



Research Paper

Inescapable Alienation: Re-Reading Human Relationships In Select Novel Of R.K.Narayan

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ABSTRACT: *Modernity opens up opportunity and creativity. It has made people ambitious and has narrowed down to self-centred view of life. Ambition creates expectation and unfulfilled expectation is followed by a taste of frustration. Anthony Giddens is right to define modernity as an “inexorable force” that welcomes “advantages” as well as “dangers”. Unsurprisingly, in the context of modern life, most of the individuals are seen to suffer from alienation. As a result, in such a situation, man-woman relationship is often gets twisted and aberrant. R.K.Narayan, one of the leading Modern Indian English novelists, has created an imaginary town, Malgudi, as a canvas to portray the scenario of urban India. Most of his male and female protagonists are victims of alienation for the waves of modernity. This paper tries to explore the layers of alienation of modern life in man-woman relationships in R.K. Narayan’s selected novels.*

KEY WORDS: *alienation, human relationship, Modernity, Urbanism, etc.*

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Modern Age is called “The Age of Nightmare and Anxiety” as it is full of confusion, frustration, alienation, disintegration and estrangement. Modernity has made people restless, ambitious and self-centred. Ambition creates expectation and unfulfilled expectation is followed by a taste of frustration. Anthony Giddens is right to define modernity as an “inexorable force” that welcomes “advantages” as well as “dangers”. Unsurprisingly, in the context of modern life, most of the individuals are seen to suffer from alienation. As a result, in such a situation, man-woman relationship is often gets twisted and aberrant. R.K.Narayan, one of the leading Modern Indian English novelists, has created an imaginary town, Malgudi, as a canvas to portray the scenario of urban India. Most of his male and female protagonists are victims of alienation for the waves of modernity. This paper tries to explore the layers of alienation of modern life in man-woman relationships in R.K. Narayan’s selected novels.

Modernity appeared all over the world with enormous development of science and technology. It makes people hedonist and restless. People started proceeding towards urban areas to make their life more comfortable and progressive. But the restless urban life style makes people forget the importance of spirituality. Frivolity and hedonism become their philosophy of life. Ultimately restlessness, self-centredness, hedonism of modernity makes the people of the era anxious and alienated. Naturally theme of alienation has been the centre of discussion in modern literature. If we look at the protagonists of modern novels of different languages, most of them are found to be alienated. As alienation of modernity grasped the whole world and affected the world literature, Indian English literature could not escape from this trend. Meenakshi Mukherjee claims, “alienation or rootlessness is a very common theme in it”. Most of R.K. Narayan’s novels deal with the theme of alienation. He has created an imaginary Indian town, Malgudi, to portray “dark picture of his country-fellows.” In his novels, we find the depiction of urban India. They deal with emotions, sentiments, and life style of urban Indian people.

“Alienation from the opposite sex occurs when a member of either sex fails to understand the psychology and the needs of some or all members of the opposite sex”. And then “emotional divorce”¹ is

¹Emotional divorce is a psychological separation between husband and wife, although they stay under the same roof for the sake of their children, financial support, or in fear of social stigma.

occurred between the couple. We find such psychological alienation and consequently emotional divorce in R.K. Narayan's *The Dark Room*, *The English Teacher* and *The Guide*.

All we know that husband-wife relationship is one of the most important and complex relationships for almost every human being. Husband and wife relationships are like the relationship of Tom and Jerry. Though they are teasing and fighting but can't live without each other. Unlike "Tom and Jerry" syndrome, in the novel *The Dark Room* we find a different shade of relationship between the protagonists Ramani and Savitri. Ramani is an insensitive and arrogant person, and Savitri, on the other, is a sensitive, timid, and introvert lady. Most of the times, Ramani dominates her and she tolerates it silently. She says—"There is no quarrel. I never uttered a single word". Such kind of passivity of Savitri makes their relationship cold which leads both of them towards alienation.

The problem of psychological alienation in man-woman relationship is again noticed in R.K. Narayan's celebrated novel *The English Teacher*. The relationship between the headmaster and his wife is cold, meaningless and passive. They can be considered as a perfect example of imperfect couple. They are completely contrary in character and temperament. The headmaster is romantic but his wife is a realistic lady. They are non-cooperative to each other. No one gets emotional shelter to the opposite one. Like the romantics, the headmaster is an escapist who always tries to escape from his wife and likes to take shelter in the world of innocence. He has created a play school for children and spends most of his time with them in this school. The husband-wife relation is for him source of frustration, boredom, whereas the world of innocence in his school is his source of happiness. This school supplies him the oxygen of life. He says, "When I watch them, I get a glimpse of some purpose in existence and creation". "His own life seemed to give him as much amusement as he found the company of children inspiring". Holidays make him sad. He rarely goes to his house and becomes very happy if he hasn't to meet his wife. He said to his children, "Is your mother at home?" "No", they relied. "Excellent" he said and went in. He looked relieved to hear it". Behind every great husband, there is an encouraging wife. But in the creation of his innovative, his wife is not at all enthusiastic rather she always remains indifferent towards his efforts. The head master laments:—"she thinks my school a fool's idea". "She is an impossible type". This unhappy marital life makes him victim of alienation and callous towards his wife. He says: "I strictly want to live according to my own plan of living and not subordinate it for any body's sake. This school is my house here after I will settle here".

