



Portrayal of Traditional Indian Womanhood in R.K. Narayan's The Dark Room

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Abstract

The Indo-Anglican literature is different from the Anglo-Indian literature. The former is the genre written and created by the Indians through the English language; the latter is written by the Englishmen on themes and subjects related to India. The Indo-Anglican fiction owes its origin to the translations of various fictional works from the Indian languages into English, notably from Bengali into English. The Indo-Anglican writers of fiction write with an eye and hope on the western readers. This influenced their choice of the subject matter. In Indo-Anglican novels there are Sadhus, Fakirs, Caves, Temples, Vedanta, Gandhi, Rajahs and Nawabs, etc. to are to show the interest of western audience. They represent essentially the western idea of India. But at the same time there are elements of Indianness, Nationalism and Patriotism, glorification of India's past and sympathy for the teeming millions of the country.

Key words: Indianness, Vedanta, fictio.

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Introduction

R.K. Narayan was born in 1906 at South Indian village named Rasipuram. His father's name is Krishnaswami. His mother tongue is Tamil, he has settled down in Mysore where the regional language is Kannada and he writes in English. Whereas Anand finished his education in Cambridge and London. Narayan had his education entirely in South India. He uses the English language much as we used to wear clothes manufactured in Lancashire -- but the thoughts and feelings; the stirrings of the soul, the wayward movements of the consciousness are the soil of India, recognisably autochthonous. Narayan selected journalism as his career. He writes for newspapers and

magazines as well as develops creative writing of the finest possible order.

His novels may be classified into early domestic novels, which dealing with mammon-worshippers and political novels. Totally he has written about 10 novels and about 151 short stories. Among his early novels fall the novels written on school and college life: these are *Swami and Friends*, *Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher*. Among his domestic novels are included, *The Dark Room* and *The Vendor of Sweets*. Among his best known novels dealing with money-worshipping people of the world are *The Financial Expert*, *Mr. Sampath*, *The Guide* and *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. His only political

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novel is *Waiting for Mahatma*. Now we shall deal with his major novels one by one.

The Dark Room (1939): *Swami and Friends*, *Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher* are a trilogy of Malgudi-on-Sarayu. *The Dark Room* is a lament on the disharmony of domestic life. The hero of this novel is Ramani, a successful branch manager of an Insurance Company. He has a middle-aged wife Savitri and three children namely Babu, Kamala and Sumati. The early chapters are devoted to his life and moods. Later, a lady named Shanta Bai is taken as an Insurance Organiser for improving business and he soon falls in love with her. Rumours get widespread. Savitri's life becomes highly miserable and she attempts to commit suicide. But she is saved by a blacksmith, returns home and takes up her normal duties as a housewife. Ramani does not change his ways and Savitri pulls on with this sort of loveless life, looking after his children.

The Dark Room (1938) presents a picture of domestic disharmony. Ramani, the office secretary of Engladia Insurance Company in Malgudi is very domineering and cynical in his ways. He governs his house according to his own sweet will. As he is always irritable, the atmosphere in his house is generally gloomy and his wife, Savitri, his children and servants are always remain in a state of terror.

Savitri is a true symbol of traditional Indian womanhood. Savitri, whose place is in the dark room (kitchen), is a timid, silent suffering and sacrificing Indian wife. She is very beautiful and deeply devoted to her husband. Ramani, however, does not respond to her sentiments even with ordinary warmth. Through they have been married for fifteen years; his wife has received nothing from her husband but rebukes and abuses. Even his children get more rebukes from him than expressions of his fatherly love.

Soon there arrives at the scene a beautiful lady, Shanta Bai, who has deserted her husband and joined Engladia Insurance Company. Ramani succumbs to her beauty and coquettish ways. Ramani spends nights in Shanta Bai's company. Savitri feels disturbed but she "decided that it would be better to suffer in silence than to venture question." When Gangu, the talkative forward

wife a teacher tells her about Ramani's infidelity, she sulks only in self-pity. "Perhaps I am old and ugly. How can I help it? I have borne children and slaved for the house." She pathetically prepares herself to win him back by reviving her charm. How pathetically she longs that he may come and "love her as boisterously as he loved her in the first week of their marriage."

All her dreams are shattered. Her fury is implacable; "Don't touch me!...you are dirty, you are impure." Her anguish born of self-pity and impotent anger is heart rending: "I don't possess anything in the world. What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything else that she has is her father's, her husband's or her son's." Seeing no way of correcting her erring husband, Savitri revolts against him and in utter frustration and disgust, she leaves her husband's house with an intention of committing suicide.

Savitri goes to the river and throws herself into it. The timely arrival of Mari, the blacksmith and burglar, who while crossing the river on his way to his village, sees her body floating on the river and at once rescues her, and saves her life. Mari's wife Ponni on knowing her plight persuades her to come to their village. There Savitri embarks upon an independent living of her own by work in the temple. As she cannot bear the querulous priest of the temple and as her own homesickness and tormenting anxiety for her children nag her, she becomes restless. She realizes the futility of her attempt to escape from her bonds with the temporal world and returns to her husband's hateful home to sulk in the dark without much effect on Ramani.

In this respect, she may be contrasted with Gauri, the heroine in Anand's *The Old Woman and the Cow*. Savitri has neither the courage nor the independence of spirit that Gauri shows. Gauri leaves her husband's house once and for all, adopts the profession of a nurse and never returns home. Ramani stands in sharp contrast to Krishna (the protagonist of Narayan's *The English Teacher*) who is a self-sacrificing husband.

One of his least successful novels is *The Dark Room* (1938), which takes up, in schematic ways, the condition of women in the changing circumstances of modern India. In Narayan's first two novels, women had

been exempt from demanding citizenship in a harsh, discouraging world; they existed on the margins, in the kitchens and bedrooms and inner courtyards, where they were often a source of tenderness. In 1933, Narayan's own marriage to a girl he saw drawing water from a roadside tap the horoscopes didn't match, but Narayan overrode his parents' objections gave him access to the lives of women, a whole new range of human experiences previously denied him by strict segregation.

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