Chapter III
SUPPRESSION OF THE WOMEN

The study of Narayans novels shows that there are a number of female characters in his novels. Female characters of different age groups and all types are found in his novels. Readers meet Leela, a three years old small girl in *The English Teacher*. Teenager girls like Malathi and Susila are there in *The Bachelor of Arts*. Readers meet Ambika as a bride in *The Vendor of Sweets*. Ambika, wife of Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets* performs mother’s role by giving birth to Mali. Susila gives birth to Leela and leaves the world very early in *The English Teacher*. Savitri, suffers and revolts against the cruelty of her husband, and finally surrenders as she is forced to do so by her motherly feelings. Her children become shackles for her. Rosie challenges the male model and lives with Raju. She questions the duties of a husband and instead of suffering and surrendering to her husband, prefers freedom and becomes Nalini, the dancer within her. Bharati, the strongest lady lives her life, as she likes. In fact she is the only woman character who lives the life fully. She is not the *Other half*, but she is the *Better half*. She is the *guru* of her lover Sriram. She is not afraid of anybody or anything; on the contrary Sriram is terrified to see her daring. She is like a role model for the Indian girls of 21st century.

Apart from the above mentioned girls and women there are certain middle aged and old female characters in Narayan’s novels. Middled aged women like Swamnathan’s mother, Chandran’s mother, Mali’s mother and Sita wife of Nagaraj are there in the novels *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The Vendor of Sweets* and *The World of Nagaraj* respectively. Lastly there are certain old women like Swaminathan’s Granny, Raju’s mother and Krishna’s mother to guide the young generation.

In fact, R.K. Narayan is a writer who puts no special emphasis on women. His concentration is on the central male character of the novel. His women characters do not emerge as strong; they are true to the traditional
image of Indian women. But the females like Savitri, Rosie and above all Bharati emerge as the most modern type of women.

Elaine Showalter, a great feminist critic divides the history of women’s writing into a feminine phase (1840-80), a feminist phase (1880-1920) and a female phase (1920 onwards). She says that in the first phase women writers imitated dominant male artistic norms and aesthetic standards. In this first phase the female writers followed the male models. But it is the beginning of their liberation. In the second phase the female writers questioned the male models; and they revolted against it. In the third and the last phase female writers created their own models based on their own experience. (BT 117-119)

A study of Narayan’s novels and the female characters in his novels show that there are three types of female characters in his novels. In the first phase women like Krishna’s wife, his mother, Raju’s mother, Chandran’s mother, Swaminathan’s mother are there. They follow the tradition; they live happily within the frame created by the male dominated society. In the second there are certain characters like Savitri and Rosie, they challenge and revolt the model created for women. In the third phase there is Bharati, who lives like the writers of female phase, by breaking the male model and by creating her own model. There are some modern female characters like Gracy and Shantabai.

Savitri revolts against the male model created by the male dominated society; Rosie challenges the model and Bharati creates her own female model by rejecting the male model. Ramani the life partner of Savitri, tries his level best to suppress her. Marco follows Ramani up to certain extant. Raju the lover of Rosie helps her in questioning and rejecting the male model. Sriram the future husband of Bharati appreciates the female model created by Bharati.

Rosie in *The Guide* overcomes her subalternity by taking a decision of becoming a professional dancer. Her dance is a creative act that helps her in overcoming her subaltern position in her marital life. She goes on dancing and dancing and performing shows one after another; each show becomes a higher rung for her in the hierarchy of elite and subaltern. The same is the case of Mali, son of Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets*. Mali’s journey to America becomes his act of overcoming subalternity. An eminent critic of subaltern
studies Peyman Vahabzadeh says, “Subalternity is overcome through a creative act, an act of decision…” (Peyman 110). Classical dance is one of the oldest arts of India. Temple dance has rich tradition of more than two thousand years in south India. It was an integral part of ancient Indian theatre. The dance movements of the dancers were crystallized in stone as karanas in temple sculpture. In the course of time, dance made its way from temple into the courts of kings; and the devadasis became rajanartakis. (Valli) The classical dance of India is liked and appreciated not only in India but also aboard. Through such dance some mythological story is told by using the body of the dancer as the only instrument to tell the story. It is accompanied by some music. Rosie belongs to the tradition of temple dancers. It is true that the temple dancers are misused by the elite male, but as dancers they have no fault of their own. It is the main cause which makes people look down upon the temple dancers and consider them as the women easily available to any strong man. Marco has also the same views about Rosie. He is interested in the study of the lifeless caves; their history; the sculpture, but not in the living being Rosie, who belongs to the tradition of dance art and who himself is the best artist.

In the earlier chapter of the thesis this point is already discussed in detail; while discussing the escape of Krishna from the state of subaltern mentality. It is mentioned there that his realization that, he is basically a poet, he is doing a wrong work all that contribute in making him a free man. By the end of the novel he becomes free by rejecting the tedious and monotonous job and by accepting a new way of life, where there is an ample scope for the creativity i.e. the world of children. One needs decision making power to set free one-self from the state of being subaltern, after all, subalternity is nothing but a state of mind where a person feels that he is inferior and someone as superior or higher in rank or position; either it may be a social position, official, political, economic or any other. The moment one realizes it; the process of becoming free of that person starts. The interesting thing seen in the novels of R.K. Narayan is that some subalterns never realize that they are subalterns, and they remain subalterns forever. Some subalterns realize that they are the subalterns; and they try to free themselves; their act of making themselves free may be
very wrong and unjustifiable, such as in *The Bachelor of Arts* Chandran’s running away from the home and accepting *sanyas*, and in *The Dark Room* Savitri’s act of running away from tyrant, customary elite husband, Ramani’s home to die in the River Sarayu. Of course, these two acts are absolutely cowardice and full of stupidity, yet they are the unsuccessful attempts made by them to get rid of this subaltern position. Rosie’s act of living with Raju by leaving her husband Marco for the sake of giving scope to the dancer within her, is of course, not justifiable from social point of view. But it makes her free.

Like Chandarn, Savitri is weak, submissive she surrenders to the strong social customs, despite of the fact that she is right and her husband is very wrong. There are a number of myths, stories and customs in India that inculcate on the mind of the people, both male and female, that a woman has to tolerate her husband at any cost; he may behave with her in whatever manner he may like, but it is her moral duty to bear it silently. It is also inculcated that a woman who tolerate her husband is good, like that of Savitri; whereas a woman who could not tolerate her husband’s wrong acts becomes an object of negative criticism. All this develops the social ideology which says that a woman is born to be silent, and to remain silent is her true self. If she tries to break the social norms like that of Rosie; she is considered as adulterous, bad, of lower social status; but nobody thinks about her suppression, her feelings, her space, and her suppressed desires. If Ramani can have extramarital relation and Savitri has to finally accept it then why should not Marco accept Rosie? That is the question. So many critics criticized Rosie as a bad woman; but most of them failed to consider her view, her expectations from life. No doubt as every Indian woman wants a settled life with a good husband and a good happy family; Rosie and her mother also want the same. But here the question comes what does it mean by a good husband? An intelligent and studious man having good fortune, a good job, a big house and having no time for his wife; and always with a feeling that a wife is burden; and by marrying her he has made a good turn on her, like Marco. Obviously, no woman would like to have such type of husband. Along with good fortune, good job, big house; a wife wants some time of her husband. This is the typical Indian mentality about the concept of
husband and Marco has neither time nor love and care for Rosie. He considers that by marrying Rosie, he has made a good turn on her; otherwise she would have been somewhere else.

