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## **Representation of Marital Status of Woman in *The Guide* and *The Dark Room* by R K Narayan**

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### **Abstract**

'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. This treatment towards women is also mirrored in Indian Literature. Very few writers tried to break this barrier and focused WOMAN as the center of their writing. Indian English Writing that too fictions of both colonial and post-colonial India mainly picture Indian society, its people, their family, struggle, conflicts between Modernity and Traditions in a family etc. R K Narayan is one among such writers who sincerely attempted to portray Indian family particularly dwelling in Towns. Where Family comes there enters WOMAN. Family without woman is not whole at all. Even though the story is woven around male characters in the center Female characters peep out inevitably. Like this we can see the images of Indian women through the various female characters in R K Narayans fictions. R K Narayan was not really a feminist writer nor even did he seek solutions to the problems of Indian women in his writing. His realistic depiction of Indian society, whisper the inner voice of Indian woman, her disappointment, frustration, struggle for identity and liberty. Unlike the rural women of then India, women in Narayan's fictions represent those women Indian urban areas, who could at least think of their deprived status and liberty. Just because a woman is learned, talented, living in city we cannot conclude she is happy. In a conservative, rigid society like India a girl is a born sufferer. Her suffering multitudes numerously when she acquires so called sacred position after her marriage i.e. WIFE.

**Keywords:** Frustration, Marriage, Disappointment, Identity, Struggle, Feminism

This article is an attempt to study the frustration, disappointment, silence, struggle for freedom and identity of those ill-treated WIVES in Narayan's two major fictions *The Dark Room* and *The Guide*. The novels of R K Narayan as said earlier are unbiased. Narayan is also not judgmental in the creation of his characters. The readers can get the image of Indian middle class family and the status of women in his novels very aptly. Though his novels

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revolve around middleclass family of Indian society the position of the women vary from family to family.

In the above mentioned novels by R K Narayan reader witness different female characters with different marital problems and pleasure. The space and time make no similarity in their position or plights. Rosie, Susila, Savithri play major role in the story as the in the novels *The Guide*, *The English Teacher* and *The Dark Room* respectively. But the wife of Sampath in *Mr Sampath* and Meenakshi, the wife of Margayya in *The Financial Expert* have not leading role but just a supporting role in the story. But each female character in these novels major or minor mirror the marital status of Indian women. Marriage has been the crucial and important phase in every one's life. But for Indian girls it has been the deciding factor for the rest of their life. This stands true even today in 21<sup>st</sup> century. *The Dark Room* and *The Guide* are the right novels to study the internal friction of the two sexes knotted in marriage.

*The Dark Room* written in 1938 by R K Narayan is his first attempt to study the marital status of women in Hindu families of urban India. The position and problems of women either in rural or urban are the same but with different facets. *The Dark Room* is the portrayal of untold reality of many marriages in our society.

The wife of Ramani Savitri in the *Dark Room* can stand equal to Rosie in *The Guide* in her thoughts and courage. The title *The Dark Room* itself indicates the darker part of the house. In Indian concept of life a house is the metonym of a family, a family marriage. The dark room in a house is whispering the darker side of the marriage and relationship in a family. The married life of the female protagonist Savitri has been eclipsed in darkness for fifteen long years. She is the victim of domestic disharmony. Mother of two children Savitri is bearing the atrocities of her husband silently all these years only because she is a wife.

Narayan in this novel has attempted to throw light on the other side of marriages and family life of India for which we Indians feel proud of. In India we give religious touch to each and everything so also to marriages. Indian girls since their birth will be conditioned with the mythological stories like Ramayana, Mahabharata and many more in which the wives proved themselves great from their obedience, chastity and sacrifice to their husbands. Sita, Droupadi, Savitri and such mythological wives have been remained the role models to our girls even to this day. Influenced by such stories Savitri the wife of Ramani, from a Brahmin family of Malgudi accepted the unhappy married life as her fate. But inside her there was a rebel who was trying to erupt out against this patriarchal hegemony.

