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Women as Deviant in the Novels of R.K. Narayan

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Abstract

R.K. Narayan's novels generally deal with a hero or heroine who in the pursuit of his/her desires goes away from the set of accepted and moral behaviour. In the course of the novels, they in this way turn out to be social and moral deviant. The present paper is an attempt to study how not only men but women as well turn out to be social and moral deviants in certain novels of R.K. Narayan.

Keywords: deviant; social; moral

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami (1906-2001) popularly known as R. K. Narayan, an award winning novelist and essayist, is generally considered one of the greatest Indians writing in English. He shares this honour with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. D. S. Maini has observed in this regard: "Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R. K. Narayan- brought the Indian novel to the point of ripeness." R. K. Narayan is one of the most artistic of Indian writers who writes solely for aesthetic satisfaction and not for some social purpose like Mulk Raj Anand. Graham Greene has observed regarding this quality of Narayan's personality and writings: "Narayan, unlike Mulk Raj Anand is hardly touched by politics." While delineating his world of fiction, Narayan does not goad the readers into adopting any particular viewpoint or ideology. Unlike Mulk Raj Anand for whom the novelist is essentially a teacher, R. K. Narayan is a pure artist. He has no ideological drum to beat like Anand. His voice is not a voice of protest. It's not acrid; it is, rather, enlivened with his sense of humour. His voice is characterized by a total lack of moralising on anyone or about anything. There is no psychic identification between the writer and any of his characters. He remains a detached and distanced observer and painter of the



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different levels of human realities. R. K. Narayan is a novelist at heart; and is not a preacher or a moralist. William Walsh has observed about this aspect of him, “If Anand is the novelist as reformer, Raja Rao the novelist as metaphysical poet, Narayan is simply the novelist as novelist” (6).

R. K. Narayan has won wide acclaim not only in India, but abroad also. In 1960, Narayan’s *The Guide* received Sahitya Akademi Award. In 1961, he was awarded Padma Bhushan and in 1967 the University of Leedes conferred the honorary D. Litt. Degree on him and Delhi University followed suit in 1973. Narayan enjoyed the privilege of being the only Indian writer to be included in *The Writers and Their Works Series* being published by the British Council. He also became the nominated member of Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian parliament. Many of his stories have even been broadcast by BBC in England and America. R. K. Narayan is regarded next only to William Faulkner and Graham Greene. He is the writers’ writer and is often admired and appreciated by authors such as V.S. Naipaul, John Updike and Saul Bellow. R. K. Narayan has fourteen novels to his credit. His novels include: *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945), *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1962), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *The Painter of Signs* (1976), *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), *Talkative Man* (1986) and *The World of Nagaraj* (1990). In addition to them, he has written five collections of short stories and an autobiography entitled *My Days*, which has the qualities of travelogue, novel and autobiography put together. His travelogues include *My Dateless Diary* and *The Emerald Route*.

R.K. Narayan’s novels generally deal with the life of a person or persons who is/are social and moral deviants. The Malgudi society of his novels represents the traditional society of our culture which is disturbed by the entry of a person who acts against the social and moral norms. It is rightly observed by Prof. Jai Dev, “Every novel of Narayan is structured around a hero, who partly because of his obsession with self and partly because of an emotionally inflammable romantic situation gets increasingly alienated from his traditional community. Thus starts a process that brings him anxiety, isolation and sometimes even degradation.” These work out their various schemes; pursue their grandiose ambitions in the orthodox, tradition-bound Malgudi society. Their chief aim and purpose in life is to gratify their senses by enjoying carnal pleasures. Religion and morality is as good as non-existent for them. These people forget all that is spiritual and celestial; for them life is in nothing else, but in the fulfillment of their individual urges and vaulting ambitions. In their attempt to fulfill the carnal desires of their life they neglect all the moral and social norms and the result is utter chaos and restlessness in their lives and the society they live in. Sampath in *Mr. Sampath*, Raju in *The Guide*, Mali in the *Vendor of Sweets*, Vasu in *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, Raman in the *Painter of Signs*, Rann in the *Talkative Man*,



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Tim in the World of Nagaraj are all social and moral deviants and act against the social and moral norms of Malgudi society.

Not only men, but women as well turn out to be social and moral deviants in certain novels of R.K. Narayan. These women characters come out of the traditional roles of Indian women and act against the norms of society and morality. These women turned deviants fail to carry the burden of old customs and traditions and struggle to extricate themselves from the habitual, dreamy automation of the past and rebel against all social and moral constrictions which seek to thwart their freedom. By their violent actions and selfish behaviour, they disturb the quiet waters of Malgudi life. These women come under the influence of western culture and try to leap-frog into a new age of materialism and sensuality.

