

Family Relations In R.K. Narayan's Novels

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Abstract: R.K. Narayan has created innumerable characters taken from the Indian milieu who not only depict us but also show a mirror to the Indian Society. We are a part of the characters that we seek in his novels The Guide, The Bachelor of Arts, Swami and His Friends and The English Teacher. Narayan is concerned deeply with varied human relationships in his fiction. He explores and examines the theme of human bonding in his literary works. Love, hate, violence are shown in all his novels. Family plays the most important role in a mans life when we meet the characters of Narayan's novels we feel connected and this connection leads us towards understanding life.

Here an attempt has been made to highlight and evaluate the nature and scope of different types of human relationships as portrayed by Narayan in his fiction/novels. Narayan's chief concern in his fiction is to delineate men and women in family and society. The source of his success as a fiction writer is that he knows the psychology of his characters very intimately. He calls himself "a realistic writer in English," and maintains his position throughout. He chooses his character from life around him. Many of his characters are based on models of men and women in real life:

.....Above all, my uncle himself was an inescapable model for me-his approach to other human beings, his aggressive talk wherever he went, his dash and recklessness (he had the unique record of taking the Maharaja of Mysore, and absolutely inaccessible, hedged in with security and protocol, for a demonstration in his car); especially his abandon to alcohol in every form all through the day. I portrayed him as Kailas, in The Bachelor of Arts and he provided all the substance whenever I had to portray a drunken character.

Thus, it is not very difficult to find out resemblances between Narayan's own experiences as a child and grown up man and the experiences of his child hero Swaminathan in Swami and Friends and of Krishnan in the English Teacher. True, most of what he has written is the replica of his feelings and experienced life. Inevitably, his treatment of human relations in his novels is so convincing and life-like. Narayan's treatment of different relationships is based on the conflict between the "Traditional Indian Values and resources on the one hand, and modern ideas and attitudes on the other." The

portrayal of these relationships displays Narayan's power of minute observation and his creative genius. However, he evinces remarkable literary sensibility in the treatment of family relationships between husband and wife, father and son, mother and child and the love relationship between man and woman.

Through these relationships are seen in the light of a departure from the cultural heritage of Indian past, yet in no way it is an absolute the dismal break with the old values and institutions. Naturally, these human relationships bear the impress of changing times. Malgudi, the fictional town in Narayan's novels, is shown passing through the process of modernization. Its agricultural look is gradually passing away and it is now a semi-industrial town. This transformation highlights the new consciousness in society. With the growth of this town, there come the outsiders with their diverse mentalities and material considerations.

An individual's relationship with society is based on this duality of consciousness, on the "conflict between two sets of values: supremacy of social hierarchy, and emergence of the individuals,". This is so because Narayan sees society tenaciously holding on to the older values and following tradition in its wider application to life, while on the other hand, he sees an individual inspired by modern scientific and commercial outlook. As there is a conflict between an individual and society, so also there is a conflict within the consciousness of the individual himself. Buried deep in his sub-consciousness are the whole some links that connect him with social morality and the security of tradition. In the pursuit of his material aspirations and ambitions, an individual

disregards society, its conventions and customs. But in the end he returns to family traditions or to his commitment with an unusual sobriety and sanity. Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* revolts against society, but returns to it to become a householder after failing in his attempt to become a sanyasi: Margayya of *The Financial Expert* becomes a financial wizard, but ultimately returns to the old way of life: in *The Guide*, Raju, who acquires friendship with "men or money or influence" and feels "vastly superior to everyone," dies as a saint in the end; in the *Man-eater of Malgudi*, Vasu who vies with nature in creation dies as a self-immolating demon; and Raman in the *Painter of Signs* returns to his usual toil as a commercial painter after the emotional failure. Love and money are the two major attractions of the individual in Narayana's fictional world.

The relationship between the father and the son is a recurrent theme in Narayan's novels. It is treated on two different levels: the father and a little son and the father and a grown-up son. In its first form it is examined in novels like *Swami and Friends*, *The Dark Room*, *The Guide* and *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. And in its second form, it is treated in the *Bachelor of Arts*, the *Financial Expert* and the *Vendor of Sweets*. This relationship is seen as stained with a breach between the two. There is lack of true understanding and tolerance between them. They never sincerely endeavor to understand the views of each other. The difference in their views is of two kinds. It is the difference which comes in a usual manner along with age and experience. As the age advances, there occur changes in man. All his earlier thoughts and prejudices undergo a change. Ramani in the *Dark Room* tells his son that he cannot dodge him with his pretence of illness because he himself has "played all these dodges in my time". The other differences which divide them so irreparably is owing to what is generally termed as age-gap. It comprises a decisive change from what is known to what is new and fascinating. The father commonly adheres to the old and tested notions, while the son, in the light of modernity, rebels against them. Balu in the *Financial Expert* and Mali in the *Vendor of Sweets* are fine studies of the new mentality of the young generation. Balu frustrates his father's hopes by refusing to study and runs away from home. On return he audaciously demands a share in property because, as he says, he is a major and is entitled to ask for his share in the ancestral property. He threatens even to go against his father. Mali in the *Vendor of Sweets* is an upstart. He gets perfectly Americanized. He advocates beef-eating, while his father Jagan prefers a footwear prepared from the hide of a dead animal. Mali is openly critical of the cultural shortcomings of the people of Malgudi. Jagan stops all communication with Mali who contaminates the whole house with open and unwarranted affair with Grace, an American Girl.