In this novel Narayan shifts his subject of the theme from male to female. His earlier novels *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts* both were written in male point of view. But in this novel he ventures to attack patriarchy which rules the family in Indian society which is the rare characteristic Narayan's fictions. Narayan himself was from traditional Tamil Brahmin family and he was prodigy in studying the intricate details of family and

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human relationships. In the period of 1930s this work of him came as a support to feminism which was meagerly taking its shape in India. Though Narayan is neutral throughout the narration, the plight of house wives in Hindu families are evident in the story which arouses sympathy in the reader. John Theme considers this novel as a demonstration of the marital status of a woman in family. "Marriage and more specifically women's role inside and outside of marriage are, then, ubiquitous in *The Dark Room*" (44)

Savitri who represents many wives of middle class is fixed with the assigned role as a wife also a mother in a family. Ramani belongs to that category of Indian husbands who think wives are mere slaves, good for toiling and deserve continuous rebuke. P K Singh generalizes this couple to convention concept of marriage in conservative Indian Hindu families.

Ramani represents a typical Indian husband who bosses over their wives for the money they can earn and spent over their children and house hold affairs.

Savitri represents a typical Indian house wife who is replica of stoicism. (18)

Savitri is humiliated, ill-treated, reproached every day by her husband since her marriage and Savitri bears all these without any protest because she believes it is her duty to listen to all these as a wife. But she is not bad to be grumbled at each and every thing. She is a good home maker. She takes care of her children with utmost care and concern. She knows how to handle the kitchen and food at the sudden arrival of guests. She is a good reader of her husband's mood. But all these positive qualities are never recognized or appreciated by her moody husband. She is never rewarded with loving words for her endless toil as wife, mother and home maker. Every minute she is concerned with how to keep her husband happy if not she is badly anxious at least not to make him angry. To keep his mood good she plays all the possible tricks known to her or advised by her friends of similar status. Even then she is degraded, wrongly dealt with. This is not a woman deserves by her husband and her own family. Whenever Savitri's individuality is very badly hurt by Ramani she retreats in to the cocoon of the dark room in house and broods there. The dark room turns to be furnace with pyre of a woman's sigh and anger. The thoughts which rush to Savitri when she isolates herself from husband into the dark room describe the true-life of Indian women.

Savitri's position is so much miserable that she cannot exercise her right even to correct her children when they are wrong. Ramani humiliates her to look after the kitchen not to worry about teaching the children. Every day such incidents keep shaking her endurance and faith in wifely duties. Though she is cooking at home but had no right to cook according to her choice. This is the height of male dominance which ought to be checked. Savitri's resignation reaches its end when she comes to know about illicit affair of her husband with his assistant ShanthaBai. ShanthaBai though projected as a negative female character in the novel, also a victim of wrong marriage. Being married to a wayward drunkard at a tender age

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and suffered in his clutches till his death. Deserted from the parents after she left her husband's house Shantha Bai was forced to earn her lively hood. Shantha Bai though wronged in her rush of liberty and emancipation in the patriarchal society is influenced by modernism in 1930's itself.

But Savitri finds herself in deep water. She blames herself for her worthless condition. At this junction she realizes the root cause for her weakness. Her dependency on her husband mainly for money is the main reason for her insecure position. Here Savitri becomes the voice of every wife who is inferior, at fault only because of their dependency. R K Narayan through Savitri on behalf of every suffering woman proclaims that education is the only hope of making a woman self-reliant. Savitri though very late, realizes the major lack in her i.e. no education. She regrets for not pursuing education when she actually could have like her friends.

