

Social values in R. K. Narayan's novels

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Abstract

Malgudi is an imaginative locale created by Narayan in his novels and short stories. It forms the setting for most of Narayan's works. The attempt in this Research Paper is made to show, how through the series of Malgudi novels Narayan presents the social values norms, mores which have been in existence and still continue to play a major role in shaping the lives of Hindu people. The important family themes like Marital fidelity, husband-wife & father-son relationship, parental love and lack of communication between the old and the young generation etc. all are beautifully deal by Narayan in his novels.

Keywords: Social Values, Norms and Mores, Hindu Society, Family Themes

Introduction

Through the series of Malgudi novels Narayan faithfully presents the social values, norms and mores which have been in existence and still continue to play a major role in shaping the lives of Hindu people. Now that, the Indian society has undergone a considerable change under the impact of Western Civilization; the changes have been vividly noticed amongst the people. O.P. Mathur rightly observes: "Narayan does assert the validity of traditional Indian values but the wind from the west has

Changed much of the panorama. ^[1] Malgudi is seen steeped in tradition and its inhabitants are men and women with their roots in family and religion. Even today they cherish a heritage of faith and values, customs and rituals and even dogmas and superstition.

The traditional Hindu family as the nucleus of social structure has zealously guarded its old norms, mores and values. Its sanctity is inviolable and its violation is nothing short of sacrilege. It causes disruption and unhappiness. Marital fidelity, the most precious of the Indian values is the theme of the Dark Room. Savitri, the traditional Hindu wife can put up with insult and maltreatment, but her husband's infidelity is the last straw. She bursts out, "Don't touch me ...you are dirty, you are impure. Even if I burn my skin I can't cleanse myself of the impurity of your touch." ^[2] Similarly Sampath (The Printer of Malgudi) gets the hardest kick from life when he gets emotionally involved with Shanti, the film actress. When he tries to pursue her, she leaves him a note of warning: "If I find you pursuing me, I will shave off my head and fling away my jewelry and wear a white sari. You and people like you will run away at the sight of me. I am, after all, a widow..." ^[3] Margaya (The Financial Expert) cannot bear the sight of his graceful daughter-in-law Brinda in tears on account of his son's debauchery. Even Marco who his callous and coldblooded, disowns his wife, Rosie when he comes to know of her infidelity. "But you are not my wife; you are a woman who will go to bed with anyone that flatters your antics." ^[4] Raju's mother, (The Guide) being steeped in social values, could not accommodate the idea of living with a 'tainted woman' and she left her home to go with her brother.

The husband and wife relationship in a Hindu family is more or less one-sided. For it is the man who dominates the family scene. As a matter of fact, the woman has a pivotal role to play in the Indian household. She is instrumental in keeping the family harmonious and united. And yet she is subjugated to inhumane cruelties and miseries. Her status and position in the orthodox Hindu family has been reduced to nothingness. For example, Savitri (The Dark Room) feels impotent in her own house. She has to greet the guests Ramani brings at odd hours, no matter if there is no food left for her. But then, there is a social custom that the guest should be received and properly fed. However, Ponni, a low caste woman we meet in The Dark Room, does not seem to suffer at the hands of her husband, nor does she have any pessimistic outlook, in her life. She is full of life with an independent mind of her own to face the challenges of life. The futility, the frustration and an inescapable moral weakness that has made Savitri cry and sob, does not touch Ponni who deals her husband with a firm hand. Savitri has nothing but defeat in her life. "How impotent she was, she thought; she had not the slightest power to do anything at home and that after fifteen years of married life." ^[5] This is the pathetic cry of a majority of orthodox Hindu women even in today's society. Rosie's (The Guide) predicament is all the more pathetic and miserable. Her husband Marco is callous and cruel. He does not give the slightest attention to Rosie's wishes. Raju is right when he comments: "Dead and decaying things seemed to be unloosening his tongue and fire his imagination, rather than things that lived and moved and swing their limbs." ^[6]

Beside marital relationship, Narayan deals with other important family themes like the father-son relationship, parental love and lack of communication between the old and the young generation. For example, Jagan, The Vendor of Sweets has all the cares and love for his son. But having come under the impact of Western Civilization Balu is a completely changed person. Consequently the father-son relation has been strained so much so that there is a total lack of communication between the two. It is only through the uncle that Jagan could get some information about his son's doings. As a result, in his old days Jagan has no other choice but to go out in wilderness out of frustration. Margayya, (The Financial

Expert) too is very much anxious for his son's welfare and expects good many things of him. But, ironically enough, the very son, Mali becomes the cause for his total ruin in the end. The entire financial edifice that he built so laboriously collapses in no time.

Sex, even in so polite a form as arranging marriage, is the subject of much embarrassment for the young that Chandran's (The Bachelor of Arts) younger brother Seenu cannot even bring himself to voice the matter to his brother. As for Chandran, it is impossible to address the girl he has fallen in love with, directly. His plight has become all the more intolerable for him when he comes to know of his mother's determined opposition to any change in social convention that initiative for marriage proposal should come only from the bride's parents.

Hindu society is divided into castes and sub castes and marriages are often arranged within the caste as is evidently seen and observed even today. Raju's mother does not accept Rosie as her daughter-in-law; Raman's aunt is opposed to his marriage with Daisy; even Jagan, the Gandhian follower is shocked to know his son's relations with a half- Korean half- American girl that he has brought from America. When Chandran is opposed by his parents to marry the girl he loves, he sounds rational: He wants that the watertight compartments in the society must be abolished. There are very persons like Marco (The Guide) who do not stick to their caste, as he accepts Rosie of a Dancing class as his wife. But the marriage between Marco and Rosie ends on a very sad note.

In India where marriage is a sacrament, a man and woman living together without getting married is sinners. Jagan (The Vendor of Sweets) the tradition respecting sweet Vendor, winces under the blow of disclosure that Mali, his Americanized son and Grace are guilty of outraging this eternal moral tenet. What breed of creatures are these? He wondered, 'they had tainted his ancient home'.

Some women characters like Swami's grandmother, Shrinivas's Granny, Raman's aunt can be cited as the representatives to uphold the old values of Hindu life. They are certainly irrational and superstitious in their outlook, and opposed to any kind of change in social conventions.

Conclusion

The Hindu society being traditional and fatalistic, the social values they cherish cannot be otherwise. They are a God fearing folk. For whatever, they do, they throw themselves at the mercy of God. Their success and failure, happiness and sufferings are all what they think as God's Benediction. Hindu's are so dogged about the traditional ideas that they hardly come out of the social framework they have evolved from time immemorial. The social scene presents a sorry picture when we come across such examples like Margayya's going to gods on Badri Hills for the supposed infertility of his wife. Daisy (The painter of Signs) has to make a strenuous fight for the eradication of such evils from the society. It is a pity that the Indians even today have miserably failed to develop scientific outlook which is the

need of the hour. It is well-nigh impossible for people to effectively shape their destiny, improve the quality of life and provide the basic necessities to people and an opportunity for doing creative things in life unless they are steeped in science and in the use of latest technologies. For, science awakens the urge to enquire and search for truth. It gives one the ability to observe and sharpens one's perception. This kind of attitude would certainly help bring about a social change removing from its surface the mark of traditionality that has kept Indians in its vicious grip. Many of the social values upheld in ancient times, are now outworn and irreverent in the changing times, and are to be discarded once for all.

References

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