

Gendered Spaces of Tradition and Modernity in R. K. Narayan's Fiction

Ravinder Reddy Mandala

Lecturer in English

Department of Technical Education, Telangana.

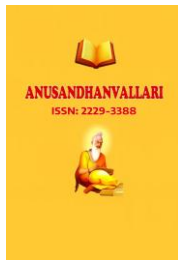
Abstract: Historically, women have been instrumental in shaping literature, as their narratives and experiences challenge prevailing societal norms and gender dynamics. R.K. Narayan's works illustrate a variety of female identities, highlighting their struggles against societal expectations and their pursuit of independence. Through a nuanced lens, Narayan underscores the essential roles women occupy within the Indian middle class, while also delving into the complexities of their identities. He advocates for gender equality and illustrates the vibrant lives of women in Malgudi, showcasing their evolution from restrictive roles to a state of self-assertion, which symbolizes a blend of liberation and the negotiation of tradition with modernity. In his narratives, such as *The Dark Room* and *The Guide*, Narayan critiques societal conventions, examining themes of personal relationships, resilience, and the transformative journey from emotional innocence to self-discovery.

Keywords: Tradition, Woman, Novel, India, Culture

Women have always been a key theme in many works of literature. The investigation of the female life is important due to a number of reasons. It does not only shed light on the perceptions, situations, responses and resistances of half the human population but also on a consciousness fashioned by gender dynamic. Moreover, it tends to put into question well-established structures and values that were traditionally self-evident. This literary emphasis presents the reader with an invitation to think about the notions of creativity and freedom, as well as brings up the aspects of colonization and oppression.

It has been very instrumental in the expression of the possibility of a female identity and in the destruction of the sense of a single, universal "I". Women are also getting to know and declare their identities through major encounters and minor changes, political, legislative and emotional battles. It should be noted though that not everything written on women can be described as feminist. Negation and absence can be used to create a feminist interpretation, not just affirmation and recognition. Such authorship by a feminist commentator using a different set of questions can result in new and enlightening insights. Women are fully involved in and existing within the societal and cultural structures; yet they are customized in a muted group, which is described by Edwin Ardener in his master piece, "The Problem Revisited". This dichotomy that has had an important part in the life of women implies that although women are maneuvering through their social reality that is encircled by the larger culture, they are usually bound by patriarchal restrictions or segregation and are forced to re-establish their position. As a result, women are subjected to a dual existence as a part of the overarching culture, as well as the part of the women culture.

The portrayal of female lives by Ardener also shows that the women find themselves in the male-dominated world, which is marked by the power relations, but they also exist in a world that is not represented by men. He imagines this association by use of two overlapping circles: the bigger circle is used to denote the common place that both sex occupy and the crescent like space which is the differentiation or the exclusive zone that belongs to women. The images of female characters in the novels of R. K. Narayan display a complicated network of identities and experiences. These women sometimes conform to the dominant social conventions, trying to be endorsed by external forces, and at other instances, they are seeking internal endorsement in their bid to seek independence. The work by Narayan is indicative of how the position of women shifted dramatically in his time, but he does not take on too much objectivity in his narratives and characters. This alienation makes it difficult to



know what he believed in or what value system he subscribed to using his literary work.

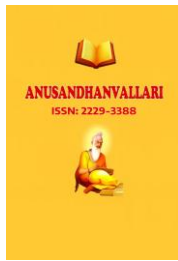
Moreover, Narayan does not want to express his idea about his works, which further contributes to ambiguity. However, by closely looking through his novels, one can see how his concept of women developed and included a great variety of roles a grandmother, wife, or mother. He skillfully plays with the theme of the old and the new female personalities, their feeling of self and their decisive character. His female characters tend to be reconstructed in the context of Indian middle-class society, which points to the fact that Narayan sees the essential role of women in the society. This examination of different images of women in the works by Narayan confirm that he is conscious of their indisputable social existence. Being a contemporary of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, Narayan is a great storyteller with whom they have the same thematic interests but a very clear trail of artistic expression.

The presentation of R. K. Narayan about women is not just a reportage but a kind of realism that is detailed to reflect the Indian psyche, full of its superstitions, confusing contradictions and hard and ironic sense of humor. He does not concentrate on how the human condition can be resolved but on its incompatibilities. The realities that his characters are placed in are a reflection of our own, and the stories he makes them relay as life stories can be considered true. His view on women can be observed through his novels since he skillfully depicts how women have changed their condition through time. Since the beginning of his literary career, Narayan demonstrated the reformist inclination, introducing a fictitious world that is quite close to real one. His style in narrating stories, which is in tandem with the settings of his tales, the middle-class setting uses a direct language in describing his female characters. Narayan has managed to capture the soul of the Indian culture, with unswerving convictions that are very colorful in his writings. He is also dedicated to moral order, forcing the readers to reconsider myths and legends in a new perspective.