What can I do myself? Unable to earn a handful of rice by begging. If I had gone to a college and studied, I might have become something. It was very foolish of me not to have gone with my education. (22)

She revolts against the stuffed concept of wifehood. She finds a wife's situation is as shameful as of a prostitute. There is no difference between both of these. Both are the sellers of their flesh for food and shelter. At least a prostitute is in better condition where she can change her man which a house wife neither could not. All these rebellious thoughts hit her numbed individuality when she shuts herself in dark room. But unknowingly in the furnace like dark room a new Savitri is being moulded gradually. Her mental alienation inside the dark room embedded her with courage and attitude. Unlike mythical Savitri who ventured even death to save her husband this Savitri is being strengthened to embrace death to get rid of her tyrannical husband. Savitri prefers death by drowning herself in the river than living like a bamboo pole with her husband. Though this is a cowardly act, the only option which a helpless woman could see in her desperation. But Savitri is saved by Mari, a low caste man. Mari and his wife Panni though from low class lead happy family life. Here we can see the collision of tradition and modernism which actually the pulling repulsive force for the theory of feminism itself. The impact tradition and taboos on the psyche of individuals in our country is powerful that Savitri dares not to stay with this low class family because she is from a Brahmin family. Uneducated Panni shows Savitri the way of independence by taking her to a temple to work as a maid. But here also Savitri finds another male dictator, the priest. Fed up of this escapism and helplessness prefers to live like a worm under the shadow of her husband. Moreover she starts to miss her children badly. Savitri's parting or her come back does not make any difference for Ramani. Defeat of Savitri who is the stranger against lowly status of her as a wife is failed. But she opposing the hegemony of husbands is the glimpse of modernity which was creeping slowly into then conventional Indian society. She might have

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failed as a woman to stand against miserable status of house wives inside the family itself. But Savitri proved a woman of 1940s of India trying to break the wall built strongly against a woman in Indian the name of tradition, customs and institutions like marriage.

Rosie in *The Guide* is a girl from the family of Temple Dancer. Marriage and family life was a mirage to a girl from such family in those days. But Rosie's mother was bit sensible to the women of such families of those days. She had different plan for Rosie. She did not want her daughter to bear all those pain and humiliation which she underwent as a temple dancer. She sent Rosie to school. And got her post-graduation done. Rosie's mother knew very well that education could empower a woman and liberate her from the stigma as a 'public woman'. Because the women from such families were looked down in the society. They had no equal respect which other women from dignified families enjoy. Rosie herself tells this painful truth to Raju when he enquires her about her family background. We are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilized (84)

When Rosie was at the crucial stage of her life after completing her education to become a dancer or something else an advertisement in newspaper changed the course of her life. Marco who wanted an educated, good looking girl without any caste restrictions seemed a gentleman with revolutionary ideals to her. When Marco extended his hands in marriage to Rosie, herself and her family were taken aback for this blessing.

But all women in my family were impressed, excited that a man like him was coming to marry one of our class and it was decided if necessary to give up our traditional art' (85)

Rosie too felt this marriage would relieve her from the humiliation and stigma attached to her birth. Wifedom in Indian concept of marriage would fetch respect and status in the society. Marco was a very rich man with motor car, big house. To become the wife of such a rich man Rosie felt indeed she was very fortunate. But this feeling of contentment did not last for long. The reality was far different from Rosie's aspirations. Wifedom gradually turned a noose around her neck. She was mere a partner to Marco never a darling wife. His interest in archeology, painting marginalized Rosie in his concern. Marco was obsessed with his studies he never gave any attention to Rosie. Raju terms this indifference of Marco profoundly when Rosie tells him Marco was interested in painting and art like that "But not one which can move its limbs, I suppose" (86)

Raju was undoubtedly right in judging Marco. As a husband he never showed any concern for the feelings of Rosie. Rosie was passionate to dance. The art of dance was imbibed in her. It was flowing in her blood. But Marco curtly prohibited her from dance. He could not even tolerate her speaking about dance. In fact Marco never responded positively to any of the likes and dislikes of Rosie "Anything interested her seemed to irritate him." (76)

This was the big jolt on the individuality of Rosie. He never praised her marvelous beauty. Raju was bewildered to observe Marco's cold conduct to Rosie whose beauty could



stir the heart of any man. A professional archeologist Marco could never realize his wife is living being with blood and flesh. He found no difference between the sculptures or the paintings which he studied and Rosie both lifeless. His aversion for the art of dance which he termed “street acrobats” disheartened Rosie.

