

Gender Distinction And Women Empowerment In R. K. Narayan's *The Dark Room*

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Abstract

As far as the life of human being is concerned there are many challenges and inner-struggles in the emerging world society namely: uncertainties of life, inequality, gender distinction, frustrations, distress, tensions, anxieties, anguish, fear, alienation, infidelity, misunderstanding and delusion. Among the struggles gender distinction has a lasting impact on the whole of human being, which prevents all types of human progress. For a woman, as for a man, the need for self-fulfilment - autonomy, self-realisation, independence, individuality, self-actualization is as important and inevitable. After the Second World War there are many women writers, social reformers and political figures and intellectual giants who could contribute outstanding performances in highlighting the competitive equality. The present article attempts to discuss the gender distinction and the empowerment of women through the writing of R K Narayan.

Key words

Gender distinction, Complimenting entity, Women empowerment, Equality in the reality of life.

Introduction

Indian Society characterizes women as ideally warm, gentle; dependent and submissive. The patriarchal family heritage of India has given her a position in the family as well as in the society kept on changing and is almost invariably an inferior one. She is scarcely given any freedom. Religious outlook on gender equality is tremendously poor in the

case of woman accommodating her in administering religious-rituals of different denominations. This engulf has been reduced through the global understanding of the potential productivity of woman in any field. Intellectual efficiency, relentless effort and concentrative attention of a woman become imperatives to build up the dream of all the companies in the global net work today. In my opinion that there is no question of gender distinction but it is to be understood as different entity of life and complimenting realities in completing the entrusted obligations. Even in India there are many writers portrayed the real potentiality and calibre of women in the society and family. Therefore in the coming decades, gender distinction will never be an obstacle in the history of humanity for its progress. This paper attempts to present the life of Savatri in *The Dark Room* of R. K. Narayan, who is typically a prototype of a suffering woman in the orthodox family set up of India.

The Dark Room -a Story of Indian Woman

The title *The Dark Room* is a symbolic representation of the dark side of the gender distinction in the pre independence era of India. It tells the story of miserable life of women in Indian orthodox family, which was unknown to the world. Associated with male dominating society, woman has a correlative identity and she forgets every situation of struggle hoping for better tomorrow and vehemently Narayan asks us the question who is really fully involved and suffered in the survival of the state of life? Is it man or woman? The story of the woman- protagonist says the answer –it is the woman who suffers and endures more. On the one hand India has a multi civilised culture, which in every aspect contributes a very particular heritage, wonderful tradition, peculiar customs and belief pattern; on the other hand its a male dominating society, who tries to suppress and oppress women, their equality and right in the fabricated frame of orthodox family structure. “Mild, submissive, domesticated and self-sacrificing woman was as essential adornment of the patriarchal social set up the world over.” (Dhawan13). Though the Indian constitution gives the provision of equal rights for woman, she is ill-treated in the family, working place, society. “‘Woman’ has been never given individual identity in Indian society. She has been always identified with a male either as a daughter or a wife or a mother or a sister”(Dyviya 58). As a pre-independent work *Dark Room* of R. K. Narayan (1938) portrays a picture of India’s patriarchal domination and atmosphere of disharmony in the family. Savatri, one of the major characters of the novel is a symbol of a suffering maid, wife and mother in a family. Ramani – husband of Savatri, the office, and secretary of Engladia Insurance Company in Malgudi is very domineering and hardhearted man as a father and husband.

R K Narayan has not exaggerated the life-struggle of the woman married to a careless and hopeless man and he becomes the sign obsessed with disintegration and unfaithfulness. There are particular instances of serious negligence to the life of Savatri without proper care and love even unaware of the presence. The pathetic family situation made her away from all the dreams of life and traditional understanding of the family concept. Infidelity and illegal relations of husband are become the causes of destruction of the family bond and the author presents Savatri as a mother of suffering; a wife of endurance in helplessness and a patient teacher to the children. She was not privileged and meritorious to be the wife of a secretary to a famous company. For Indian tradition is so valuable that it teaches us to respect woman, not only in words but in practice that is why G.D. Barche says that “ for years the woman has lived under the protection of either parents, husband or her children. And this pattern of life outwardly made her life safe and smooth” (Dhavan 12). Sympathized by the miserable life of Savatri, each reader would be disturbed to make an assessment in siding with all the suffering women in India either by gender distinction or by male chauvinistic behaviour.