Marco is always busy in his work in his studies, in watching and studying the caves and their beauty and its artists, but he never thought for a single moment about the real person, real beauty, real artist Rosie. To Marco Rosie is nothing more than a burden, an object of pity, and a thing to waste no time. “If a man has to have peace of mind it is best that he forgets the fair sex” (Guide 71 ch. 5). He never noticed the dancer within her, he never noticed her real self, and he never noticed that she is an educated woman, the first post-graduate in her family. Marco neither thought about her education nor about her art. He does not give space and scope to her. Rosie is not brought up and educated by her mother for this type of life. Such women need some space of their own, some scope to do something, some attention and some care; Rosie got nothing of this from Marco. But when she finds a hope of getting everything in Raju; it is natural for a woman like Rosie to get attracted towards such man. Though Raju is economically a poor man, he has everything which Marco lacks. In this connection Som Dev rightly remarks: “If Rosie is driven to the arms of a stranger, it is partly not her fault…Had he considered the basic needs of the woman whom he takes for a wife, perhaps their union would not have sundered in this manner. He has offered insult to womanhood, and in return the womanhood in Rosie raises its hood to leave fang-marks on him” (qtd. in Ramteke 55). Marco wants his wife like his servant Joseph. According to him Joseph is a wonderful man. Marco looks down upon dancing and thinks that this kind of art suits to the people of low rank and position. “Old prejudices die-hard, and Marco for all his erudition looked upon dancing as just street acrobatics, and he killed Rosie’s instincts for life and love of art by denying her both of them” (qtd. in Ramteke 55).

Raju is the man who says to Rosie that he can do anything for her. He is the man who says that she looks beautiful. He is the man who appreciates the dancer within her. Without considering all the above mentioned things it is wrong to blame Rosie as an adulterous or a bad woman. It is not the honest
criticism against her. A reader should not forget that she is neither Savitri nor Bharati; she is Rosie. To understand and to criticize a woman, as she is one needs a different outlook. The past and the upbringing of that woman are to be taken in to consideration first; and then a customary outlook of looking towards a woman is to be thrown away. Finally and basically, she must be considered as a human being with all her desires, space and possibilities of taking some right or wrong decisions; sometimes getting sleep down and sometimes succeed in her acts of doing something. If it is done then one can make the real estimate of that character, here the term real estimate is used in the same sense in which Matthew Arnold used it to appreciate the literary work in hand while criticizing, in his famous essay ‘The Study of Poetry’.

To understand a woman, her rights, duties, responsibilities and first freedom must be given to her. In this regard Tennie Claflin, in her work Constitutional Equality a Right of Woman notes: “What are the duties woman owes herself; and what does she owe to man?--- No responsibility without freedom compelled honesty and loyalty only dishonesty and disloyalty- Greeter freedom insures more virtue-Principle must be the basis of all virtue…” (Claflin 77). If the statement is reversed, the status of women in India becomes very clear that is to say; women has more responsibilities and very less freedom; she is compelled to be loyal and honest by the society, culture and above all her own ignorance about all this.

To be just to others, there must be some self-justice at the foundation of a person. If a woman is seen from this point of view, it becomes easy to understand her. The freedom which a woman gets, determines the possibility of her being true to her own nature. Customs and society have been laying certain rules and restrictions for a woman to follow them without any question. She takes birth naturally; but society joins hand with the family from her very childhood to nurture, and educate her till her youth not for herself but for a man. When this process completes, it becomes her ideology. She thinks that her soul and body both are to keep her husband happy, and her happiness lies in his happiness. Here the real problem is that she thinks it is the only truth. Such type of thinking is artificial, but the problem is that both man and woman think
that it is natural. If it is so, all her aspirations, ambitions and intuitions which spring from her well nurtured generous heart are not her own, but of the society which shapes and creates her.

From this it becomes clear that Indian society, customs, culture and history are largely responsible in shaping the mindset of a woman. In every woman two women are found one who is naturally created i.e. both her inner-self and her body, and other is created by the society, customs, culture and history which form her ideology. It will not be wrong to say that nature creates sex and society creates gender. It means gender is a manmade thing, if it is manmade it is quite possible that it can be modified, changed or abolished; and fortunately this herculean task has been undertaken by some great female writers and thinkers like Siemone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, Tennessee C. Claflin, Gayatri Spivak etc. and it will also continue in future till the process of training a female child to live for a man will come to an end. It is an ideal hope yet efforts of the people in this direction will at least modify and change it up to certain extent if not eradicate it absolutely.

There are a number of places in the novels of Narayan where the references of a woman being trained for a man are found. For example in The Bachelor of Arts, Malathi is trained for her future domestic life. Chandran keeps a watch on her to know the details about her, by sitting in the room of his friend Mohan. His room is opposite to her house. What Chandran observes is important to note here:

He gathered several facts about the girl. She wore a dark sari and a green sari alternatively. She came to the river chiefly for the sake of her little companion. She was invariably absent on Fridays and come late on Wednesdays. Chandran concluded from this that the girl went to the temple on Friday evenings, and was delayed by a music master or a stitching master on Wednesdays. He further gathered that she was of a religious disposition, and was accomplished in the art of music or embroidery. From her regularity he concluded that she was a person of very systematic habits. The fact that she played with her young companion showed that she had a loving disposition. He concluded
that she had no brothers, since not a single soul escorted her on any evening. (BA 64 ch. 7)

The purpose of quoting this long passage from the novel is to make the point clear that how the society and her family has been preparing Malathi for her future domestic life or to be an ideal house wife of some man. It also shows the madness of Chandran for Malathi. But the more important thing is that the passage shows how a girl has been trained for a man. Malathi’s wearing sari; her going to the river only for the sake of the little companion; her learning of music, stitching and embroidery and her habit of going to temple all this is a part of her training to be an ideal house wife. She never goes to river only for her sake like Chandran. She does not learn any art like karate or marshal art or any other game. She has been trained in only those traditional arts like stitching, music or embroidery. Her religious bent of mind is also prepared by sending her to temples. Her going to the river with the little one is a part of her training in taking care of children, in which a woman is traditionally expected to be perfect.