Narayan, being an archetypal narrator, gives subtle accounts of Indian women who mostly happen in the fictional town of Malgudi which is a miniature of the human race. Although the characters of Malgudi are tied to a particular place, they have universal human qualities, which makes the town a symbol of the entire human experience. His women are shown with vividness and reality which adds to the establishment of a miniature but nonetheless realistic world of Malgudi. R. K. Narayan demonstrated a deep interest in the complexity of middle-class life, especially accentuating an important place of women as a core of life. This is demonstrated in his works as he is full of respect, affection and empathy towards the whole of women with a special interest in the Indian women.

Despite a critical analysis depicting the female characters, it is evident that his female characters tend to come out as more vivid, compelling and dynamic than the male characters. Narayan assumes that men and women are interdependent and none can exist without the other. Instead of promoting the absolute equality, he demands the equality of opportunities between both sexes. The fictional town of Malgudi is not an ordinary place where women are considered secondary characters, but they are portrayed as full-fledged characters. He is a promoter of the principle of innate equality between men and women, questioning the traditional relations where men have to be viewed as breadwinners and can be assertive and aggressive, whereas women have to be viewed only as responsible housewives.

Within this classic paradigm, there is family pressure and the pressures of the society that women have to face and in this case their fate is mainly made by the rest of the world and they do not have too much control on how they are going to live their lives. In Narayan previous works, women reject these traditional roles, and the motif of the disregarded wife appears to be one of the repeating themes. He depicts that marriage may wring away the individuality of the women and they have to conform to the ideals set by men and thus they become subservient. These women could live purposeless lives, lacking the purpose and the ones who met social expectations get the false security in their compliance, despite their own struggles of living with conflicting feelings.



Traditional women tend to be deeply connected to the concept of marriage and any postponement of the latter may cause anxiety on a grand scale, and barrenness is considered an extreme tragedy. The female characters in the works of R. K. Narayan are not always the characters with strong personal opinion and are often considered along the Male-character in their lives, which results in the image of an incomplete woman in his earlier works. These characters are mostly restricted to domestic duties, where they play their roles mute in doing the chores at home.

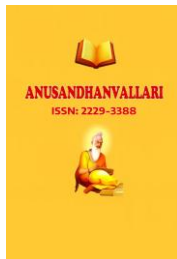
Although Narayan is inclined to romanticise the motherly nature of women, especially when it comes to the image of the grandmother, he implies that the feminine identity of a woman is inextricably connected to the act of mothering, whether one has children or not. In his earlier novels some female characters do make the attempt to break the norms and conventions in the society, but they fail to do so, being defeated by the sheer force of societal demands. The consequence of this is defeat in which remorse causes them to seek solace in submission. Narayan seems to frown upon any rebellious spirit of these women, since his typical characters are shown as good mammas, loving wives, and cute grandmothers. Though they can complain of social wrongs or infidelity of their husbands, they tend to compromise and cross the marital limits.

The old women of Narayan stories get their social and family reputation due to their sacrifices and service, which is an idealized image of the Indian culture. However, contrary to this, not all of Narayan women are as patriarchal and some are more spirited, claiming their independence and establishing their spaces. Instead of depending on men, they take a leap towards their liberation, as this implies that the women liberation movement has not achieved much in terms of emancipation but possibly reactions to the initial oppressive behavior, in that they are still stuck to the initial oppressive act. Narayan had the groundwork of a great change in his initial works, and in his later novels the women he creates are depicted having a sense of freedom which did not come out of hatred, or bitterness, but a deep understanding of what liberty is.

Within the conventional contexts of Narayan's stories, however, there are certain female characters who stand out as progressive figures, who challenge the social injustices and assert their right to express dissent. These women are dynamic and sensitive to their circumstances. While Narayan touches upon social problems like dowry system, preference for male babies in the society, stigma of being infertile and evolution of nuclear family etc. he does not exploit these themes; he enjoys a position of detachment with respect to the sufferings of women. The women's rights issue is not overtly in favor of or against women in his narratives.

Narayan shows the complexity and unpredictability of women, exploring the emotional landscapes of women and suggesting that men do not fully understand the motivations behind some of women's behaviors. His female characters are keenly aware of their rights and responsibilities, and some of them are influenced by Western ideals. They live outside the limits that patriarchal structures impose on them without competing directly with men, and at the same time, they value their domestic roles. Narayan implies that Indian women don't want freedom to the point that it will make them emotionally empty. His characterization of well-educated and proactive and ambitious women are astoundingly progressive for his day in terms of portraying an empowered image that challenges traditional norms and redefine their societal roles to achieve greater personal satisfaction.