R. K. Narayan is very particular to make all the readers say that the story of Savatri is not accidental but its the real life of many wedded women in the so called ‘Malgudi’ state-India. Inevitably rich the presence, volunteer service as a mother and a full-time handmaid in the family, the absent of a mother is a stumbling block of the growth of children. As a whole, the work of a mother can never be replaced by anybody even father or the most attached one. Savatri is a prototype of a decent mother that she comes back even after quitting away from husband’s house. Even the accidental death or absence of a mother can affect more than of a father or anybody at home. For mother is the only immediate person fully aware of the needs and emergency of all the members in the family. Therefore the multi-dimensional role of a woman in the family is dignified and considered as a gift and blessing.

R k Narayan emphasises on the characteristic features of Savatri as a submissive house wife, a good mother and a woman with an integrated personality. This is the typical point where the author challenges the modern readers in highlighting the fact that there is no gender distinction and inequality between man and woman; for they are complimenting each other for the purpose of self actualisation in the process of transformation reciprocally. A woman becomes a cause of formation, changes and instrumental of transformation in every individual in the family. Moreover in Savatri, the self actualisation is the moment of personal awareness of the value of motherhood; that is why she has given away the plan of committing suicide even at the point of complete dejection and loneliness. Obviously woman

is an instrumental cause for the self realisation of the entire humanity. R K Narayan symbolically highlights that the different gender is a unique identity and complimenting entity. Man and woman collaborate for the amalgamation of better thoughts, initiatives, undertakings and future plan. It is hopeless and obstinate to make any distinction according to the gender and it may degrade the human nature and collaborative endeavours in the unity of humanity.

Gender Identity as a Blessing

In the emerging world society women have proved the ability to cope up with any situation as men at work. The story of the novel of Dark Room envisages us to think the limited span of life has given to everybody to do something better. And therefore the gender distinction is an impediment to fulfil the purpose of our call. The gender distinction is a biological peculiarity that gives each gender either masculine or feminine, a particular role in the family and society in fulfilling the entrusted obligations and the realisation of the self. It is not the time to quarrel with each other or confront on the matter of gender identity, but rather to acknowledge the fact that human being or any gender is interdependent for anything and everything for the purpose of self actualisation. The physical domination of the male gender is not a right to over rule and intervene the life of woman in any state of life. Savatri proves that the activities of a mother can never be delegated even at the point of death. The memories of her children and their future made her mad after life. Savatri, a woman of personal integrity and identity had a definite plan of life that leads her to endure sufferings in the family, misbehaviour of the husband, uncertainty of the life of the children.

Transformation of a Soul in the Dark Night

Heroic action of a mother is explicitly manifested in the life and activities of Savatri, neither loses her life in fact nor abandons her children; she became an exemplary model of a mother who has the sole responsibility in a broken family. Here R. K. Narayan emphasises due importance on the character of Savatri though a male narrates the novel, her personality is dignified as woman of determination. The life of Savatri was in the process of transformation as she had been undergone through dark nights in her life. Infidelity and constant torturing of the husband, personal awareness of the dependency on husband for everything, hopelessness and enslavement in life, made her gloomy and dejected. But at the same time she was moved by an inner urge that lead her to regain the power of mind to withstand for her identity. From a spiritual point of view Savatri had a firm faith in God that

she says in the uncertainties of life “ I am not afraid of anything, and she added, I am living in God’s house and he will protect me” (145). Faith in God facilitates human being to overcome the struggles and accidental events of life. The rise from a suppressed house wise to a strong personality is called transformation; each and every event in human being’s life has a peculiar role to transform the entire life. According to Gabriel Marcel every individual is to be participated in every situation in order that human being will overcome those struggles. Here Savatri is typically a model and impetuous for the suffering women of the world of today.