In his novels Narayan presents some situations where a woman tries to revolt against her social upbringing for man. For example, Savitri in The Dark Room, questions the bad behaviour of Ramani. Rosie in The Guide, listens to the self within her; she prefers to be a dancer rather than a house wife of Marco, waiting for him at home. There are certain women in the society who are manlier then a man himself. Bharati, in Waiting for the Mahatma is the best example of this kind of woman.

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that R.K. Narayan, is a very conscious writer. Being a keen observer of society, and a writer with objectivity, he focuses on both the sides. There are traditional women like Chandran’s mother, Malathi, Susila, Krishna’s mother who happily serve their husband without any question. Modern women revolting against such type of traditional images of women like that of Savitri, Rosie and Bharati are also found in his novels. It is important to note here that the revolutionary and modern types of women are found in the later novels of Narayan; and the traditional types of women are found in his earlier novels.
“The first duty, then, that woman owes herself is, to demand for herself her right to freedom, without which there can be no individual responsibility” (Claflin 78). To make anybody responsible, freedom is to be given to that person first, and then one can expect some responsible acts from that person. Man has made free to himself; he posses all the freedom, so he asserts his individuality and there is individual responsibility with him. But his mothers, sisters, wives and daughters still do not have it. (Claflin 78) Freedom is given to woman inside the kitchen and not outside the home in the society. If she tries to do so, society criticises that woman in such a way that as if she is absolutely wrong.

There is one incident in Waiting for the Mahatma. Bharati comes to the hill to meet Sriram. She comes there all alone and goes all alone, this act of Bharati creates a sense of fear in Sriram and a feeling that: “she doesn’t seem to feel she is a woman” (WM101 pt.2). All this makes Sriram a subaltern. Bharati becomes an elite by breaking all the norms that make a female Other. She is sharp in contrast to Savitri of The Dark Room, and Sriram is also sharp in contrast to that of Ramani, who neither cares for his wife and children nor loves them.

Shaminder Takhar in his work Gender, Ethnicity and Political Agency notes that: “Men’s fear of losing control is an obstacle to women’s empowerment, but is it necessarily an outcome of women’s empowerment that men should lose power...” (Takhar 13). A person in power is afraid of giving freedom to others due to fear of losing the power, but it is the one side of the coin. Great leaders trust in making leaders by giving power to their subordinates, this is the other side of the same coin. There are some leaders in the world, but due to the liberty given by their leader. A true leader develops leadership in others. It means all most all women in the power are not only just because of their own caliber, but also due to the support given by either their leader or some family member to them to let grow. Whenever the followers of Gandhiji are with him they are afraid of nothing says Bharati. This is the other side of the fact which cannot be ignored.
Some thinkers think that women are still not going to get the proper support from the men. This is the partial truth; the other side of the earth which was in the darkness, now came to the light. There are some men like Gandhiji and Chandran’s father in the society who has been giving an active support to the Other section of the society, but unfortunately their number is very meager. Social changes do not take place in short time. A woman suppressed for thousands of years, how could be strengthen overnight? There has been development in the social, political, economic status of a woman, but it requires time and collective, conscious efforts by both man and woman. The process of empowering is slow and interactive, in fact, it will never complete because it is an ongoing journey for both men and women. The process of women empowerment needs certain fundamental psychological changes in a woman about herself and in a man about a woman which can boost her self-confidence and self-esteem like that of Bharati of Waiting for the Mahatma.

Bharati comes there barefoot to meet Sriram on the hill in the evening. Sriram says her, “You should not walk barefoot” (WM 100 pt. 2). Bold Bharati, being a true follower of Gandhiji, with her full patriotic feeling argues that: “Why not? India’s three hundred sixty million walk barefoot” (WM100 pt.2). Bharati thinks of the whole nation where as Sriram thinks of his own self and his beloved first and of the nation at last. The answer given by Sriram makes it clear. “They may, but it doesn’t mean you should also walk barefoot. There may be cobras about, this place is full of such things” (WM100 pt.2). His feeling of care is mingled with fear, but Bharati is not afraid of any body.

Bharati is neither afraid of cobras nor lonely roads nor police, all these things terrify a woman in general. But she is confident enough to manage with all these things. She taught him to spin on charka; it is symbolic enough. It symbolizes that she taught Gandhism to him. In this sense she is his guru. When Sriram says to her that she should not be afraid of him, but others must be afraid of her then she says, “Yes, because I am your Guru” (WM100 pt.2). In this above discussion one thing is important to note that physically Bharati is a female but psychologically or mentally Bharati is like a male. Her behavior is manly.
By nature Man is born free, but Man is made a slave, untouchable, subaltern, subordinate by some people for their own gain. Right to freedom is the inborn instinct of every Man. Freedom is such an abstract term that is divided into two parts i.e. abstract freedom such as freedom of soul, and concrete freedom such as freedom to write, speak. A woman does not get either of it, whereas a man enjoys both of them; and that makes a difference. Here one must bear in mind that a woman is at the centre of the society. By making the centre silent society has been paying a heavy price for the same.

Calflin Tennessee in her work *Constitutional Equality: A Right of Woman* notes:

> One law for him and another for her cannot be much longer exercised. It is not that woman, in demanding freedom, no man is willing to allow his wife the same privileges he makes use of when away from home. Look to the numerous houses of prostitution in all large cities; they are supported by men whose wives are at home performing their duties and maintaining their loyalty as wives. (78)

In *The Bachelor of Arts* there is an incident where Chandran, meets Kailas at a hotel. Meeting of Chandran with Kailas has its own importance in the novel. It tests Chandran’s social morality. It throws light especially on the unlimited freedom which men like Kailas are enjoying in the society; and the immoral trafficking in big cities like Madras. Chandran learns that Kailas has two wives at his home. He loves both of them says Narayan; but can it be called as love? He has made plenty of money in Malaya and settled down in his old village, which is at a night’s journey from Madras. The words of Kailas to Chandran reveal his nature and mentality.

In fact, Kailas is the representative of certain type of people in the society. The words of Kailas are: “I have brought two hundred rupees with me. I shall stay here till this is spent, and then return to my village and sleep between the two wives for the next three months, and then again come here. I don’t know how long it is going to last” (BA 97 ch.11). It means Kailas’s visit to this place is his frequent habit; and it is not an accidental incident like that of Chandran. If it is so, then what is the fault of the two wives of Kailas? What do
they get in return for their loyalty to her husband? Society has two different angles to look towards the same thing. Prostitutes are looked down upon and hated by the society; but the same society has different outlook for people like Kailas, those who go to them. It is all due to the different measures for man and woman by virtue of customs, history and religion. Claflin Tennessee says that: “those who throw dirt show their own filthiness...” (81). As per this statement man becomes the first victim of the filthy nature, for he has been doing this since antiquity. In fact, prostitution is started by the men, for the men and controlled by the men; and a female is blamed for it. The two unnamed wives of Kailas remain speechless silent sufferers.

