

The Urge of Emancipation in R.K. Narayan's *Daisy*: A Study of Painter of Signs

Lakhimi Dutta

Associate Professor
Department of English
Sibsagar Commerce
College Sivasagar
(Assam) & Research
Scholar (AUDC)

Dr. Indu Swami

Assistant Professor
Department of English
Assam University Diphu
Campus, Karbi Anglong

Abstract

R.K. Narayan born in a South Indian village in probably one of the most versatile novelist of Anglo – Indian fiction. His imaginary town Malgudi is a broad Canvass. Where one gets to be acquainted, with the changing scenario of India. His characters are mostly the middle class milieu. Narayan is quite sympathetic towards the status of women in India. In his novels he presents the docile and submissive housewives of the pre-independence India and also the emancipated women of the post independence period who have experienced the social changes and western influence. These modern women are seen struggling to get out of their shackled existence and strive to create an identity of their own. The readers get to experience the evolution in the women characters of Narayan from the modest, religious tradition bound housewives to bold confident professional ladies. In them we hear the voice of protest against the patriarchal dominance. Daisy the heroine of the novel painter of signs reflects this metamorphosis. In this paper, through the character of Daisy I would like to bring forth Narayan's support towards woman emancipation.

Keywords: Emancipation, Docile, Women, Existence, Change

Introduction

The Urge of Emancipation in R. K. Narayan's *Daisy*: A Study of Painter of Signs

BY

Lakhimi Dutta & Dr. Indu Swami

The impact of the significant economic and social movements is also reflected in literature. The Indian English Novelists spreads a wide canvas of the Social Consciousness through their works at different stages. The theme of emancipation of women gained momentum in the early 20th Century and a genuine concern for the amelioration of their condition for the first time developed. Daisy is R. K. Narayans one such attempt to represent the new women. Daisy is a trend setter in the literary canvas of R.K. Narayan. The hero of the Novel Raman is a painter by profession who remains a bachelor as he was not in favour of sex and marriage.

Daisy's mission reveals that Malgudi has been affected by the waves of modernity. Daisy is a bold modern woman. She confidently works in her office, she boldly unhesitatingly invites Raman to her house. Raman accompanies her to every place where she goes for her mission, where he assists her by writing signboards advocating family planning. Daisy's modern pragmatic attitude towards life inspires her for fulfilling her missionary zeal. Her objective is to arrest the rapid population growth in India even if it is only five percent a year. For this she develops in herself a great sense of adaptability. Food, lodging seems to be no problem for her. She can sleep anywhere, on anything. She eats whatever she gets. Even bathing seems to be not a problem for this modern spirited women. Daisy bathes, washes and dries her clothes anywhere. For her caste and creed is not a barrier. She accepts hospitality even at the hut of the poorest without any fuss and demand. She opines – "Let us live at least for a while as millions of our population live; otherwise we will never understand our own people... (POS 57) In a world where material comfort attracts every young girl Daisy emerges out as an exception. Claded in a simple cotton Sari, Daisy is emphatic about the woes of others. For her love, charity, compassion for the needy seem to take the priority and her missionary zeal makes her neglect the consciousness for the temporary physical beauty. ... In order to be unnoticeable she wore a Sari of the drabest staid, never used any powder or make up and did her hair indifferently. (POS 60) Daisy's ease and boldness in addressing the masses on family planning had a great motivating power. At a time when talking about sex openly in the orthodox Indian Society, was a taboo Daisy is very practical and bold. – She explained physiology, anatomy, and sexual intercourse with charts or if a blackboard was available, with sketches in chalk. She never felt Shy, hesitant but sounded casual... (POS 59)

Daisy's independent self voices out Simon De Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex' that 'There is no such thing as 'feminine nature'. There is a physical or psychological reason why women should be inferior to men... (bevoir 320) Daisy as reflected from her childhood does not feel the necessity of a male in her life whether it is a husband or a lover. She is neither fascinated by the sacredness of marriage nor the passion of love. Though she is not bereft of emotions and as she travels and works with Raman she too gets the feeling of attraction towards Raman but she doesn't allow it to lead her astray from her mission. So far as her work is concerned she considers love and marriage a hindrance. And to fulfill her mission she moves forward to make any personal sacrifice that is needed. In this respect her mental

strength proves to be stronger than that of Bharati in *Waiting for Mahatma*. As an expert exponent of family planning Daisy knows how to give herself and Raman the pleasure they long without the consequences of having an unwanted child. But finally her refusal to marry was for the reason that she could not accept a fact of a moment's weakness to chain up for the whole life and threaten the cause for which she is striving. She agrees to marry Raman but that is at a moment when she had surrendered to a weak moment of emotions. – "At some moments, and moods, we say and do things – like talking in sleep, but when you awake you realize your folly." She fumbled on ... (POS 180) Infact Daisy possess in her a saintly quality. Her refusal of marriage doesnot involve anything personal but it is rather impersonal considering the society as a whole. It is seen that the strain of modernity and urge to establish the woman's identity has assimilated in her. She has become self sufficient and an uncompromising individual.

