

# SOCIAL RELEVANCE IN R.K.NARAYAN'S THE DARK ROOM

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## **Abstract**

*Male domination is the predominant theme in the literary works of 1960's the trio, Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand are the most important writers of the period. "The Dark Room" presents an Indian woman in stiff opposition to male domination. That Savitri returns to the dark room is foiled by a traditional society. But she partly succeeds in bringing the voice of victimisation by taking to her role as a mother. She frees, herself from illusion and establishes her womanly dignity.*

## **Introduction**

Narayan was oldest of the sons; his younger brother Ramachandran later became an editor at Gemini studios, and the headmaster, and Narayan did some of his studies at his father's school. As his father's job entailed frequent transfers, Narayan spent a part of his childhood under the care of his maternal grandmother, Parvathi. During this time his best friends and playmates were a peacock and a mischievous monkey. Narayan moved to Mysore with his family when his father was transferred to the Maharaja's college high school. The well-stocked library at school, as well as his father's own, fed his reading habit, and he started reading and writing as well. After completing high school, Narayan failed the university entrance examination and spent a year at home reading and writing; he subsequently passed the examination in 1926 and joined Maharaji College of Mysore.

## **Binary Opposition Of Male Dominating Society**

*The Dark Room* Savitri the protagonist is on the lookout for her independent human identity, because she does not wish to remain content with her status as a mere slave to her husband, her helpless outside the home suffering mental torture and insecurity, under the dominance of the priest, another male boss. Savitri, therefore pessimistically returns to her family beaten by the unchanged harsh realities of the Indian society. Society evolves over a period, but *The Dark Room* records the early attempt of a women to find self-expression and fulfilment, rather than an instant success. In spite of her failure, Savitri as a character has made not only Ramani, but all the readers to think about the status of woman in the Indian society.

Ramani was in a terrible temper.... He stood in the doorway and roared. “What is this?” “Is everybody in this house dead?” he asked. Savitri was angered by this, “What a thing to say on a day like this, and at this hour! I have seen very few who will swear and curse at auspicious times as you do.(TDR 36).

The traditional Indian family at the nucleus of the social structure has jealously guarded mores and values. Marital fidelity is perhaps the most precious and durable of the Indian values. In *The Dark Room* every character is living and real. Savitri, the silent 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 relationship with ShanthaBai, she cries against her husband.

Savitri realizes her dignity as a human being and becomes conscious of the fact that the relation between the wife and the husband is not complete until unless both of them are devoted to each other. Knowing Ramani’s relationship with ShathaBai, Savitri demands an explanation. Savitri questions her social as well as economic independence. She decides to give her daughters higher education to stand independently on their own and not depend on their husband for food and shelter. But at the same time she is aware of the sublime nature of the husband-wife relationship. It is a reason that the woman never thinks of other men to marry although she wants economic independence. Being cheated and ill-treated, emotion erupts and activates Savitri to stand up to assert herself as a human being. Now she sets aside all her self-accusing and self-attitude. She bursts out at him,

Savitri is a middle class but not highly educated woman, who is burdened by the immense weight of the Indian past, by her caste, her religion and role as a wife and mother. heis an ordinary, amiable housewife, not deeply dissatisfied with her allotted part, given on occasion to boredom with its pointlessness, but increasingly oppressed by her loud, assertive and elegant husband.(61).

This drastic change is a great success for her, she can make a comfortable living behavioural change of Ramani. Thus her protest is not a total waste. ShanthaBai has been presented as a romantic woman her artful movement of her lips, the tossing of her head and her humming of a tune all to herself. Extra-marital love relationship is not seen in a dignified manner in Indian traditional and orthodox society as in the cases of Raju-Rosie in *The Guide* and Ramani and ShanthaBai in *The Dark Room*. No assessment of Narayan escapes without a reference to Malgudi. This constant reference to a single world with clearly demarcated topography, with its graduate expansion through the years from an agrarian to an industrial town cannot be ignored in the study of Narayan. Talking about his writing of *The Dark Room* Narayan says in my days:

I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of women as opposed to man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament of the women's lib' movement. Man assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunningness that she herself began to lose all notion of her independence, her individuality, stature and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances.

In *The Dark Room* Narayan enquires into the place of women in India of 1930's. In the social-cultural context, it was difficult to pursue life outside the family fold. But, the unfortunate elements is that even after eighty years and 60 years of India's independence the place of women has not changed to any remarkable extent. Our Indian constitution provides equality between men and women. It ensures through its Fundamental rights "Equality before law" and "prohibits any discrimination and further empowers the state to make "any special provision for women and children. "However, it is seldom practiced. Many of the legal provisions for equality remain on paper only. Equality before the law is not necessarily equality in life. In fact, Indian society is still largely male dominated and women are often looked down upon.

Narayan has carefully studied the Indian mind and the Indian woman under complex social motives. The novel is an account of marriage from a wife's point of view of which the image that has been projected is that of an Indian woman as a victim of the whims of her husband. Savitri, a middle-class woman is not well educated but she is loaded with the weight of caste, religion and her role as wife and mother. She has a strong cultural base in herself and is deeply entrenched in its values, traditions and ethos that are exclusively Indian. Every morning, apart from doing daily chores, she has to look after her three children giving bath to Kamala, tying up her daughters' pigtails and packing them off to school, and also listen to the nasty comments of her husband Ramani, when his choice food is not served. She should behave like a typical housewife doing everything to keep her husband happy.