The words of Kailas make Chandran aware about the dirtiness which has been going in the society. After the dinner they go to ‘Kokilam’s house’ at Mint Street. It is the place where prostitutes are available for men like Kailas. When they go there by a taxi; Chandran comes to know that this is prostitute’s place, in the words of Kailas, his girls’ house. After knowing the fact Chandran flies away from there and the rest of the thing is a part of the novel.

The situation before the legal rights given to women in England was very bad. England, the mother of democracy, is a country that gave right to vote to woman very late, and a place on earth where women writers wrote by assuming pen name of male like Bronte Sisters, George Eliot etc. The legal right to vote is given to them by the law, but what about the social right and equal status in the society. How is it possible till there is burden of First Sin? If such is the condition of woman in the most forward country like England, then one can imagine the condition of a woman in India. India is a land of much diversity, but unfortunately there is much similarity in the treatment given to woman throughout India. The greatest paradox in India is that woman is considered as a goddess, but is treated as a slave. Its examples are found in the novels of Narayan.

Chandran before knowing the name of Malathi, calls her as ‘Lakshmi,’ a goddess of wealth. By the end of the novel when he sees Susila, he finds nothing in Malathi, even her name also looks like a tongue twister to him. As per Hindu religion a bridegroom takes an oath to take care of his wife. But the
treatment of Ramani to Savitri forces to think about killing herself. As per law inducing someone to die is like culpable homicide attempting to murder, a punishable offence. Her failure in the attempt of committing suicide makes her a silent sufferer forever. Marco’s carelessness and his inhuman attitude towards Rosie and ample scope given to Raju are mostly responsible for her leaving him.

It is the universally acknowledged truth that houses of prostitutes in all large cities are supported by men, largely by married one. Men do expect the loyalty from their wives. It is found in the case of Marco, the husband of Rosie and Ramani, the husband of Savitri and Kailas, the husband of two wives. They never bother about the treatment which they have been giving to their wives, but do bother very much about their wife’s reactions. The social, unwritten liberty is given to men to go to prostitute’s house or keep extra marital relation with other woman like Ramani’s with Shantabai, but the same is not given to a woman. If a man keeps extra marital relationship with a woman then a woman is blamed for it; and most unfortunately the man is left free. The same thing happens with Rosie in *The Guide*. When Rosie says to Marco that she is with him because she is his wife then he says, “You are here because I’m not a ruffian. But you are not my wife. You are a woman who will go to bed with anyone that flatters your antics. That’s all” (Guide 153 ch. 7). He further says that if she wants to talk she may talk; he does not want to listen to her. He continues: “I felt too hurt. I thought that Othello was kindlier to Desdemona” (Guide 153 ch. 7). Marco blames Rosie for the fault. But it is the culture and the history that speaks through his moth. His lack of interest in Rosie and his disrespect is responsible for it. “She is a real snake-woman,” (Guide 154 ch. 7) says Raju’s mother. But in fact Raju started his full efforts for the very first moment on which he saw Rosie. When she comes to Malgudi with Marco from Madras, Raju falls in her love. Raju says that:

My sympathies were all for the girl; she was so lovely and elegant. After she arrived I discared my khaki bush-coat and dhoti and took the trouble to make myself presentable. I wore a silk jibba and groomed myself so well that my mother remarked when she saw leave the
house, ‘Ah, like a bridegroom!’ and Gaffur winked and said many an
insinuating thing when I went to meet them at the hotel. Her arrival
had been a sort of surprise for me. (Guide 65 ch. 5)

Busy Marco in his studies gives ample chance to Raju by saying, “Go
ahead, if you are bold enough” (Guide 72 ch. 5). Raju waiting for the right
opportunity how could wait even for a second. Raju says Rosi that: “life is so
blank without your presence” (Guide 73 ch. 5). She opposes him, but not for a
long time. A critical and objective analysis of the novel shows that the fault is
of all three: Marco, Raju and Rosie; in fact, more of Marco and Raju and less
of Rosie. So it will not be correct to blame Rosie. Claflin notes:

Woman is subjugated still by man; woman as a sex is under the
absolute sway of man as a sex. All rules of life are by him laid down
for her to be guided, governed and condemned by. We flatter ourselves
that this America is a free country. In which all enjoy the rights of
equality, not a bit of it, never were you more thoroughly, more
radically mistaken. There is no such thing as female freedom of female
quality, before the law, in the land...(Claflin 86)

If this is the condition of woman in America, a country which is the
freest, liberal and modern nation then one can think about the condition of a
woman in India. It is the most traditional land where people follow the customs
and traditions as if they are the part of their DNA. A slight detachment from the
traditional ways of life makes the people uncomfortable; they feel this slight
modification or change will uproot them completely.

Parents are generally unnecessarily found on a campaign of husband
hunting that makes woman unhappy. The question is can a woman live without
marriage? Marriage brings bindings: social, moral, religious, economic and so
on. It changes the way of thinking of the married woman, her family and
society. Marriage has both advantages and disadvantages for a woman, it will
not be correct to think only the negative aspects of the marriage. Simone de
Beauvoir’s discussion about marriage in the fifth chapter of her great work The
Second Sex is very correct. But it throws light on only the negative side of the
marriage. It is true that marriage has its own disadvantages for a married
woman, but it has also many positive points which cannot be ignored. As a result of it the family, the oldest social institution still exists in the society. Marriage gives a woman social security, stability, love and affection, respect and honour to a woman, who marries. But unfortunately it not true with every woman. But the other side, marriage is very ugly only for woman. Marriage snatches virginity and freedom from a girl who marries. It draws a frame of social, religious and legal bindings around her in such a way that it becomes nearly impossible for her to break the frame. If some woman tries to do so either she is punished or made outcast. So she remains a subaltern throughout her life. Rosie in *The Guide* breaks the frame and suffers very much. On the contrary, the woman who suffers silently like the wife of Ramani, society calls such woman as Savitri.

Culture, religion and history have been making collective efforts to make a woman weak, helpless and submissive. But in the course of time, women have been trying their level best to make themselves strong and sound on all grounds. In this regard Claflin says, “There are very few women who, once having arrived at the condition of ability to provide for themselves well, will ever sell themselves to any man for the sake of support” (Claflin 89). Once a woman becomes able and strong, then why should she ask any man for the help? Weak woman like Susila, Malathi and Chandean’s mother in *The Bachelor of Arts*; Swami’s mother and his Granny in *Swami and Friends*; Krishna’s mother and wife in *The English Teacher*; Raju’s mother and Rosie’s mother in *The Guide*; Savitri in *The Dark Room*; Jagan’s wife Ambika in *The Vendor of Sweets* all need support of either their husband or son. But there are certain strong and able women who do not need any kind of support. Rosie in *The Guide*; Bharati in *Waiting for the Mahatma* and Gracy in *The Vendor of Sweets* are strong enough not only to support themselves, but also provide support to their men.