Through his unique perspective, Narayan is able to capture the evolution and transformation of the role of women within society. He expertly weaves in the elements of traditionalism and modernity in such a manner that he has effectively bridged the gap in between and expressed the emergence of self-determined women in the framework of conservative elements in Indian culture. The characters that he portrays experience the invigorating effects of this change, as the new representation of women is offered as a beacon of hope to those who have been wading through the darkness. By instilling a sense of purpose and activism in his female characters, Narayan reveals new possibilities for them. Several of Narayan's female protagonists reject the societal norms and make an effort to forge their own path for economic independence, based upon their



individual choices, skills, and ambitions, despite their roots in marginalized communities. He recognizes their undiscovered potential for self-sufficiency and writes them as daring and determined figures who make a strong impression of conviction. These women dispel the uncertainties and ambiguities and are represents a blend of modernity and a search for identity.

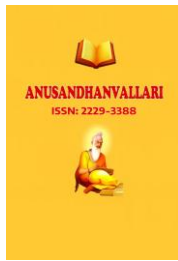
Narayan's female characters display extraordinary foresight and resilience, preparing them to overcome the challenges that an evolving world presents. They come out as powerful agents of change, as they have moved on to unconventional views regarding premarital relationships and love marriages. In some cases, Narayan's feisty females even outshine their male counterparts because their commitment to their work boosts their confidence and they confront and overcome the challenges they face. Narayan has had a literary career spanning almost eight decades as a novelist and in this course of time has evolved a unique view on the role of women in the Indian society, both in the past and the present. His work makes him one of the leading humanists of the twentieth century, as he dives into the complexities of the women's experiences that were created by their upbringing, societal norms, education, and cultural influences. These elements form a constraining shell, confining their understanding and existence; however, Narayan does an amazing job of demolishing this shell and opening up the possibility for a deeper exploration of their often-painful histories.

The women in Narayan's stories show a striking capacity for observing the natural world with serene composure and defying the pains and sufferings of different kinds inflicted upon them. Their emotions - ranging from jealousy and anger to frustration - provide sources of their pain, but their ambitions, although fraught with challenges, provide a sense of fulfilment as they are self-determined. Narayan is not afraid to portray the imperfections of his female characters, and he recognizes that pressures from society play a part in their imperfections. He passionately rejects the idea of the subservience of women, stressing that the nurturing qualities of women should not be mistaken for an order of servitude, but that the essence of womanhood is based in the principles of care and mutual support, without coercion.

Narayan proposes that economic independence is a powerful force in empowering women to a certain extent so as to assert their identities. He argues that the discussion of freedom has to be based on self-sufficiency. In the background of Malgudi, the tradition of arranged marriages on the basis of horoscopes is of paramount importance. However, in the latter works of Narayan the idea of marriages being divinely ordained is questioned. The changing outlook of women in marriage depicts such a change; economic autonomy has enabled women to renegotiate basic societal norms. Self-sufficient women today are more likely to get married, however, as they want to share their lives completely with a partner. In contrast, previous generations had few options relating to their choice of spouses and were often forced into marriage before adolescence.

Through his narratives, Narayan shows how education and economic independence have helped to bring about positive changes in the lives of women. His female characters go on a journey for a deeper understanding of the husband-wife relationship, and prioritize that we can only find true relationships in which we allow women's emotional and spiritual needs to be met rather than focusing on societal expectations of security and respectability. Narayan's fiction has a special quality that provokes the average reader's perceptions, challenging them to look into the complexities of his female characters, who have been portrayed with depth and nuance, instead of being reduced to superficial characteristics. This complex portrayal resonates with modern audiences, and thus his work is especially appealing in the modern literary world.

The female characters created by Narayan move beyond the black and white distinctions of being mere sex objects or self-centered and career-oriented women. Instead they represent the basic values of womanhood but grow up to become figures of heroism. Narayan also ardently illustrates the metamorphosis of women from passive and compliant roles to women with traits of strength and competitiveness. This change in the dynamics of male-female relations, considering the changes in the status of women, is especially noteworthy, because it



promotes a sense of mutual trust and companionship.

While women might seek physical demise, their souls persevere, symbolizing Narayan's belief in their capability for creating a harmonious home in the confines of domesticity. In his narratives, these women become sincerely engaged, think independently, and try to create their identities within society instead of outside of it. Narayan does not set out to teach moral lessons or promote any particular causes; instead, he recognises the complexities of the human character, implying that all people have both faults and merits. It would be unfair to take a superior critical attitude towards his heroines, who make so many mistakes under the pressure of their circumstances, although they are basically good.

