accomplishment. On the one hand, her studies have made her more conscious of her

uniqueness. On the other hand, it sets her up against a society that still maintains some clearly defined views regarding women. Furthermore, the class she belongs to is denigrated as a lowly group that does not deserve of equality with the upper caste. She has succeeded in establishing her unique identity despite the obstacles. It seems that her inner self is not ready to spend the remaining years of her life fulfilling the stereotype of an Indian wife who is repressed.

Because Rosie is a member of a different caste, Raju's mother, an elderly, traditional woman, will not accept her. Rosie has had a terrible experience living with Raju. She looks down in embarrassment and disgust at his uncle's rude questions.

"What is your caste? Not in our class? No. Are you someone we know? No. Are you a resident of this house? No. If so, what brings you here? You are a dancing girl, after all, and our families don't accept them." (The Guide 169)

After overcoming the shocks, Rosie demonstrates to the world that she, too, has a unique status and life goals that she works to achieve throughout her life. But her guilty conscience keeps her restless, and in the end, her agonizing desire to pass away at her husband's house is evident.

## 5. Conclusion

Therefore, it can be said that R.K. Narayan is a keen observer of society because the traditional Hindu society that Narayan creates for his fictional world is dominated by men rather than women. He investigates the routine events that occur in Hindu households in India and highlights the plight of typical housewives, who are typically restricted to their homes and hearts. The modern liberation motion is very different from the world of women in the novelist's work. All of the female characters are oppressed housewives in our society who are taken advantage of at every turn. His books highlight the paradox of contemporary Indian society, in which women are denied their fundamental rights while simultaneously being revered as gods. For this reason, women represent the true voice of strength in R.K. Narayan's novels.

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