Rosie by transforming herself into Nalini earns a lot of money and provides economic support to Raju, it is another thing that he misuses it. When her husband Marco rejects her she lives her life independently. Bharati in *Waiting for the Mahatma* moves throughout India with the Mahatma and
Sriram remains at Malgudi. She actively takes part in the freedom struggle of India. For her freedom struggle and social service are more important and for Sriram her love and marriage comes first and then the rest of the things. Daisy in *The Painter of Signs* is educated and talented lady. She devotes her time and energy to check the population of the town. Shantabai in *The Dark Room* who struggles to free herself from her drunkard husband, comes from Bangalore to Malgudi to work as a trainee officer in the Insurance Bank. Gracy in *The Vendor of Sweets* comes to from America to India. All these educated women are strong enough to face the challenges of life and live independently. They challenge the age old customs and the long tradition of women’s subalternity; and they raise their voices against it.

To the question can an Indian woman live independently without any man? The answer is ‘no’. Its roots are found deep in the culture and customs. It is not without reason that women remain helpless, history, culture and religion are responsible for it. Decision making power is not there in most of the women; provided that the above three factors are responsible for it, as a result of it women cannot shake off the shackles of dependence, and they do not become their own support. Rosie in *The Guide* needs either Marco or Raju with her; she does not live independently, but on the contrary Marco and Raju both live very freely without Rosie; the only reason behind it is that both Marco and Raju are male and Rosie is a female. Certain women like Bharati are strong enough to take decision, capable to live without any kind of support from men, in fact they support others; but even then they do not live independently, again the reason for this is the same society, culture and history. They make a woman subaltern and a man the dominant one.

Everything is defined for women, either by man or unfortunately, by women themselves. The framework of external behaviour for a woman is designed by the customs, either they may be foolish or wrong that makes no difference. These customs are closely associated with what a woman should wear, play with and do. There is a lot of sentimental and hypocritical mock modesty in the customs. When a woman tries to break it, either she is rebuked, punished or thrown outside the society. If some man tries to defend her he also
has to suffer a lot like Raju in *The Guide*. Raju says: “I was getting annoyed with my mother’s judgement and duplicity” (Guide 154 ch. 7). When Rosi comes to Raju’s home, his mother says, “Why can’t she go to her husband and fall at his feet? You know, living with a husband is no joke, as these modern girls imagine. No husband worth the name was ever conquered by powder and lipstick alone” (Guide 154 ch. 7). After explaining the right place of a woman i.e. at the feet of husband, and the real worth of husband, Raju’s mother says that the modern girls like Rosie think that it is easy to live with husband. She narrates how her husband unnecessarily created trouble more than once. She wants to tell that how she borne the trouble created by her husband, every wife must bear it. It creates a frame to live in and not to break it.

Simone de Beauvoir discusses marriage in the fifth chapter of her great work *The Second Sex*. She notes: “The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage” (Beauvoir 451 ch. 5). In her work Beauvoir explains how marriage made a woman a silent sufferer. She says, “Marriage is the reference by which the single woman is defined,...Modern marriage can be understood only in the light of the past it perpetuates” (Beauvoir 451 ch. 5). Marriage brings a condition of slavery to a girl who was single and free earlier. With marriage she enters into a new world where she cannot proceed beyond certain boundaries. These limits are created by the customs which has a long socio-religious history. It is true that a wife has liberty but within the limits whereas the husband has a license to live the life as he wants outside of all these limits. He is free to exercises his rights within and without the limits. The concept of marriage is different in each religion. It is a social activity which has got religious sanctity. In the course of time it is made a legal act governed by the local laws of the land. Law provides equality, but religion and society makes the discrimination.

The concept of marriage of Hindus is different from that of Christians and Muslims. As per Hindus it is a sacrament, a sacred bond between husband and wife. Once tied never breaks. But as per Christens and Muslims it is an agreement, and it can be made any number of times and can be broken at any number of times. The religious feeling behind the Hindu marriage makes it
very special and sentimental too, as compared to Christens and Muslims. A Hindu wife has liberty within limits; the husband has freedom within and outside his home. It becomes clear after studying the characters of Marco and Rosie, Ramani and Savitri and Kailas and his two unnamed wives.

While discussing Narayan’s novels only Hindu marriages are to be taken into consideration, for his novels deals with only middle class Hindu families. The issues of caste and status along with religion come in *The Bachelor of Arts* while discussing the marriage of Chandran. All these things are deeply inculcated on the minds of even young like Chandran. When Chandran falls in the love of Malathi, he thinks: “Suppose, though unmarried, she belonged to some other caste? A marriage would not be tolerated even between sub-castes of the same caste. If India was to attain salvation these watertight divisions must go—Community, Caste, Sects, Sub-sects, and still further divisions” (BA 56 ch. 7). This is the dream which one can imagine like Chandran. These thoughts of a young boy like Chandran show the deep impact of all the customs in the society.

Through Mohan’s co-operation Chandran learnt that his sweetheart’s name was Malathi, that she was unmarried, and that she was the daughter of Mr. D. W. Krishna Iyer, Head Clerk in the Executive Engineer’s office. The suffix to the name of the girl’s father was a comforting indication that he was of the same caste and sub-caste as Chandran.” (BA 67 ch. 8)

The above lines make certain things clear. To marry a girl certain conditions are essential. They are: first is that the girl must be unmarried, it means the society does not permit the second marriage of a girl. The second is that the status of the girl’s father should match the status of the boy’s father. The third is that the caste and the sub-caste of the girl must match the caste and the sub-caste of the boy then and then only there can be a marriage otherwise it will not be approved by the society. In an attempt of following all these watertight compartments, man becomes more conservative and less rational and free. The consent of the boy and the girl for the marriage are not taken in to consideration. As it is found in case of Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets*. He goes
to see a girl with a lot of restrictions and warnings from his father and elder brother. They decide Jagan’s marriage without taking his consent. “Jagan retired to his room asking himself, “Is no one interested in my opinion of the girl?”” (VS 156 ch.12). It is the marriage of Jagan, but his idea about the girl is not important and there is no question of taking the consent of the girl. In this way as a matter of custom the voices of both the girl and the boy who are going to marry are suppressed by the elderly members of the family. The same thing happens with Chandran, Malathi and Susila in The Bachelor of Arts.