R.K. Narayan sees the relationships between husband and wife from a traditional angle. This relationship has its own joys and sorrows. The disharmony between husband and wife is caused by the progressive policies and the socio-economic changes which follow in their wake. In the present economic conditions a husband has to keep away from home, thus causing an anxiety in his wife. In the pursuit of earning, a man becomes intimate not only with men of his trade or profession, but also with other representing different social, religious,

academic and professional institutions. This consumes most of his time and he suffers at home his unintended negligence. The ideals of faith and fidelity are also not so rigidly followed. Ramani, Sampath, Balu, among male characters sin against the piety of martial sex. Similarly, among women characters Shanta Bai, Shanti and Rosie are seen forming alliance with men outside marriage. However, Narayan seems to stress the purity of love between husband and wife.

Much of the acrimony in this relationship is due to modern education. It has inculcated a sense of independence in men and women. It has inculcated a sense of independence in men and women. Rosie, Shanta Bai and Daisy are some of the female characters who try to seek an independent life. In their craze of independence, they flout the traditional moral values and create unhappiness for themselves and for others. Narayan is a traditionalist and values only the old ideals of this relationship. He upholds the security and charm of the arranged marriages as opposed to the civil marriages of modern times. Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets* recollects with emotion the charm of his early married days. Gaffur, the taxi-driver in *The Guide* seems to express the feelings of the writer when he advises Raju not to keep relation with Rosie:

"...Just as an old, uneducated wife is better than the new type of girl. Oh, modern girls are very bold. I wouldn't let my wife live in a hotel all by herself, If I had to remain on duty on a hill top."

No doubt, there are moments of real joy in the family, but there are also misunderstanding and bickering which grow out of petty worries upsetting a middle-class family, the need of money being the foremost. However, the sufferings of the simple and faithful wives are quite commonplace.

Narayan treats the mother and child relationship with great sensitivity and feeling. A mother is generally very affectionate and self-effacing to her children. Again, it is the child who is seen defying the piety of this relationship. A grown-up child becomes a source of great mental uneasiness to his or her mother. Parents very often fall out with each other on the basis of their treatment of their son or daughter. Meenakshi, Margayya's wife in *The Financial Expert*, is a study of the psychology of a woman who stands between an over-confident and domineering husband and her determined and impertinent son. She stops interfering between them when they head toward a crisis on the question of education. She is a silent spectator of the crisis between her husband and her son. Narayan has very convincingly portrayed the psychology of this relationship. While a mother feels it is a joy to bestow her love on her child, the child has the desire to make use of his mother's love. Depending on this mother's love and favor, Swami pretends fever to avoid his school. He asks her to entertain his friends with the choicest food. Raju asks his mother to tell him a story each night and to scratch his hair. He is a source of comfort to his mother when the anxiously waits for her husband's return from the shop. Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* and Daisy in *The Painter of Signs* provides examples of adults who bring disgrace on their parents by refusing to act according to their wishes in regard to their marriages. Chandran dislikes his mother because she disfavors his marriage with Malathi, and Daisy does not like to see her mother unusually gay and contented when the guests come to see her before marriage. Chandran considers his mother cruel

and runs away from home, Daisy who hates the idea of marriage, also leaves her home and family.

The love relationship between man and woman outside marriage does not go beyond physical attraction and sexual involvement. There is no genuine feeling of true love in such people. It is purely physical enjoyment and an emotional relief to the partners in this kind of alliance. Ramani and Shanta Bai in *The Dark Room*, Sampath and Shanti in *Mr. Sampath*, Raju and Rosie in *The Guide*, Mali and Grace in *the Vendor of Sweets* and Raman and Daisy in *the Painter of Signs* provide a fine study of this kind of love relationship. There is hardly any sense of sacrifice in them.

To sum up, Narayan is deeply concerned with varied human relationship in his fiction. As an artist, his central preoccupation is doubtless with the exploration and examination of the theme of human relationships, and thus he has a close kinship with the inimitable, great modern novelist D.H. Lawrence. Accordingly, Narayan's treatment of human relationships is the key to the correct understanding and appraisal of his writings, and it surely constitutes the core and the principal charm of his entire literary corpus.

REFERENCES

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