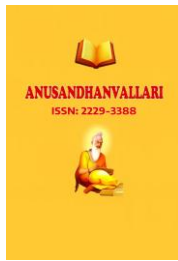
In this way, the way Narayan portrays women seems to be a new kind of perspective and would make him a person of the changing role of women without being a reformist or feminist in the strictest sense of the two ideologies. He captures the emergence of the 'New Woman' with a naturalistic lens, as a result of his keen observational skills. Among the Indian English novelists, he is the most objective writer; a quality which requires a luck to be disciplined, composed and balanced, which he is by nature.

Narayan is a master at expressing the essence of life as lived by the people in his surroundings; using a clear and accessible language. His female characters often represent a sense of mystery, although he has shown a strong awareness of the problems and issues facing women. While he may not offer clear-cut solutions or promote particular doctrines, this does not mean that there is a lack of substance in his work. Rather, he manifests the bravery to speak out against the struggles of women and fights for social reforms for their welfare. Through his novels, he has successfully captured the realities of women's lives, and established a laudable portrayal of realities that would have a universal impact, thus obtaining a distinguished status in the field of Indian literature in English. The fact that his works were widely translated into various languages is no mere accident, as it stems from the sensitivity and authenticity of the way he handles the subject of portrayal of women and fundamental facets of Indian society.

For an Indian author, the challenge to present native traditions, customs and social norms in a foreign language like English is not an easy task. Narayan handles this complexity with finesse, using such literary devices as satire, irony, and humor to create his name as an important Indo-English writer. His use of these devices is to comment on societal absurdities, moral failings and hypocrisy, which makes his narratives, at once, both interesting and thought-provoking. The simplicity and objectivity of Narayan's language is what helps it to be effective, as it is quite similar to the straightforward style of writing in journalism. His command of pure and lucid English, with a natural flow and tone, is ever refined and deliberate, and gives an additional piquancy and effect to his contributions to literature.

Narayan's use of English, while there is a traditional structure, is somewhat aloof from the cultural context that created it. The historical background, social conditions, and environmental factors such as the heat oppression, the presence of vultures, rich flocks of parrots and scavenging jackals are all factors that contribute to a bleak depiction of poverty and clarity of light. This stands very much in contrast to the rich and nuanced qualities of contemporary English. Narayan's language is cleverly used to represent an Indian point of view and demonstrates his artistry in the English language through a deep psychological examination of his characters. He manages to base his ideas on concrete observations, which highlights the importance of close scrutiny in his narrative strategy. By using simple language, like phrases such as "brought and dumped" and "a silent and benumbed gang," Narayan manages to capture philosophical and metaphysical thoughts in a stronger way than would be possible if he used an extended description.

This technique demonstrates his narrative skill because he manages to convey the ordinary rhythms of the South Indian society through a powerful depiction of its various facets. His narratives are impregnated with a gentle irony that exposes the vibrancy and absurdities of life without sacrificing a commitment to an intense realism.



Ultimately, the journeys of his protagonists often end in unfulfilled lives, which highlight the innocence and the unique artistic representation of his characters. Narayan's approach to his subject matter is strong and objective. He has the amazing feature to be able to make something extraordinary out of the most humble linguistic resource thanks to his honesty and self-assurance. His use of simple English is worthy of note as he avoids trying to add some elements from Tamil or other Indian languages to it, and there is a clear adherence to English grammatical conventions. While he makes good use of many Indian words, such as "pyol," "jukta," "pahelwan," his English is all vivacious, lucid, and gripping. The themes, characters and dialogues he creates successfully express the feelings and mood of the South Indian society.

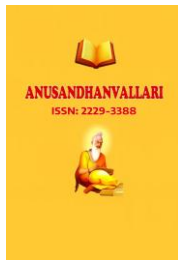
Narayan also uses the idioms of common Indian English without distorting their original structure and, that way, makes his language skillful in expressing ideas and characters, not to mention its attractiveness to the Western readers. Clarity, gentleness and fluidity are the features of his expression of thoughts and observations. He does not have a rich vocabulary, but can easily traverse different subjects, avoiding too artistic, obscure, or prolonged expressions. His language is very close to the natural speech patterns of his characters, and he does not use complex sentences. His distinctive style of writing is that of clarity, purity, simplicity, and precision.

Narayan has received international recognition because of this down-to-earth style that he has successfully applied to ironically and philosophically comment on people and events. Even ordinary events are made interesting and enjoyable by his style of approach, and his descriptions of events and dialogue are as full of self-confidence and narrative power. So it is seen that the nature of Narayan artistic expression is the sincerity of his work, the simplicity of his word, the delicacy of humor since he has a sharp observation and self-understanding instinct of human follies. Narayan also skillfully reproduces the behaviour and speech patterns of people and presents them in a very natural way, especially when they are dealing with a different language. The setting of the story is in an apparent abandoned theater, which is the only facility of its kind in the town, its long hall and its corrugated iron roof.