Matching all these things is not enough. But it is enough to begin the process of marriage. “Chandran took it all as a favourable sign, as an answer to his prayers, which were going intender every day” (BA 67 ch. 8). He prays to the gods to give him courage and goes to his father to tell about his marriage. His father makes a formal inquiry about all this, but the real discussion starts when his mother comes there. She says to Chandran: “Do you think marriage is a child’s game?...if the stars and the other things about the girl are all right,...’ (BA 69 ch. 8). Really marriage is not a child’s game, but it is performed by the so-called wise adults between the two children. To them marriage is the matter of stars and destiny and not of the consent and ability of the girl and the boy who are going to marry. When Chandran’s mother asks about the age of the girl, he says it is sixteen and it gives a shock to her: ““Sixteen!” mother screamed. “They can’t be all right if they have kept the girl unmarried till sixteen. She must have attained puberty ages ago. They can’t be all right. We have a face to keep in this town. Do you think it is all child’s play?” (BA 69 ch. 8). The novel is published in 1937 during that period girls were married very early in their life; child marriages of the girls were arranged. But now because of social awareness the picture is different, especially in urban areas and among the educated class.

Marriage brings certain restrictions on a once free girl. Certain expectations are also made from a married woman. Jagan marries Ambika, and family members of Jagan expect certain things from her. She has to do all the housework, such as cooking, washing, cleaning and etc. On one day “The mother-in-law demanded, “Amba, did you add salt to the sauce?” Amba said,
“Yes, of course, Mother;” in a polite tone from inside the kitchen.” (VS 170 ch. 12). In cooking not a single mistake is admissible in the Indian joint families.

One day Jagan’s mother mutters: “All asks of a girl is that she at least bring some children into a house as a normal person should; no one is asking for gold and silver; one may get cheated with regard to a gold belt even. Why can’t a girl bear children as a million others in the world do?” (VS 164 ch.12) All this was heard by the daughter-in-law Ambika scrubbing another part of the floor; she went on with her work without replying.

The matter of Ambika’s not having a baby is discussed at home. It is a tradition in India to pray some god or to make a vow to some god to have a child. So Jagan’s father says: “The temple is known as Santana Krishna; a visit to it is the only known remedy for barrenness in women” (VS 167 ch.12). Without scientific inquiry in to the matter Narayan’s characters turn to gods for easy solution as they belong to middle-class Hindu families. One more thing is to be noted here that the blame of not having a child is always put on wife and not on husband. As they decide to go to the temple, to have a child; they start their journey by a bus. In the bus Jagan’s mother tells to a woman travelling in the bus that: “I shall be happy if my daughter-in-law has a child, the next following in the normal way....” (VS 169 ch.12). There are some grand children in the family then why one more is expected from Jagan’s wife? “But for the fact that he was a coward, Jagan would have asked his parents: “Haven’t you enough grandchildren? Why do you want more?” (VS 172 ch. 12) Being a subaltern and weak Jagan could not support his own wife. The novel provides answer to the question why one more child from Jagan’s wife is expected. “A new son in the house is a true treasure in this life and beyond life” (VS 172 ch. 12). The issue of Ambika’s not becoming mother becomes very serious. “I was dreading Jagan would be without issue,” said Jagan’s father. “But I was in no doubt at any time. Barrenness is unknown in our house”” (VS 172 ch. 12). It is a customary practice that a woman has been blamed for the barrenness, and man is set free for the second marriage.

Jagan repeatedly failed in the Intermediate. Now he fails in the B.A. class and still there is no sign of having child in the house, it makes a great
problem for his wife. The fault is of Jagan, but his wife is blamed. So one day she goes to the bedroom and says by shutting the door: “Why don’t you pick up your books and go away to a hostel? Your mother seems to think I am always lying on your lap, preventing you from touching your books... your mother remarked that, being uneducated myself, I want to drag you down to my own level” (VS 167 ch. 12).

Why does the suffering of Ambika and Savitri matter now? Much has changed since the publication of The Dark Room. It is true that much changed but not completely. Much happens inside the four walls of the bed room and a woman remains a silent sufferer, for Savitri the love of her children brings back to suffer and for other women reputation of their father, customs economic and other reasons have been making the woman sisters of Savitri, the silent sufferers.

Paula Banaerjee in the introduction to her edited work Women in Indian Borderlands notes that: “People move when their survival is threatened and rigid borders mean little to the desperate. They question the nation form that challenges their existence” (Paula 4). It is the fact that everybody loves life. A lot of people migrated from India to Pakistan and vice versa, for they loved life. The same is true about those who migrate from one place to another to survive. A strong desire to survive that kept man alive everywhere on the earth, despite of all the geological, natural and artificial adversities. The journey of man from Stone Age to present day is the great proof of this. Man is fit so he survived; it is true in the light of Darwinian’s Theory of Survival of the Fittest. Now the existence of man on the earth is in question, so man has been trying to move to some other planet in the milk way.

When the existence of a woman is in question, it is but natural for her to question it. Either it may be the nation, culture, customs, society or men or women themselves. People are made to think that a woman must behave like the traditional image of woman; as it is there in the mind of the people. If she tries to go little bit away by leaving the track which is created by the long tradition of India then it seems that she is tring to revolt. The cause for such thinking is the expectations of the society from a woman, long tradition,
history, religious impact on the mind of the society.

It is true that Marco gives a new life to Rosie by marrying her, but she is not happy with him. There is a deep valley of different interests, mind sets if not of caste between Rosie and Marco. He does not give an advertisement for a wife having her own interests, but for an educated woman who would look after him and blindly follow his interest, likings and everything. Rosie’s leaving of Marco is definitely objectionable from the social point of view, but what about her own feelings, interests. Does she have them? The answer seems to be ‘no’. By marrying to a woman without considering her caste or any other social details and by considering only the educational qualification Marco shows his modern point of view of looking towards marriage and wife, but this is not enough. It is all right up to marriage, but what about the life of a woman after marriage. Marco is busy all the time in his studies, caves; and he has no time to talk with Rosie. A man who buries himself in to his studies, own interests and own works; it is but natural for his wife to get trapped by a man like Raju. Who says to Rosie, “I will do anything for you. I will give my life to see you dance. Tell me what to do. I will do it for you” (Guide 121-122 ch. 7).

Of course, Raju flirts, but in doing so he praises a dancer within Rosie. It is an opportunity for a dancer that makes her trust Raju. So when she listens to Raju “She brightened up. Her eyes lit up with a new fervour at the mention of dance” (Guide 122 ch. 7). It will be a traditional way of thinking like that of Raju’s mother, whatever may be the behaviour of Marco, and it is the duty of Rosie to remain with him.

As a husband Marco remains a failure. He does give neither time nor any kind of emotional or any other kind of support; on the contrary, he thinks, “I have one principle in life. I don’t want to be bothered with small things. I don’t mind the expense” (Guide 74 ch. 5 ). On the third day of his arrival at Malgudi Marco says to Raju, “If a man has to have peace of mind it is best that he forgets the fair sex” (Guide 71 ch. 5). This statement by Marco to Raju shows that he is not happy with his wife Rosie. It gives a chance to Raju to have courage to take Rosie away from Marco.