Rosie, the heroine of R.K. Narayan's famous novel *The Guide* is such a character who turns deviant in the course of her life. *The Guide* revolves around two main characters named Raju and Rosie. Both Raju and Rosie in this novel are full of individual desires and passions. Rosie is the wife of an ill-matched husband, an archeologist by profession, an eccentric fellow who has a great passion for lifeless things and is named as Marco after Marco Polo by Raju because of his strange dress and manners. The relationship of Rosie and Marco is mechanical and lacks any emotional touch in it. Rosie remains dissatisfied of her marriage as her husband fails to fulfill and satisfy both her emotional and biological needs. "Her marriage, entered into for the sake of respectability and in response to an advertisement, leaves her deeply dissatisfied, her nature unfulfilled, her nerves jangling"(123), observes William Walsh. Marco, her husband who is an archeologist by profession remains busy in his passion for lifeless things and worries little for the emotions of his wife. Distressed and dissatisfied Rosie tries to find solace and relief in her passion for dance. Rosie was born into the despised caste of dancers and has a great passion for dancing. She is a born dancer and feels irresistibly attracted towards this profession. But her husband is against any such plan of her. Rosie's passion for dancing is exploited by Raju for his own evil ends, and being emotionally starved because of her husband's apathy, she falls an easy prey to the shrewd and crafty designs of Raju.

Rosie is full of individual desires. She has an inclination towards dancing and she wants to establish her own identity as a dancer. But any such attempt is thwarted by her insensitive husband who still cherishes a traditional approach to the role of a lady in society and feels that a wife should restrict herself to the business of cooking food, looking after her husband and children and other household chores. But Rosie's passion for dancing is so strong that it refuses to be cowed down or suppressed, and in this passion of her she seeks the help of Raju, who is a trickster. Raju uses Rosie's passion for dancing and the mechanical relationship of husband and wife for his own evil ends.



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Rosie gets carried away by her passion for dancing. The company of Raju soothes her soul which has been left high and dry by the insensitive approach of her husband. But gradually in the whole process she gets swayed and becomes ready to sleep with a person other than her husband. She goes through a conflict within her own-self, the conflict between her individual desires and her social and moral obligation towards her husband. But her husband's indifference towards her feelings and sentiments leads her to go to Raju to find love and sympathy. Raju is a shrewd person who uses the dull and mechanical relationship of the wife and husband for his own immoral designs. He flatters Rosie in the absence of her husband and praises her dancing postures and by doing so makes her surrender before his advances. Raju is a great judge of character and knows very well, "Anyone likes to hear flattering sentiments, and more than others, I suppose, dancers. They like to be told every hour of the day how well they keep their steps. I praised her art whenever I could snatch a moment alone with her and whisper in her ear, out of range of that husband of hers" (134).

Though Raju praises her dancing tactics, but his main object behind all this is to get her love and possess her by all means. He expresses his love and infatuation for Rosie in the disguise of compliments. Rosie feels caught in the snares of Raju's charm and falls a victim to his sexual urges. She starts getting physical with Raju and does all heinous and morally and socially unacceptable things. She indulges in an illicit relationship with Raju and becomes a tainted woman in this act of her. When Marco comes to know of this immoral act of her, he refuses to keep her in his home. In a state of utter shock, he declares, "You are not my wife. You are a woman who will go to bed with everyone that flatters your antics" (148). He throws her out of his home and life, and eventually she comes to live with Raju in his house.

Rosie's presence disturbs the poise of Raju's home also as his mother is a traditional lady and is against any such act of immorality. The unethical relationship of Raju and Rosie shocks her completely. She starts calling and referring to Rosie as a 'snake woman', who has captivated her son in her evil snares. She tries to dissuade her son from doing such things, but he turns a deaf ear to her sane counsel and steels and cements his relations with Rosie further. When she realizes that nothing can mend his ways, she leaves him to his fate and goes away from there. Rosie along with Raju creates havoc in the society by her immoral behaviour and evil deeds. In the pursuit of her vaulting ambitions and individualistic desires she acts against the moral and ethical norms of Malgudi society and turns deviant.

Like Rosie Daisy in the novel *The Painter of Signs* is a social and moral deviant. The novel as C.P. Sharma observes, "highlights the degeneration of modern man as an inevitable result of decline of faith in the cherished ideals, established institutions and sacred values."⁸ Because of their degeneration and immoral behaviour they, as S.P. Bhardwaj finds, "are a little



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way off from the normal class of beings” (173). Daisy is a family planning zealot of Malgudi and acts abnormally. She has a great desire to establish her own identity and in its pursuit she runs away from her home in her very childhood and is later found somewhere near a sea in a hut by her parents. She acts in an anti-social manner right from her childhood. She feels her identity lost in the din and clamour of her household which consisted of fifteen children and numerous elders living the most unarranged life in that ‘madhouse’. She could not establish her identity in that house as “all individuality was lost in this mass existence” (173).