Rosie as a wife was totally disappointed and frustrated. The indifference of her husband for her was continuously pricking her individuality. Before marriage she had decided to sacrifice her family art of dance for the sake of becoming a wife of a loving husband. But paradoxically she went to the extent of leaving her husband for the sake of her career as a dancer. If Marco had treated her with due respect Rosie could never stepped out of the realms of good wifhood. If ever Marco had boosted the individuality in her, she would not have fallen the victim of a rogue like Railway Raju. When Raju realized the root cause for the continuous quarrels between Rosie and Marco he used it as his forte to trap her. He praised her beauty, her dance. Which has been the trivial expectation of any wife, unfortunately Rosie was deprived of such small thrills in her marital life. But Raju’s words of commendation and encouragement paved way for her to enjoy a life of her choice. She relished the beauty of freedom with the company of Raju. Like a child she was flourished with joy when she roamed in Malgudi with Raju in the absence of her husband.

She liked to loaf in the market, eat in a crowded hotel, wander about, and see a cinema- these common pleasures seemed to have been beyond her reach all these days.

Marco who had no time for his wife in his busy routine was gradually replaced by Raju who gave up all his routine jobs to accompany her. With the assistance of Raju, Rosie concentrated to enhance her skill in dancing. She was very much dedicated to excavate new forms of dance and improvise her talent. With the help of Raju her individuality resurrected which she had lost in the journey of life after her marriage. She emerged from lowly serpent dancer to well-known classical dancer. This transformation is due to the boost on her individuality which was possible only due to Raju’s company.

But the concept of Indian wifhood is so powerful that to come out of even an unhappy marriage is not easy for any educated or modern girl as well. Rosie though she changed her name to Nalini could not completely cut off herself from her husband. Her wish to become a wife of a man, with her own family was to come out of a tainted life. But the same marriage led her to accept a sinful life with an extra marital life with Raju. This guilt was continuously troubling her and she became moody day by day. Many a times she regretted for separating from her husband though she was left alone by Marco himself on the platform of railway station. There was resurrection of notion of wifely responsibilities which any Indian girl had been stuffed with. The guilt of violating the norms of marriage weighed heavy on Rosie.

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When Rosie was aware of the deception played by Raju she was completely shattered. But she did not abandon Raju during his crisis. Though Raju took the advantage of her physical as well as financially, she did not leave him to die in his problems. She sold her jewels and saved him from severe punishment. This was because it was not her husband but Raju who helped her to grow as an individual. She could now live independently. And this courage was filled by Raju in her. It was Raju who identified a dancer in her, adored that artist and respected her feelings. But once again she became the victim of a man. But by then she had transformed strong enough to take her life in to her own hand. She fights with her disappointments and frustrations and emerges as a well-known dancer in Madras.

Rosie is woman with education and individuality. She is a very bold female character created by R K Narayan out of all the female characters in his novels. Marital issues and failures lurked on the life of Rosie. But she emerged as an independent self-reliant woman. In *The Dark Room* R K Narayan's studied the root cause for the helplessness of a wife in a family. The main reason for many house wives bearing harassments either physical or mental is due to the feeling of insecurity. Mainly financial insecurity. Here through Savitri Narayan proclaims that educating a woman is highly essential to make her financially independent. Savitri's failure is the result of the lack of education. Another equally important reason for Savitri's surrender at the end is her children. As a mother she could not depart from her children.

In this way Rosie is in better circumstances as she is not yet a mother. If she had a child her liberation was also not so easy. But the solution for many domestic problems and mismatched marriages has been given in *The Guide* through Rosie. Her education strengthened her with courage and talent supported her confidence. Though both the novels were written long back by R K Narayan deal with the problems of women which are still found in contemporary society in a different garb.

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