Narayan uses satire to show the peculiarities and inconsistencies in the society but his method is very mild, and the audience cannot be offended. It is a satire device that seeks to create laughter, and this provision is constant in his novels. His writing style is quite sparse in terms of imagery due to a falsely simple nature and this is supported by a simple syntax that is not riddled with word play and fancy. The art of prose of Narayan cannot be considered with regard to the richness of imagery because it is not a main point of his narrative vision. Rather, the key to his art works is his satire and irony that is a barefaced mirror of the reality, devoid of conventional leanings. This ironic view, especially, is conspicuous in his handling of romantic love, in making it clear that his command of lovely irony and tender satire is central to his excellence as a stylist.

The literary works by R.K. Narayan form one of the major accomplishments in the sphere of Indian literature in English. His long list of work has earned him a lot of recognition not only in India but in other countries as well, over the fifty years that he has worked. One of the most interesting factors about Narayan was that he embodies the Indian identity both in his thoughts and spirit even though he prefers to use the English language in order to focus on his creative urges instead of using his mother tongue. Soak in religion and family values, he is not much influenced by western literary trends, but ironically, he has won a large following in the United States over the recent past. His stories are set in the fictional town of Malgudi, the setting that can be summarized by the changing world of Indian society. His writings represent the microcosm of India, which traverses conflicts between tradition and modernity, and a strong social consciousness, as well.

Narayan keenly understands that there are always some contradictions in life and society, and this aspect of the story is reflected by the author in his narration. Instead of attacking the vices in the society, he decides to enlighten them, the main point of which is to entertain and captivate his audience. The heroes of his novels represent the many experiences of different living situations in society and his subsequent ones, which revolve



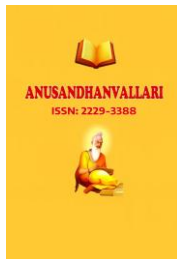
around Indian mythology, bring out a more metaphysical aspect of his literary venture. A keen interest in the Hindu religion and its stories can also be traced in Narayan, and this is due to the depth into the Hindu mythology that he exhibits. He uses a wide range of characters to express his ideas, remarks and own experiences, and neatly incorporates them into the context of his narration. Narayan clearly captures the spirit of Hinduism; it is absolutely clear that his biography is closely intermixed with religious and family principles. His personal experience of the workings of Indian families is an important background to his literary intelligence permitting him to delve into the relationships between family members with a level of delicacy and confidence.

The narrative technique Narayan used might seem to be simple, yet it is quite a complex one, skillfully covering the requirements of the thematic complexity and character growth. The credibility of his narrators is also characteristic of his style because their ideas and views expressed are in tune with general rhetoric and narrative strategies he utilizes in his works. Narayan rarely uses first-person and third-person narration intertwined with non-linear plot in books like *The Guide* since s/he understands that the strictly chronological structure does not necessarily correspond with the spirit of narration. The lack of continuity due to the frequent interruptions, pauses, and breaks in the narrative echoes with the inner life of the main character and his changing identity. Narayan uses and employs the minds of multiple characters with a skillful sense of pace that shows how Narayan has mastered the narrative perspective and how he uses these tools that enrich his thematic explorations. The shifts in viewpoints are so slight that the narrator hardly ever attracts attention to himself, which lets the readers experience the story and not pay much attention to the narrative strategies. This nuance is also applied to the way Narayan treats time in the novel; although he uses devices such as flashbacks and flash-forwards in a skillful manner to make the reader sympathize with otherwise unlikeable characters, these time shifts are hardly ever noticeable, and they are used to make characters more human and keep the reader invested in their stories and self-reactions.

Narayan is one of the artists who is characterized by an outstanding originality and skill. It is not only his skill in using different narrative techniques which he does with great artistic accuracy but also provokes a harmonious fusion of the local and the universal, the present and the eternal, and demonstrates his deepest moral interest in humanity. He covers the intricacy of his art very artfully in his works, this speaks volumes of his genius as an artist. Critical analysis of R. K. Narayan in his methods of narration, goes a long way in comprehending the worldview of the author, and the intelligent commentary on the endless socio-economic, spiritual, and ethical quandaries the modern Indians have to experience all around in the world around us all condensed in his simplified narrations which we can appreciate further.

The way in which Narayan manages to convey the social awareness of his characters is quite impressive, not to mention the fact that this is done without any awkward methods being used. The psychological motivation of his three-dimensional characters, firmly in place because of their setting, choices of location, use of significant myths and symbols, the use of well structured plots that turn meaningfully, the use of important titles which capture the essence of the stories, and the use of a subtle irony as a counterbalancing factor all serve to supplement his plots. All this highlights the fact that Narayan has weaved the social awareness into his work of fiction perfectly. His novels represent a perfect blend of social consciousness and fantastic worlds, and, more to the point, Narayan does not merely portray social consciousness the way it is but also follows its development and shifts depending on the altering times.