B.R. Ambedkar said, "The relationship between husband and wife should be one of closest friends". But in Narayan's another masterpiece *The Guide*, there was no trace of friendship in the relationship of Rosie and Marco. Their relationship was built solely on necessities. They had no passion for each other. Marco needed "an educated, good looking girl" to take care him whereas Rosie needed this "rich bachelor of academic interests" just to get a financially secured life. But their relationship proves failure. They are the inhabitants of completely two different spheres. Rosie is a passionate "born dancer" while Marco is interested in archaeological studies.

Tony Gaskins said, "Communication to a relationship is like oxygen to life. Without it...it dies". Marco is so obsessed with his academic interests that he is not agreed to spend a single moment for his wife's sake. He does not support and encourage his wife's passion for dance rather insults her by calling it a mere street acrobatics. He even forces her to leave the job. Though they live under the same roof, a communication gap occurs between them. Marco's indifferent attitude and cold behaviour make Rosie a victim of alienation. She becomes a solitary soul for being deprived of love, sexuality and even of dance yet he never thinks to leave him. Rather she "followed him day by day like a dog waiting on his grace".

Karl Marx claims that city or urban area is the primary location of alienation. "Sociologists have proposed that urbanism results in higher alienation toward society". "It has been estimated that approximately 60 million people in the United States or 20% of the total population, feel lonely". Another research suggests that this rate has been increasing over time all over the world.

"As theorized by Georg Simmel and subsequently Louis Wirth, increased stimuli (i.e., noise, light and people) inherent in the city can cause undue stress on individuals. In response, city dwellers adapt by withdrawing from interactions. What little reactions they do have are rational and unemotional and only serve as a means to an end". Ramani in *The Dark Room* is such a person who has been burnt by the flames of urbanity. He can't be called a cruel man altogether. Although he is a rough and tough man, sometimes we see him to take care of his wife and children. But he was not happy with his family life. The flames of urbanity (i.e. - restless schedule, more aspirations, and ultimately frustrations) make him a cruel husband, a dull father and ultimately an alienated man.

On the other hand, the head master in *The English Teacher* possesses contrary characteristics of Ramani. He never feels thirsty to lead a glanderous urban life as Ramani does. Rather he has devoted himself in his school just to keep himself away from the flames of urbanity and the waves of urbanity. He wants to lead a serene, peaceful and spiritual life and he has found it in the children of his school. He is not a victim of alienation rather he had made himself alienated to spend his life in his own way.

APJ Abdul Kalam in his autobiographical piece *The Wings of Fire* said, “Whenever human beings find themselves alone, as a natural reaction, they start looking for company. Whenever they are in trouble, they look for someone to help them. Whenever they reach an impasse, they look to someone to show them the way out. Every recurrent anguish, longing, and desire finds its own special helper.” But all of the alienated persons in the above mentioned novels become failure to get the way of redemption from alienation.

Firstly we may deal with the female alienated figures —Savitri in *The Dark Room*, the headmaster’s wife in *The English Teacher* and Rosie in *The Guide*. Among the three, only Rosie could find the way of redemption whereas the rest had to negotiate with their situations. Simmel in his *The Philosophy of Money* tells how relationships are controlled by money in this capitalist society. As Rosie was highly educated, and desperate for her passionate hobby (dance), she could break the nest created by patriarchy by her indomitable courage and will in association with Raju who after the departure of her husband gave everything as she needed. But the headmaster’s wife and Savitri are typical house-wives who had no proper education, courage to struggle solely against their odd circumstances.

On the other hand, all the three male figures – Ramani in *The Dark Room*, the Headmaster in *The English Teacher* and Marco in *The Guide* – being economically self dependant, try to become emotionally self-dependant. And every one has succeeded more or less. Having spent a passive marital life, Ramani became a frustrated, alienated husband. Marital status became just burden for him. To escape from this meaningless relationship, Ramani builds a temporary extra-marital relationship with Shanta Bai. But ultimately does he get redemption from alienation for a long time, that is the question. Secondly the Headmaster being disgusted by family livings, escapes and builds an innovative play-school for children. He finally finds the meaning of life in the innocent smile of children. And Marco, after departing his wife for her extra-marital affair with Raju, sinks into his studies and achieves a grand success.

D.H. Lawrence points out: “The great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman”. But this great relationship is being marred by the flames of modernity. In “the age of nightmare and anxiety” people are giving prominence in searching their self-identity and ultimately they find themselves alone. A psychological research points out, “the two people want to be together, to talk, to touch and individuals who are deeply in love actually to spend an unusual amount of time looking into each other’s eyes”. But this is really difficult to achieve. Different temperament, different social status, misunderstanding, miscommunication, selfishness, ego-clash causes an invisible rift between couples. Z.Rubin points out, “In a successful relationship the two individuals progress towards deep feelings of attachment, concern about the other person’s welfare and respect for other’s abilities and personal qualities” which were unfortunately absent in all the three couples of the above mentioned novels. That is why they become failure to a healthy relationship.

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