Daisy represents the women of post-independence era who were zealous to establish their individual identity and in this attempt of them they went against the traditional norms and established institutions of society. She herself admits in the course of the novel, “Long ago I broke away from the routine of a woman’s life. There are millions of women who go through it happily. I am not one of them” (159). Daisy does not like to be inspected by a prospective bridegroom who has come to her house with a marriage proposal, and behaves in a very rude way. By such an attitude she is held responsible for spoiling the image of her family and ruining the future prospects of her other sisters. But, she feels fed up of such a life, “I never dreamt there could be any other kind of life, any other interest in life, any other way of living. I had no idea that it could be changed...” (130). To get rid of such a life, she runs away from her home and becomes a missionary who is devoted to the social cause. Later in life, she becomes a campaigner of family planning and has no personal life. But such an attitude of her gradually turns her out into a social deviant having no regard for the cultural and moral values of society.

Daisy’s involvement in the programmes of family planning makes her envious of children. She is against children and considers them burden on society. Raman feels afraid of such an attitude of her. Though Daisy works with a mission to save ‘mother earth’ from the extra burden of excessive population, but her mission makes her an extremist who feels envious even of children and marriage. Daisy does not have faith in the established social institutions like marriage and family. She is against marriage as the monotony and drudgery of married life does not suit her. Marriage and other social bonds are all meaningless for her. For her sex, whether within marriage or outside marriage, is just a biological phenomenon having no spiritual or social significance. For her there is “nothing extraordinary for a man and a woman beginning to live under the same roof even without being married” (168). She adopts a mechanical approach towards life and starts copulating with Raman without getting married. For her sex is a mechanical process, having no emotional and social value, and this attitude of her reminds us of the mechanical approach of the Typist Girl towards love and sex in T. S. Eliot’s modern epic, *The Waste Land* which too portrays people’s faithlessness in the established social values and institutions.



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Daisy is not interested in marriage with Raman as she does not believe in it. She feels that marriage and other such social bonds will curtail her freedom and will make her lose her individuality. The two conditions she has laid down before Raman for marriage are- First they will not have any child and second if by chance one is born she will give the child away and keep herself free to pursue her social work. She refuses to marry Raman as per Vedic rites and decides to come to his house to live on any of the convenient days. “We will begin to live under the same roof on any day we decide” (158), she tells Raman. This is how she justifies her decision to start living together without getting married, “When two souls met in harmony the marriage was consummated perfectly, and no further rite or ceremony was called for.” (158) Somehow, the married life or the life of a husband and wife terrifies her. Though she wants to enjoy all the pleasures of a married life, she wishes to escape from its responsibilities. Daisy is a social deviant of her own type. This is how she justifies her decision and refutes her earlier promises made to Raman, “At some moments, and moods, we say and do things- like talking in sleep, but when you awake, you realize your folly... Oh, forgive me for misleading you...” (180).

Similarly Grace in the *Vendor of Sweets* is a social and moral deviant who starts living with Mali, but without getting married. She alongwith Mali disturbs the peaceful life of Jagan and forces him to leave his own home. Grace is a half-American, half-Korean girl whom Mali introduces as his wife to his father. But later Jagan feels utterly disheartened when he comes to know that Mali and Grace, who are living as a married couple to all appearances in the Malgudi world, are not married actually. This is how Grace tells him of their relationship, “But we are not married. He (Mali) promised he’d marry me in the Indian way, because I liked it, and brought me here” (108). Jagan’s soul is shaken to its roots at this realization. He has never thought that Mali and Grace would bring him to such a state of degeneration. He is unable to believe in such an immorality of his own son and daughter-in-law. ““What breed of creatures are these?” he wondered. They had tainted his ancient home which had remained unsullied for generation” (109). Jagan feels so much shocked to know of this that he loses interest in everything. He finds it difficult to cope with the situation. He feels it impossible to live with such a tainted couple and decides not to go there. He does everything to save himself from the evil vibrations of that unmarried couple living together. This is how he insulates himself from them, “JAGAN BARRICADED HIMSELF in completely. He derived a peculiar excitement in performing all the actions of a purificatory nature. He shut the communicating door between his part of the dwelling and Mali’s and locked it on his side. He did everything to insulate himself from the evil radiations of an unmarried couple living together” (112).

Thus many of the women characters of Narayan become deviants in the course of the novel and act against the set moors of Malgudi society as it comes out from the study of some selected novels of R. K. Narayan.



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