



## An Amiable House Wife in R.K.Narayan's *The Dark Room*

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From the very beginning wife has been enjoying an honourable and important place in the society and family. The Vedic mantras hold that the wife herself was the home and its ornament. It is wished that in her husband's house the wife shall be the supreme ruler of the house.<sup>1</sup> According to Manu "Off springs, gonist. He writes about this novel in MY Days:

I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of woman as opposed to man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early treatment of the "Women's Lib movement. Man assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtly and cunning that she herself began to lose all notion of her independence, individuality, stature and strength.<sup>3</sup>

R.K.Narayan's fictional world is circumscribed by a traditional Hindu society where men rather than women hold a superior position. Women are generally confined to the home and hearth, and all sorts of taboos and traditions are clamped on them. But women slowly and subtly begin to assert their independence in the society. That is why women characters in the novels of R.K.Narayan (Savitri of *The Dark Room* 1938), Rosie of *The Guide* 1958) and Daisy of *The painter of signs* 1976) reflect the characteristic spirit of era.

Savitri of the *Dark Room*, the woman of 30's – quite weak, humble,

due performance of religious rites, faithful service, highest conjugal happiness and heavenly bliss of ancestors and oneself depend on one's wife alone.<sup>2</sup> *The Dark Romm* (1938) is the first novel of R.K.Narayan with a woman as its prota

amiable, docile, submissive, unassertive, in confident and fickle – minded creature. She is a wife of an officer in Englandia Insurance Company. Though her Narayan picturises the predicament of woman belonging to traditional Hindu society who is always pushed to inferior position than that of her counterpart who enjoys superior status in every respect. The husband-wife relationship is one of the most important components of human relationships. In the great Indian culture and tradition, the husband-wife relationship is presented and treated in sublime manner. So Narayan plants incidents and thoughts in the novel that show the lack of co-ordination between husband and wife. The following quotation from the novel (*The Dark Room*) would testify her condition in the house.

"How important she was, she thought, she had not the slightest power to do anything at home, and that after years of married life".<sup>4</sup>



The traditional Indian family as the nucleus of the social structure has zealously guarded norms, mores and values. Marital fidelity perhaps the most precious and durable of Indian Values, is the main theme of the novel.

Savitri, the silent and suffering wife can put up with insult and maltreatment, but her husband's infidelity is intolerable to her. When she becomes aware of her husband's illicit relationship with Shantabai, she cries against her husband.

Donot touch me.  
You are dirty. You  
are impure. Even if  
I burn my skin, I  
cannot cleanse  
myself of the  
impurity of your  
touch."<sup>5</sup>

In this novel, Narayan is very critical in present the relationship between a devoted wife and cruel husband. Savitri is an outstanding representative of wifely devotion cited in the Indian myths and legends. But Ramani is very cynical and domineering. The happiness or unhappiness, and the quiet or disquiet of the house depend purely on his mood. Ramani does not respect the feelings, emotions and sentiments of his devoted, aimable and submissive wife. William Jones rightly comments:

Though they have  
married for fifteen  
years, his wife has  
received nothing  
from her husband  
except his hot and  
cold temper. Even  
his children are

recipients more of  
his rebukes than of  
his fitful love.<sup>6</sup>

As a devoted and submissive wife, she feels that quarrelling with her husband over his attraction towards the other woman is not desirable on the part of a wife. So when it is reported that her husband is having affairs with another woman i.e. Santhabai, she instead of questioning or lodging a complaint about it with her husband decides to make herself so attractive that her husband loses his interest in the other woman. She adopts all the possible devices to make her charming and attractive. She applies a little scented oil to her hair, combs it with great care and beautifully braids and coils it very neatly. She washes her face with a soap water and applies very elegant pinch of vermilion on it and trims it edges with her little finger to make it perfectly round.

"She went out into  
the garden and  
plucked some  
jasmine and red  
flowers, strung  
them together and  
placed them in a  
curve on the coil at  
the back of her  
head".<sup>7</sup>

After fully decorating , she eagerly awaits the arrival of her husband as she is confident that when her husband comes, he is sure to appreciate her beauty and shower his love over her. But, when he does not arrive till late she gets disappointed. She goes to the mirror, steals a look at herself and thinks that if he sees her then he would certainly like her. Her makeup might not be disturbed so she doesn't lay herself



down on the bed. But to her despair the night turns into dawn and her husband doesn't come. All her enthusiasm is shattered and falls on the ground. Her mind reverts to its obsession that he does not care even a bit for her.<sup>8</sup> In spite of her husband's rude and rough and sometimes even cruel behaviour, she is all attention to his likes and dislikes in respect of food, etc. When her husband expresses his annoyance over the regular serving of bringal curry, Savitri asks the cook not to repeat the bringals for a week. She, as a good wife is ever alert to see that the hard earned money of her husband is not wasted in any way. She keeps an eye over the punctuality of the cook and the servants of the home.