Savitri tries helplessly to convince her husband to take the kids but he adamantly refuses. Her predicaments is not peculiar. It is an archetypal pattern of Indian woman in general. She remembers her own grandmother who enslaved herself cheerfully to her husband who had concubine at home, her aunt who was beaten everyday by her husband and had never uttered a word of protest for fifty years and another friend of her mother's who was prepared jump into a well, if her husband so directed these emories indicate the critical position of a wife as she is bullied not only physically or abused sexually but traumatized mentally as well. Savitri, a weak, submissive and utterly helpless woman can not question her husband because ramani can bluntly tell her that she has no right over their children.

So she weeps, obsessed with feeling of helplessness, she curls herself in *The Dark Room*, next to the stores. It is the only way of protest against her husband's tyrannical behaviour, but he never consoles and helps her to come out of this dark room. As she lies there, Ramani tries to prove that no one is indispensable and orders the cook to do the preparation of food, instead of bothering to convince his wife. At this time, he shows extra love to his children and goes to office, ignoring Savitri altogether. He proves himself a typical Indian man full of male chauvinism with unbending and unbending and behaviour. Her sulking goes unrecognized. Later, after being convinced by her friend Janamma how men are, Savitri comes out of *The Dark Room* and returns to her routine.

Savitri charges and rebels not only for help own self but for the sake of some social and cultural mission. Ramani's relationship with Shanta Bai compels Savitri to realize her individuality. She becomes conscious of her existence. She says

I am a human being. You men will never grant that. For you, we are playthings when you feel like hugging, and slaves other times. Don't think that you can fondle us when you like and kick us when you choose. (110)

Savitri's use of us twice in the last sentence shows her vigour in assuming a representative role of the whole race of woman from the tyranny and injustice of the male. Savitri's endeavour to discover the meaning of her life away from her family does not prove successful. She decides to swallow her husband's insult and returns home. However in a broader sense it is not a failure. She has realized her limitations and accepted her obligations to her children. Her firm resolve never to return weakens before her maternal affection, it has the effect of understanding the reality. Instead of asserting a protest against the patriarchal society which would throw up no realizable solution, the novel promotes greater awareness. Savitri grows in the process of her protest and returns home.

A little storm in a colourless domestic cup more than slightly cracked says she protest against her husband's infidelity not only for her own security but for her children's security from their father's callousness. However, the protest is not a total waste, so far as Ramani is forced to sit up and think of the family; do he asks no question when Savitri returns.

"*The Dark Room*" illustrate the notion of circular journey. The society is patriarchal all over the world. Patriarchy is the politics of male dominance. Power, regime, rests in male hands. Patriarchal power, the women bear discrimination, marginalisation and oppression, on account of their gender. The tradition gender roles cast by patriarchy curb the potential of women. Savitri is stereotyped as an angel of love and sacrifice for centuries, male writers have strictly guarded the domain of letters and discourage the creative endeavours of women. Subverting the oppressive structure of language is the first step in the strategy of women.

Binary opposites created in the foregoing discussion on *The Dark Room* with reference to the theme, character, socio-cultural and point of view brings out the various narrative strategies through which Narayan signifies his theme of the place of woman in Indian society, in the 1930's. Education among women had not caught up in any significant way and male dominance and challenge were the order of the day. The simmering discontent of a middle class women results in a protest to its fold, when the alternatives proves more formidable, she returns home to full fill her motherly obligations, but to the husband who also realize the important of his wife.

Thus, the protest has not gone a total waste. Both of them down to a more knowledgeable life. The author retrains his own critical judgement on the theme, through constantly focalizing the situation from savitri's point of view, which has the tendency to think too precisely on the events.

In other words, economic liberty means that one is able to earn money and also have the right to spend it. It has been only through employment; through attainment of means to earn one's living that woman has managed to fill in some gap that exists between two sexes. The belief that a woman has to be taken care of, both physically and financially has been dismantled. Working and earning woman have proved that they can support themselves financially and that she is no more a burden that a man has to carry on his shoulders. She should not, therefore, be regarded merely as an exploited and a parasite who extracts benefits from her partner. Once she ceases to be parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles between her and the universe; there is no longer any need for any masculine mediator,

The problem faced by Savitri is that she is not permitted to do anything. In fact, the real problem is that she is not thought to be capable of doing anything. We see man-woman relationship in case of Savitri and Ramani, Savitri is never regarded as equal. It is only man who is always privileged to take position of the subject and doer, women always remains as an object.

In a patriarchal social set-up, masculinity is associated with superiority whereas femininity is linked with inferiority, and while masculinity implies strength, action, self-assertion and domination, femininity implies weakness, passivity, docility, obedience and self-negation. The problem in the novel *The Dark Room* is that man-woman relationship has, on the whole, evolved through centuries in a set-pattern. i.e man to rule and woman to obey. Man, the master and woman slave, man, the god and woman, the devout, man for field of woman.

Savitri also rises significant Marxist feminist issues- the economic independence of women is necessary in order to assert her independent personality. Patriarchal ideology has become the part and parcel of the male mentality. The temple priest cannot understand why man should care at all for what his wife says, clear picture of the attitude of male dominated society where considering wife equal proves a man impotent. In such a milieu, women is meant only for suppression. Savitri is passive being who is simply meant to be supposed and there is no other way. But his does not mean

that she has no voice, the problem is that the world is not able to understand her language, feelings, and opinions.

Thus, she keeps looking for means here and there, which will help her to search her true self that has been lost in playing different roles and living a life which is dictated by myths and stereotypes dictated by the society. In light of Marxist perspective, we can assume that if a woman is able to be economically independent, able to earn, things are different for her. When she is productive, active, she regains her transcendence in her projects. She thus concretely affirms her status as subject. After the study Savitri's life and her position in family, we can say that unless the sexual discriminations, gender biases are done away with and unless the woman is allowed to feel and be regarded as an individual, she will not be able to make much contribution to this world.

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