The futility, the frustration, and her own inescapable weakness made her cry and sob. A wretched fate wouldn’t let me drown first time. I can’t near the water again. This is defeat. I accept it. I am no good for this fight. I am a bamboo pole... perhaps Sumati and kamala have not had their hair combed for ages now..... (146).

While undergoing the struggle of identity and uncertainty in life, she was firm enough to overcome the situation called formation of the self through events and that precisely leads her to the transformation of the identity from a submissive poor village woman to a strong and firm convinced woman of faith and integrity. Firm conviction and self confidence gave Savatri courage to live in a temple and work for livelihood. “She dug the plants and watered them. She felt a great thrill when she lighted the oven and cooked a little rice for herself. This is my own rice, my very own; and I am not obliged to anyone for this. This is nobody’s charity to me” (142). The story of the protagonist Savatri gives the readers a series of questions to be answered and Savatri challenges all the suppressed ones in the family of the modern world to protest and reveal the identity of a woman that she is not a subordinate but as interdependent being.

Self actualization in Savatri

According to Abraham Maslow- the most influential psychologist of the twentieth century “the conduciveness of life, which means the fulfilment and accomplishment of all the hierarchal needs of human being, leads the person to attain self actualisation.” (Maslow 235). Is it possible for a woman to achieve self fulfilment in the valley of suffering and dejection? Or is self- realisation restricted to masculine only? How long a woman can be in the wilderness of uncertainty and obscurity? Although Savatri’s life was full of misery and suffering, nevertheless she did away from the process of self realisation. She was in a process of actualisation of the self by regaining the value and importance of motherhood; the

commitment towards her children and family forced her to come back to life with more power and enthusiasm. The self actualisation in Savatri is a parameter of the desire of fulfilling the obligation pertains to motherhood. R. K. Narayan points out that each one with its gender distinction is endowed with a particular mission and he or she should not be prevented from the achievements. “Even today, in the Indian social milieu, in the lower stratum of society, woman is accustomed to the frequent or occasional beatings she receives and the money she earns by manual slogging being snatched by her drunkard or good for nothing husband“(Dhavan 13). No status- bond prevents woman and man to be negligent to achieving the self realisation; and therefore gender identity is an intermediary to materialize and accomplish the destiny of life.

Conclusion

As a prolific writer, R. K. Narayan has intentionally portrayed the living life-experience of an Indian married woman in *The Dark Room*. “Savatri has enacted various roles – of a mother, a wife, a good neighbour-a cog in the family mission but never as an individual claiming her life to be her own, wherein she could seek personal gratification and self-fulfilment”(Meera Bai 16). As far as the life of a person is concerned, personal identity, individuality and integrity are not correlative terms but comprehensively it pertains to the very nature and uniqueness of each individual. Therefore personal gratification and self-realisation has a pivotal role in the whole of one’s being in relation with state of life and the situation. In the emerging world both man and woman become inevitably source of unity for the purpose of self actualisation. Self actualisation of individual is a process of being in the awareness of identity and individuality, and which presupposes the freedom and equality of gender, caste and creed. In this context there is no hypothetical arguments who is great? Who is better? Which gender is superior? Who is to be submissive and dominant? The entire humanity is moving towards a definite destiny which encompasses the atmosphere, situations, events, relations, personals, individuality, identity, uniqueness and potentiality. As far as I understand the word gender distinction is a negative term which degrades the status of both masculine and feminine. The story of Savatri is an awareness of successful effort and resurrection of a suppressed group. The success of family life, the wellbeing of the society, the prosperity of the nation is only and only through the mutual cooperation and collaboration of the entire humanity as a single unit.

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