The development of the image of women in “*The Dark Room*”, as compared to “*The Guide*”, is an excellent example of the change. The richness and the art in which social consciousness has been embodied in fiction are seldom compared. The traditional Indian values form the core base of the Narayan literary works and he is always drawn to these values, Indian myths and Indian legends in the growth of his characters. These characters get involved in the perpetual dialogue of assessment and reassessment of old stories and principles. Individuals that break social and moral rules, neglect family ties and still do not acknowledge the uniqueness of others suffer



and are criticized by the author. In the fictional world created by Narayan, almost every major character is set on a journey which seems predetermined, in which their lack of interest in tradition is proven false, and they come to a new level of self-awareness and establish a sense of balance.

The critical analysis of the works of Narayan shows there is a deep relation between interpersonal relations and self-discovery. The consequences of this are distress, anxiety, confusion, and the overall feeling of helplessness among the main characters and their partners when people use unethical tactics to gain personal or material satisfaction, when their ego is in the way of communication, or when their social and family ties are at risk.

The stories of Narayan reinforce the value of personal bonds in surmounting these struggles since it is through these bonds that people can find their way out of their predicaments and come out to be stronger and better beings. The writer is so convinced about the significance of relationships in the quest to achieve selfhood that his main characters are not given the chance to be rebels.

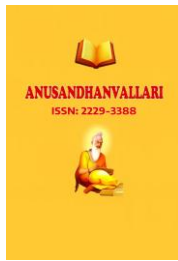
The suppression of rebellion in the novels of Narayan is one of the means to sustain the balance and conformity of society, where the characters are free to go against the norms to a certain degree. Although they might challenge and break down accepted norms in the short run, they are soon assimilated back into the conventions that have been inherited, which even agrees with the challenges inherent in this. The main characters follow the cause of protest but the strong connection to the cultural surrounding makes the author believe that without adhering to the old values, even the harmony in the personality of the person, or his vision cannot be attained.

As a result, such characters have to work their predicaments in terms of such norms. Names of the characters used by Narayan tend to clarify their relationships and state of development usually, the love of Krishna to his wife, Susila, and the level of wisdom in Krishna are examples that remind us of the mythological character of Lord Krishna. At the end of the story, Krishna gains such deep understanding that he is ready to come to terms with the loneliness of life and this idea is reminiscent of the wisdom of Sri Krishna, who tells his followers not to mourn about the dead. This understanding justifies Krishna using his religious name. Equally, Margayya, meaning the way shower, eventually carries this meaning as he is flexible to alterations and accepts the will of the Destiny with almost no struggle. Raju is an inverted version of the Hindi word Rajan, that means king. This shows the royal ambition of the protagonist in the story despite his ultimate demotion to a twisted form of his desires; but, he is even more successful on his own.

The name of Rosie, one of the characters in “The Guide”, is not traditionally Indian, which emphasizes her non-conformist nature and the need to be unique and recognized as a professional, which is usually foreign to traditional Indian women. Nonetheless, when she is renamed Nalini, the meaning of which is a comparison to a lotus flower that grows in stagnant water and does not lose its beauty even when it is not submerged, she symbolizes this change.

Narayan has made his own niche in literature as the downfall of the transgressor is followed by a sense of self-realization and the support of the importance of the stable and original state of mind, which can be achieved by the few. When Narayan is being critiqued by Srinivas Iyengar, it can be said that the author understands the world as the complicated matter of checks and balances which eventually results in the acceptance of the Absurd. However, the ending of both Narayan novels, which is in question in this analysis, is the defeat of the ridiculous, the exaltation of the competent, reasonable, and worthy, even the one who might have previously gone astray. The world of Narayan is known globally because it has created a seemingly ordinary world full of characters whose seeming banality conceals a critical depth and strength into which Narayan instills them. The significance of relationships and family ties to people is emphasized by the fact that almost every character who attains a new level of self-realization welcomes these ties even though they have tried to ignore them and overestimate them earlier.

On the one hand, they do not leave the world completely or stop feeling like foreigners, but on the other



hand, their awakening is a major shift of their former conditions. Even though they do not end up being completely unattached, their enlightenment level is significantly higher. They feel isolated without feeling alienated since they have learned a lot about the nuances of life. Narayan skillfully puts a dismantling effect on the individual identity in his stories, and it results in the moment of clarity. This negation which can be seen by others and society as destructive is really a hidden gift and eventually leads to a greater understanding in the person.