For Marco study and own interests matters and not the other things. It is
the family duty of Marco to give some time to Rosie. But he lives in his own
world, by thinking that he has made a good turn on Rosie by marrying her. It
has been taught to the Indians both male and female from the very childhood
that, “A good wife ought to be interested in all her husband’s activities” (Guide
121 ch. 7). Rosie tells Raju that Marco is after all her husband. Rosie tries to
remain loyal to her husband Marco, but the situation sleeps from her hands and
she goes with Raju, who by chance gets ample chance to separate Rosie from
her husband Marco. Raju has a habit of piping into the life of others. Raju who
tells that he has less knowledge of women makes a remark of psychological
significance about Rosie. He says about Rosie that: “…this girl herself was a
dreamer if ever there was one. (Guide 113 ch. 7). Raju says that Rosie would
have greatly benefited by a husband who could care for her career; it is here
that a handy man like him proved invaluable.

A girl is trained for her future husband from her childhood. She is taught
that: “A good wife ought to be interested in all her husband’s activities” (Guide
121 ch 7). It means she should not do anything of her own interest. She has to
live only for her husband, and not for her own. Rosie is a post-graduate in
Economics. Her mother taught her with a hope of good life for her. Rosie says,
“A different life was planned for me by my mother. She put me to school early
in life; I studied well. I took my master’s degree in economics” (Guide 85 ch.
5). After college, the question was whether she should become a dancer or
something else. But the advertisement looking for a good-looking educated girl
by a rich bachelor Marco brought a turning point in her life. The line: “No caste
restrictions; good looks and university degree essential” (Guide 85 ch. 5) in the
advertisement is a ray of hope of good life. Because Rosie does not possess the
first and essential qualification of caste but she has both qualifications: good
look and a university degree. When she asks Raju: “Have I looks?” (Guide 85
ch. 5) To this Rosie’s question Raju replies instantly: “Oh, who could doubt
it?” (Guide 85 ch. 5) Here it is essential to recall what Chandran thought about
Malathi for the first time. The question of caste, sub-caste comes to his mind
first and then the rest of the things when he thinks about his marriage with
Malathi. The advertisement provides relaxation of caste; which is not a small
thing for Rosie.

Rosie says to Raju “I belong to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers; my mother, grandmother, and, before her, her mother. Even as a young girl I danced in our village temple...We are viewed as public women,...”(Guide 84 ch. 5). Rosie belongs to that family which is used by the public commonly to gratify their sexual desires under the disguise of temple dancers. The tradition has a long history that goes very long to grandmother and great grandmother of Rosie. The life of such temple dancers is very bad and no mother likes to give the same life in heritage to her daughter. Rosie says: “A different life was planned for me by my mother” (Guide 85 ch. 5). Conscious attempts are made by Rosie’s mother to get rid of her daughter Rosie from this ugly life of temple dancers or to be more specific public women, but her luck could not favour her. Finally unsettled miserable life comes to her. She is misused by both her husband Marco and lover Raju. What an average Indian woman expects from life, a settled family life. The same thing is expected by Rosie’s mother, and with the same intension she gave education to her daughter; but all her efforts made in vain by both the men Marco and Raju. Rosie’s speechless mother tries her level best to give voice to Rosie. The silence of a woman is not the result of her presence, but it is the result of the history. The roots of a woman’s silence are found deep down in the history. In this sense the act of reading Spivak’s works is like reading the silences of history. (Rosalind 14)

The state of a subaltern is manmade; it is a state of mind of the people about oneself and about others. One considers oneself as elite and the other as non-elite and vice-versa. This problem is more psychological and less social and religious, but religion and society makes the mental makeup of the elite and non--elite. As a result of it both of them live in the prisons of psyche, which are psychologically created, by the society and by themselves, in their minds. It will not be wrong to say that subalternity is a predicament and not an identity of some person. According to Spivak subalternity is the structured place from which the capacity to access power is basically hindered to a great extent. There are a number of books in the world that claim to speak or give
voice to the subaltern. For the Subaltern Studies, it is important to study whether the subaltern groups are fixed in their subalternity by the elite groups or not. Only dealing with the subaltern consciousness and action is not enough for it. (Rossalind in Intro.20-21)

The relationship of man and woman is the basis on which the whole structure of the society rests. They play the key-role in a familial set up, not only in India, but in the whole world. It is impossible to imagine a family without a man and a woman. In fact, the concept of family started with the coming together of a male and a female. The cohabitation of a male and a female gave birth to the concept of family. The roots of civilization are found in the family. Man has been taking the first lessons in life: of language, communication, importance of relation and emotions in the family. He began to retain and transfer all this knowledge from one generation to other. The cohabitation of a male and a female created certain rules; and there began customs of following those rules for the safety of the family. In this way the marriages began to be solemnized in different ways as per different religions, which further became the customs and traditions of the society.

According to Islam and Christen religions marriage is a contract but for the Hindus it is a sacred bond. As per sastras, it is one of the nineteen samskaras which brings a man and a woman together and builds a strong relationship, till the end of life. As there is a lot of difference between the Hindus and the Christen and the Muslims about the views of looking towards the marriage, one finds a great difference in their marriages and the relationship of husband and wife. Religion is at the base of marriage, and not the science, hence its guiding principles are found in the concerned religious books. The differences among these three major religions of the world are many, but they are similar on one point and their views about a woman are nearly the same. All of them considered woman as inferior, secondary, subordinate the Other. Though she is at the centre at the family, she is not the governing centre. She is the protector, creator and the forerunner of the human race even then she is a subordinate and a subaltern.
In this sense the question of subalternity starts from the family or every home in the world. If a woman is a subaltern then there is a subaltern in every family and the half of the world is subaltern! If it is so then the whole world is to be divided into two categories i.e. the elite, by virtue of birth all men and the subaltern, all the women, by the curse of the religion and customs. If they belong to two different classes, it is but natural there should conflict between them on a variety of reasons, which leads to disharmony in the marital life and thereby in the family. In all this generally and mostly the Other is the sufferer, for all the customs, religion, ideologies, are dominated by men; they go hand-in-hand to defend a male and to make a woman silent. It makes a woman weak, submissive and voiceless like that of Savitri in The Dark Room. It not only increases the expectations of tolerance from a woman, but also increases the courage of the tyrant husbands like that of Ramani. If a woman behaves like that of Rosie in The Guide then she is blamed and not a man like Marco, who being husband failed to give enough time, proper care, love and respect to Rosie which every woman deserves or not a man like Raju, who puts all his money, time and efforts in achieving Rosie.