Apart from these Daisy doesn't forget that she is a woman by birth. Her far sightedness and boldness keeps her prepared for unexpected menacing situations. This is illustrated by an incident where Raman wriggles out of bed and attempts to take physical advantage of Daisy. But Daisy foreseeing the danger, sits on the branch of a tamarind tree till dawn. After this incident she remains totally indifferent to Raman during the rest of the journey. In the novel the power roles seem to get reversed. Daisy takes up the reins of the relationship between her and Raman. In an orthodox Indian Society where only the male opinion was taken into consideration, Daisy advocates radical feminism and rejects the male order. Raman submits to all her decisions. She even does away with sacred obligations like marriage. She does not believe in ceremonies and motherhood. She agrees to marry Raman on two conditions – Firstly, they will not have any children and if by mischance, She gets pregnant she would abort it. For her motherhood is a kind of shackle in the path of emancipation of a woman. It was very normal for an Indian women to worship her husband. She considers it as her sacred duty but in Narayan's *Painter of Signs* it is not Daisy who worships Raman but it is the other way round. Raman blind foldedly is ready to do everything as she wishes.

Through Raman is brought up in a very conservative and traditional way by his Aunt by Daisy's influence on him is so strong that he feels the urge to compromise with certain rituals as they do in the matter of their marriage. After his aunts departure to Benares Raman moves forward to transform her puja room into Daisy's bedroom which would have been considered blasphemous by his Aunt. When they peep into the puja room he said – "This will be your bedroom, you can put up the table and the chair." She looked in and remarked, "I remember seeing your aunt's Gods and Goddesses here. Where are they?" "Safe in that Cupboard", he said. "Is it safe?" she exclaimed in a mock fright. "Will the God's not smite us for this effrontery?" Raman laughed at the notion, rather loudly and artificially. (POS 170-171) Though both Raman and Daisy are rational but they are not atheists. It is not their shaken belief in God but they donot believe the worshipping of idols and statues. This

highlights the wave of scientific thinking into the Indian society. Daisy is a kind of enigma for Raman. Her unpredictable moods are very difficult for Raman to comprehend.

Daisy intact for quite some time was in a dilemma and crossroads between her intellect and instinct – one pulling her towards her firm convictions against marriage and the population explosion and the other towards her satisfaction of her own natural instinct towards marriage and sex. After a struggle with her instinct Daisy recovers her normal self with confidence and firmness. She is very much different from Narayan's other heroines like Rosie and Bharati whose self discovery process is a gradual one. Daisy realizes the need of establishing her identity in a faster way. William Welsh rightly observes : Daisy is a peculiarly modern young woman for whom the cult of independent individuality is the Supreme value in life. (Welsh 161) There is a similarity between Daisy Raman story and the story of King Santanu and Ganga in Mahabharata. Ganga makes Santanu agree that he would not question her about her activities after marriage or else She will go away from him. And after marriage he was shocked to see her drowning seven new born babies one by one in water. But unable to control himself he raises his protest at the time of drawing the eighth child. At this juncture Ganga breaks her marriage and leaves him. Daisy to lays her conditions of marriage to Raman and conditions him not to question any of her activities. Here Narayan ironically highlights how a modern girl seeks complete freedom from marriage. In the traditional Indian society housekeeping is considered as a priority and sacred. In the pre-independence novels of Narayan we have Swami's mother, Savitri, Susila who keep themselves busy and stay happy in their household chores. But for an emancipated woman like Daisy it takes a secondary place. She considers home to be – a retreat from sun and rain, and for sleeping, washing and depositing one's trunk (POS 116). She tells Raman, "You will be as much a house keeper as I'll be." (POS 167) Here Daisy seem to lay stress on the equality of work between men and women.

Narayan while potraying the emancipated new woman Daisy, does not leave behind his tradition bound ones. There is a clash between the two polarities in form of Daisy and Raman's old Aunt. The former representing the modern and the latter the traditional. For Raman's Aunt marriage between Daisy and Raman is horrifying. Daisy for her was a girl without a family, out of caste. She cries out – A Christian! How can you bring a Christian... (POS 147) Her religious devotion and culture bound nature makes her a complete antithesis of Daisy. Unable to accept Ramans decision to marry Daisy and looking at Daisy's unconventional life style Raman's Aunt prefers to live Malgudi and embark on a pilgrimage to Badrinath, Haridwar and finally Benares. Thus Daisy is Narayans modern woman who has been influenced by the impact of western ideals and ideas. She fights her own battle of life and tries to make a room of her own in the male dominated society.

R.K. Narayan being very Indian at heart brings out this modern woman to the readers proving that emancipation of woman in India is not a myth or an Utopia. She is the product of our own Indian Culture, who though is influence by the changing values of the society but

does not totally shed off her own values. She is a bold struggler for her identity trying to assert equality not only for herself but also for her sex. It must be noted that with this boldness she also becomes instrumental in certain extent to empower her male counterpart. It must have been very surprising for a tradition bound Indian society to accept such a sudden metamorphosis in women but Narayan's character like Daisy has ushered a wind of positivity and boldness. R.K. Narayan's writing career course a span of nearly six decades and during this period Indian society has witnessed several changes and these changes had encompassed the women too vast changes have come over women's priorities and changes the docile, submissiveness of the women of 1940's has given place to assertiveness and boldness. R.K. Narayan has a progressive attitude towards and this is reflected in the treatment of his heroines.

Works Cited

Beauvoire, Simone. *The Second sex*, Tr. And Ed. H.M. Parshley. Harmondsworth Press, Penguin, 1972.

Narayan R.K. *The Painter of Signs*, Indian Thought Publication, Mysore, 2001.

Welsh William, *R.K. Narayan; A Critical Appreciation*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1982.