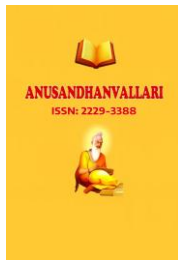
Similar to the mythical phoenix, they have come out of a discontinuous and chaotic world, made stronger by inner toughness and balance, which are the values that they have developed. The heroes come out of a naive emotional innocence into a deeper perspective of themselves and the meaning of human existence leading them to maturity and self-realization. According to the Hindu philosophies, the protagonists of Narayan often strive to pursue the path of renunciation which, at first glance, appears to be a way out of crises, but inevitably manage to go back and face what they were trying to avoid, only to be provided with an additional insight that the true wisdom does not lie in avoiding issues but making the most of them.

The literary skills of R.K. Narayan can be seen in his deep perception of the human soul and the interactions between people, which adds the philosophical touch to his works that readers can relate to. His writings are characterized by a great universalism, with the characters going through any form of relationships, which is characterized by the journey of transformation that starts with innocence, passes through experience, and finally to wisdom. This development is an indication of a maturation process, and the truth is realized, and this re-establishes a touch with the primary points of life.

Moreover, the motive of the "Return of Tradition" is well traced in the lives of Narayan characters, where the cultural background remains a timeless component in their lives. Narayan had a distinctively individualistic and free imaginative potential, which he tapped on a great deal in the influences of the surrounding world and his experiences in life. He closely analyzed the situation of human relations, activity and ambitions and filled his stories with vivid description. His novels abound with the colorful descriptions of characters, as he had mastered the psychological aspects of the characters that he created. Often, his storytelling was triggered by real life events as he attempted to infuse his characters with part of human characters that were distinctively individualistic. Though they might be different in many ways, these characters tend to have the transformational revelations that tend to purge the mind resulting into the spiritual enlightenment as the story progresses. This quest leads them to the level where they can transform their work into a kind of worship and this is through the development of the right attitude towards their work.

Narayan also fills his fictional world with characters representing the South Indian middle class which is dominated by the lower classes in the society. He skillfully embodies the spirit of their personal lives, family life, dreams, and victories and losses, peculiarities and disappointments of them. His subtle narration leaves the audience with sympathy towards the apparently foolish hero who goes through the road of self-blaming and regeneration. His fictional world is a reflection of the real-world, and it is full of its countless events.

Narayan is also compassionate in his attitude to his characters but he also recognizes the absurdities of life. He depicts them as people who possess true values but with a few vices that make them imperfect. The main characters blend perfectly into society, which points to philosophical reconciliation of their situation. As remarked, authors such as Narayan contribute to the knowledge of the human experience by presenting us with unfamiliar themes, characters and views. (Milligan 2) The Dark Room by R.K. Narayan is an absolute swerve of the traditional story-line, a heart-rending account of the struggles in a woman trying to find the way in the mazes of her life being the wife of the unfaithful husband. The theme of personal free will is skillfully interwoven throughout the story and its importance is imperative in human relations. As the tension grows in the domestic sphere, the story develops into a bright image of the conflict which culminates into violence. The theme of



infidelity is central to the plot and it not only serves as the driving force of the story but also influences the journey of the protagonist.

Finally, having walked out of her house in a rebellious gesture against treachery of her husband, the heroine comes back, and the feeling of resignation and bitterness makes the ending of the novel quite a powerful one. Narayan looks back upon his obsession with the issues of female-to-female interactions and their interactions with men where the wife is a classic victim in the strict confines of the Indian traditional society. (Narayan, *The Dark* 174)

The main character of the story is Savitri who fulfills her duties traditionally as a devoted mother and wife and seems to be resigned about them. Nevertheless, she is getting more and more impatient to leave the routine of her life as she desires to have personal freedom and release of the human spirit. Another important element of the Savitri character is that she is badly entangled in the inflexible hierarchies of Indian society. The end of the novel shows her going back home with a feeling of helplessness dependency just like she was at the start of the story. Although she is mentally strong to withstand the abuse of her husband, the bold step she takes to leave her family and her violence to demonstrate that she can stand alone are dramatic as compared to her later backlash into a state of despair, implying that the decision is made by people who lack the spine to face the difficulties of life as they come. The story becomes even more sinister as she learns of her husband having an affair with a colleague called Shanta Bai and this compels her to give up her pursuit of independence and back to being the wife of Ramani. Conversely, his masterpiece,

The Guide, is his most successful work and was recognized internationally and it won the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1960. The main character of this novel, Rosie, is in the same situation as she is trapped in the bondage of a patriarchal society. Though she becomes famous and is economically independent, the association with Raju, who takes control of her money but later betrays her, makes her new independence difficult. The reason behind her affair with Raju has to do with the emotional neglect that she feels in the hands of her husband, Marco, an architect whose indifference further motivates her to seek comfort with someone else, and this implies that her infidelity is a direct result of the lack of concern and engagement on the part of her husband, Marco, who is an architect (Singh 143).

