

Theme in R K Narayan's *The Dark Room*

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Abstract: R.K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* explores various themes throughout its narrative, shedding light on human nature, social constructs, and the complexities of relationships. The novel, set in pre-independent India, provides a rich cultural backdrop and delves into the inner turmoil faced by the protagonist, Savitri. Through the lens of Savitri's struggle for autonomy within a traditional Indian household, Narayan exposes the hardships faced by Indian women during this era. Additionally, this literary work examines themes related to the power dynamics within marital relationships, the importance of self-worth, and the consequences of blindly following societal norms.

Keywords: The Dark Room, Themes, Novel, Society, Realism.

I. INTRODUCTION

In further examining *The Dark Room*, Narayan masterfully unveils the psychological aspects of oppression and suppression faced by women in a patriarchal society. The characterization of Savitri, as well as other female characters in the novel, highlights the emotions and resilience required to navigate a life bound by societal expectations. The author also delves into the concept of darkness as a metaphor for ignorance and the inability to break free from the constraints of gender roles. Through this exploration, Narayan encourages readers to question long-standing traditions and challenges the necessity of change in the face of injustice.

The Dark Room (1938) presents a picture of domestic disharmony. Ramani, the office secretary of Engladia Insurance Company in Malgudi is very domineering and cynical in his ways. He governs his house according to his own sweet will. As he is always irritable, the atmosphere in his house is generally gloomy and his wife, Savitri, his children and servants are always remain in a state of terror.

Savitri is a true symbol of traditional Indian womanhood. Savitri, whose place is in the dark room (kitchen), is a timid, silent suffering and sacrificing Indian wife. She is very beautiful and deeply devoted to her husband. Ramani, however, does not respond to her sentiments even with ordinary warmth. Through they have been married for fifteen years; his wife has received nothing from her husband but rebukes and abuses. Even his children get more rebukes from him than expressions of his fatherly love.

Soon there arrives at the scene a beautiful lady, Shanta Bai, who has deserted her husband and joined Engladia Insurance Company. Ramani succumbs to her beauty and coquettish ways. Ramani spends nights in Shanta Bai's company. Savitri feels disturbed but she "decided that it would be better to suffer in silence than to venture question." When Gangu, the talkative forward wife a teacher tells her about Ramani's infidelity, she sulks only in self-pity. "Perhaps I am old and ugly. How can I help it? I have borne children and slaved for the house." She pathetically prepares herself to win him back by reviving her charm. How pathetically she longs that he may come and "love her as boisterously as he loved her in the first week of their marriage."

All her dreams are shattered. Her fury is implacable; "Don't touch me!...you are dirty, you are impure." Her anguish born of self-pity and impotent anger is heart rending: "I don't possess anything in the world. What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything else that she has is her father's, her husband's or her son's." Seeing no way of correcting her erring husband, Savitri revolts against him and in utter frustration and disgust, she leaves her husband's house with an intention of committing suicide.

Savitri goes to the river and throws herself into it. The timely arrival of Mari, the blacksmith and burglar, who while crossing the river on his way to his village, sees her body floating on the river and at once rescues her, and saves her life. Mari's wife Ponni on knowing her plight persuades her to come to their village. There Savitri embarks upon an independent living of her own by work in the temple.



As she cannot bear the querulous priest of the temple and as her own homesickness and tormenting anxiety for her children nag her, she becomes restless. She realizes the futility of her attempt to escape from her bonds with the temporal world and returns to her husband's hateful home to sulk in the dark without much effect on Ramani.

In this respect, she may be contrasted with Gauri, the heroine in Anand's *The Old Woman and the Cow*. Savitri has neither the courage nor the independence of spirit that Gauri shows. Gauri leaves her husband's house once and for all, adopts the profession of a nurse and never returns home. Ramani stands in sharp contrast to Krishna (the protagonist of Narayan's *The English Teacher*) who is a self-sacrificing husband.

One of his least successful novels is *The Dark Room* (1938), which takes up, in schematic ways, the condition of women in the changing circumstances of modern India. In Narayan's first two novels, women had been exempt from demanding citizenship in a harsh, discouraging world; they existed on the margins, in the kitchens and bedrooms and inner courtyards, where they were often a source of tenderness. In 1933, Narayan's own marriage to a girl he saw drawing water from a roadside tap the horoscopes didn't match, but Narayan overrode his parents' objections gave him access to the lives of women, a whole new range of human experiences previously denied him by strict segregation.

As the narrative progresses, Narayan deeply explores the concept of individuality and the quest for self-discovery within the confines of a restrictive society. Through Savitri's journey, readers are given an insightful look into the courage and determination required to challenge the status quo and overcome the limitations imposed by traditional norms. As Savitri's perception of her own identity evolves, she becomes an instrumental force in advocating for reform and equality. Ultimately, *The Dark Room* serves as a powerful reminder that the pursuit of personal growth and self-realization is essential for breaking the chains of societal expectations and achieving true emancipation.

As the narrative unfolds in *The Dark Room*, the reader is confronted with the harsh reality of the protagonist's entrapment within her domestic environment, serving as a stark reminder of the issues women faced in similar situations. Through the use of evocative imagery and compelling storytelling, Narayan reveals the conflicting emotions experienced by those who yearn for freedom and autonomy while being shackled by societal obligations. The novel also investigates the theme of self-discovery and personal growth as a crucial component of a fulfilling life, both emotionally and intellectually. Thus, *The Dark Room* acts as a compelling call to action, urging its audience to recognize the value of self-determination and challenging the status quo for the betterment of society as a whole.

In light of these poignant themes, Narayan's *The Dark Room* provides a captivating and thought-provoking commentary that transcends its historical context, resonating with contemporary readers who continue to face similar societal challenges. The novel's exploration of power dynamics, gender roles, and self-discovery serve as a compelling call for critical reflection on the values and norms that shape our lives. By unearthing the importance of autonomy and personal growth, Narayan emphasizes the potential for individuals to catalyze lasting change in the pursuit of a more equitable society. Ultimately, *The Dark Room* remains a timeless literary work, offering profound insights into the complexities of the human condition and the indomitable spirit required to rise above adversity.

II. CONCLUSION

R.K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* presents a captivating exploration of the human spirit and the fight for self-discovery and empowerment in the face of societal constraints. Through the novel's poignant themes and dynamic characters, readers are encouraged to critically examine the values and expectations that define their own lives. *The Dark Room* serves as both a mirror and a map, reflecting the realities of our world while guiding us towards the possibility of change and the potential for greatness in the pursuit of self-actualization. As a captivating literary work, the novel's enduring relevance and powerful message continue to inspire generations, shedding light on the struggle for emancipation and the true essence of humanity.

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