Whenever she finds that her husband is not in good mood, she as a devoted wife waxes and cajoles him in various ways. She furnishes him with so many pieces of information. She tells him that Babu has scored sixty percent of marks in arithmetic and stands fourth in his class. She said, "Babu has scored sixty marks out of one hundred in arithmetic. He stands fourth in his class this term."<sup>9</sup> When her husband displays no enthusiasm over the news she proceeds further.

The rough and rude behaviour of her husband has torn her inner soul into pieces. She is full of misgivings about her husband. Yet, when he after taking dinner, retires to his bedroom she follows him. There again she has to face his indifferent attitude towards her. When her husband realises her hysteric behaviour or mood and to cajole her holds, her hand and draws her nearer, she pushes away his hand and saying not to touch her. When her husband tries again to hold her hand she violently frees

her hands from his clutches. Because her feelings were lightly injured, accumulated in her heart she says:

I am a human being. You men will never grant that. For you we are play things when you feel like hugging, and slaves at other times. Don't think that you can fondle us when you like and kick us when you choose.<sup>10</sup>

Then her husband remains silent after hearing her angry words, her resentment comes down, "His endearing tone for a moment wins her over, his acquiescence momentarily satisfies her and she was pleased that he had tried to fondle her. She burst into tears and allowed herself to be drawn to his side. She sat on the edge of his bed sobbing and felt all her troubles had ceased and blamed herself for exaggerating a little mistake that he might have committed."<sup>11</sup>

Finding him in a good mood when she tries to persuade him to give up his relations with the other woman he flares up and says that he is not going to do. Then, she leaves the room in an angry mood.

Her husband's harsh reply proves, her patience and endurance give away and she decides to leave the home. When she is preparing to leave the home, her husband raises his hand and said, "Women get away now."<sup>12</sup> She bearing all the tortures calmly and cutting off all loving family ties came out of the main gate and proceeds to the north of the town and reached the river named



Sarayu an hour later. By this time, she has finally decided to put an end to her life.

After reaching the bank of the river, Sarayu she sits on the last step with her feet in the dark moving water. She was intense at that moment. Before going to commit suicide the events of her past life pass through her mind like reels of a movie. All the incidents of her life she calls one by one. On the other hand, particularly the brutal behaviour of her husband forced her to jump into the water. On the other hand, her affection on her children and also her consideration for the well being of her crucked husband stand in the way of doing so – she is placed in a highly psychologically tense mood. It is very difficult choose between life and death for her. Even when is stepping down she thinks that after committing suicide, she is sure to be burnt in the cauldron of boiling oil in yama's world for talk back and disobeying her husband.<sup>13</sup>

In "The Dark Room", R.K.Narayan has presented that there is interference of third women between husband and wife. Savitris devotion and amiable and submissiveness are challenged by Ramani's callousness and his illicit relationship with Santhabai.

A.V.Rao writes about Narayan's strong sense of the Indian tradition:

"The darker shades of moral aberration in his novel" The Dark Room Ramani temperamentally a callous man, violates the traditional family morality under the alien influence of modernity represented by the coquettish Shantabai with her Great-Garbo manners. The inevitable result is suffering.<sup>14</sup>

There can be no worse lot of aimable wife than that depicted in R.K.Narayan's The Dark Room.

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<sup>1</sup> Samrajni Swasuram bhava Samrajini Swasruvani bhava Nanandri Smarajini bhava Samrajini adhidrsu. Rigveda 10.85.46.

<sup>2</sup> Manusmriti IX 26-28.

<sup>3</sup> Narayan.R.K. My Days (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), p.119

<sup>4</sup> Narayan.R.K. "The Dark Room" (1938, rpt Chennai: Indian Thought Publications 2007), p.5.

<sup>5</sup> Narayan.R.K.: The Dark Romm (1938, rpt Chennai: Indian Thought Publications 2007), p.87

<sup>6</sup> Jones William, "Picaresque Tradition", perspective son R.K. Narayan, ed. Atmaram, p.229.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid – p.82 (The Dark Room)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid – p.75

<sup>9</sup> Ibid – p.85

<sup>10</sup> Ibid – p.86

<sup>11</sup> Ibid – p.87

<sup>12</sup> Ibid – p.94

<sup>13</sup> Ibid – p.82

<sup>14</sup> Rao.A.V.: The novels of R.K.Narayan (A writers workshop, Calcutta, 1976), p.36.