Rosie ends up breaking up with Marco and after having her heart betrayed by Raju, who is her husband, comes up as her destiny. She misses the love of her husband, but in her endeavors, she often meets failure. She turns to Marco who rejects her in her efforts to redeem herself in relation to her affair with Raju when he learns about the affair between his wife and the guide though only in name. Marco is so inconsiderate of her and he leaves her without even giving her a chance to explain herself. The story, through the character of Rosie, displays that the fate of a woman is usually coupled with her husband, and thus the theme of *The Tradition to Return* is well presented in the novel. This custom is further reiterated with the character of Raju who although forced into a life of being a spiritual guru eventually falls into the same woe that he is forced to starve to death.

It has been commented that

Of all Narayan's novels, *The Guide* reaches us into thought to an extent no other novel of his does. Narayan's fictional technique is also at its subtlest in *The Guide*. The novel, which opens with Raju in the ruined village temple about to be reverentially accepted as a Sadhu, ends in the same locality with his enforced death, thus giving the tale a perfectly rounded, circular structure. (Naik 167)

The English Teacher is one of the most praised works by R. K. Narayan that can be understood only by subtle analysis of the narrative structure, which is not a split into two parts, but the complex process of human soul with its nuances in the way to self-realization. The most crucial part of this exploration is the necessity of self-discipline that is even more important in the situation of the personal experience of the author. The play of reality and fiction is especially tragic, since it represents a great personal crisis that Narayan went through since the

untimely death of his young wife, a loss that Shakespeare was thrown into so deeply that it troubled his professional dedication to the literary profession.

Numerous analysts believe that the novel reflects the life of Narayan, whose autobiographical components were extremely evident. The main character, Krishnan, struggles with the emotional conflict caused by the death of his beloved wife, Susila, who he feels still guides him even after death. He writes in many cases about how he misses her and how she died because of his failures but the memory of Susila reminds him that he has parental duties to his only child. Finally, Krishnan is developed to a more metaphysical realization, the death of Susila is related to unsanitary conditions of their surroundings, which Krishnan identifies with the New Extension.

John Thieme notes that at the end of the story, Krishna finally attains a positive acceptance of life and death which culminates in the torturous but transformative experience of educating oneself. Heavy-heartedness in the novel is the theme of returning to tradition, but with some tragic undertones, and at the same time, the theme of returning to tradition is supported by the conclusive nature of the human spirit to accept as a whole the limits of life, death, and the afterlife. The main character of the novel portrays a metaphysical approach all through as he struggles with the idea that the death of his wife is something out of the ordinary in his life. As the story unfolds, he slowly learns to accept the fact that the two states, life and death are no longer parallel but one is pure physical and the other spiritual. This awakening brings him back to his sanity so that he can concentrate on raising his daughter, Leela, as he approaches the end of his life. Narayan does not make explicit or implicit moral judgments but he shows that he is psychologically astute in his investigation about several human experiences. According to critics, Narayan has managed to reduce the description to bare minimum to capture the essence of his characters, which is notable given his deep understanding of the human psyche and human behavior. (Raizada 126)

References

- [1] Chakravarthi, Uma. 'Retrieving Women's Voices: Contexts, Issues and Implications,' *Indian Review of Books*, Vol. 8, No. 5, pp. 4-6, 16 February 1999.
- [2] Dodiya, Jaydipsinh. *Contemporary Indian Writings in English*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001.
- [3] Hall, Calvin S. and Gardner Lindzey. *Theories of Personality*. New Delhi: Wiley, 1985. Iyengar, K. R. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling, 1962.
- [4] Kapadia, K. R. *Marriage and Family in India*. Calcutta: OUP, 1966.
- [5] Krishnaswamy, Shantha. *The Women in Indian Fiction in English*. New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1984.
- [6] Lerner, Gerda. *The Majority Finds its Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. Milligan, Ian. *The Novel in English*. London: Macmillan, 1983.
- [7] Narayan, R. K. *The Dark Room*. 1938. Mysore: Indian thought Publications, 1998. Raizada, Harish. *R.K. Narayan: A Critical Study of His works*. New Delhi: Young Asia Publications, 1969.
- [8] Singh, Krishna Kant. *Social Perspectives in R.K. Narayan's Novels*. Jaipur: Tarun offset Press, 2002.
- [10] Tharu, Susie. "Tracing Savitri's Pedigree: Victorian Racism and the Image of Women in Indo-Anglian Literature", *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Eds.
- [11] Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989.
- [12] Walsh, William, "Common Wealth Literature", London: Oxford University Press, 1973.