There are frequent discussions on the matter of customs and traditions of marriage at the home of Chandran. His father is a retired District Judge; he has decided the matters of life and property of others in the court, but at his own home, he is helpless. His better-half, though housewife, takes all the decisions at home. The home is dominated by her or in other words she is dominating in the matter of marriage of Chandran. Here it is important to quote what Chandran says about it:

Ordinary talk at home was becoming rarer every day. It was always a debate on custom and reason. His father usually remained quiet during these debates. One of the major mysteries in life for Chandran at the period was the question as to which side his father favoured. He did not appear to place active obstacles in Chandran’s way, but he did little else. He appeared to distrust his own wisdom in these matters and to have handed the full rein to his wife. Chandran once or twice tried to
sound him and gain him to his side; but he was evasive and non-committal. (BA 70 ch. 8)

It is true that Chandran’s father is the patriarch of the family; he is an educated person, a retired District Judge, but in the homely matters; in the words of Chandran “he appeared to distrust his own wisdom.” The roles of Chandran’s mother and Malathi’s father Mr. D. W. Krishna Iyer are important in the issue of Chandran’s marriage with Malathi. They bring the matter of horoscope forward, and they are not ready for the marriage because the horoscopes of Chandran and Malathi do not match. In this matter the role of Chandran’s father is very little. It shows how Chandran’s mother is strong at home and his father is weak.

The impact of religion is very strong on Chandran’s mother. Non-tallying of the horoscopes of Malathi and Chandran do not fulfil Chandran’s dream to marry Malathi. The customs of matching and mismatching of the horoscopes of the girls decide their destiny. There is one more incident of flower thief in The Bachelor of Arts. One day Chandran catches the thief who usually plucks flowers from their garden. The thief is in ochre-coloured loin-cloth; it seems that he is a sanyasi. Initially Chandran’s mother says to Chandran: “take him away and give him to the police” (BA 43 ch. 4). But when Chandran says that the thief seems to be a sanyasi, it is important to note what she says and feels: “Ah, leave him alone, let him go. She was seized with fear now. The curse of a holy man might fall on the family. “You can go sir,” she said respectfully” (BA 43 ch. 4). Invisible things like planetary positions in the horoscope, curse and blessings dominate the mind sets of Indian traditional women like that of Chandran’s mother in The Bachelor of Arts, Jagan’s mother in The vendor of Sweets, Krishna’s mother in The English Teacher etc.

Keen observer of society, Narayan never forgets to mention the loving nature of Indian mother. It is for the sake of love of children Savitri takes a decision to live a speechless life. In The English Teacher there is an incident where the loving nature of mother can be seen. After giving birth to a child Susila returns to her husband’s house. On her coming to home Susila along with the child is welcomed by her mother-in-law. Krishna thought: “All my
dread of yesterday as to how she would prove as a mother-in-law was suddenly eased” (ET 34 ch.2). The relation between Rosie and Marco is sharp in contrast to that of Susila and Krishna. What is the place of Susila in Krishna’s home is important to note here: “On the first of every month, I came home, with ten ten-rupee notes bulging in an envelope, my monthly salary, and placed it in her hand. She was my cash keeper” (ET 37 ch. 2). The death of Susila makes Krishna very sad. After the death of his wife he performs both roles of father and mother of his daughter. Krishna’s own words make the point more clear. He says that: “I slipped into my double role with great expertness. It kept me very much alive to play both father and mother to her at the same time. My one aim in life now was to see that she did not feel the absence of her mother” (ET 97 ch. 4).

Politics and love are the two main themes of Waiting for the Mahatma. Bharati has devoted herself to freedom movement under the leadership of Gandhiji, and Sriram is in love of Bharati. He waits for her till she gets permission from Gandhiji for their marriage. She is always busy in either political or social work and finds little time for her lover Sriram. He has to wait for her, on one day when she meets him he says:

I feel happy when you are with me, and miserable when you go away. She looked at him, startled. He continued, ‘Won’t you sit down here?’ and he made a space for her. She sat down. He moved close to her, and laid his arm on her shoulder. She said, ‘Not yet,’ and gently pushed away his arm. ‘What a strange man!’ she cried. ‘You have not changed at all.’ (WM 242 pt. 5)

The above dialogue between Sriram and Bharati is romantic. It is true that both of them love each other, but there is smell of lust in the behavior of Sriram. Bharati is bold enough to meet Shriram anywhere in aloofness, but it doesn’t mean that he should take the undue advantage of her boldness. He thinks and attempts to do so, but responsible Bharati boldly stops him from doing so. He has no courage to restrain her from doing so. It shows that Bharati is strong enough to speak out. So he sat away from her and asks, ‘Am I still an untouchable?’ (WM 242 pt. 5) To this she replies that: ‘Bapuji alone can
This dialogue between them gives socio-political touch to their love story. It means the condition of the untouchables was very bad in India, and Gandhiji was working for the cause of the untouchables. It also means that Gandhiji will decide whether they will marry or not. Bharati is a true follower of Gandhiji, so she does not want to marry without his consent.

When Sriram goes to Delhi to meet Bharati; it gives him a great relief that Bapuji is not against their marriage. But it is not enough. “He wanted to shout at her and demand if it was only for this that she wanted him to come all that way, he wanted to tell her that he regretted ever having set eyes on her. He wanted to threaten her that he would seize her by force and carry her back to South India” (WM 243 pt. 5). It is all in Sriram’s mind. It shows two things, the first is his strong desire to possess her and the other is the suppressed voice of Sriram. The large image of Gandhiji and the bold nature of Bharati stops Sriram from doing any such type of act.

All women are not like Bharati, they are weak. Wars, riots or any other natural or unnatural such type of problems make their condition worse. Gandhi is such a great man that even the great men wandered about his personality. It is the truthfulness, non-violence and a lot of love for the entire human race makes him the great. The suffering of the others pains him much. Being a true follower of Gandhiji, Bharati knows him well. She says to Sriram that:

More than anything else the thing that pains Mahatmaji now is the suffering of women. So many of them have been ruined, so many of them have lost their honour, their home, their children, and the number of women who are missing cannot be counted. They have been abducted, carried away by ruffians, ravished or killed, or perhaps have even destroyed themselves. (WM 243 pt. 5)

From the above passage it becomes clear that in riot men fight and kill for some cause and leave behind their women to suffer. Women have to take triple care of their self, their honour and their children. In it some are missing, some are abducted and some are killed. Men fight, but women bear heavy losses which can never be recovered. Woman suffers, without any fault of her
own. She becomes the victim of the wrath of some men. Bharati says to Sriram that:

On the 15th August when the whole country was jubilant, and gathered here to take part in the Independence day festivities, do you know where Bapu said his place was where people were suffering and not where they were celebrating. He said that if a country cannot give security to women and children, it’s not worth living in. He said it would be worth dying if that would make his philosophy better understood. He walked through villages barefoot on his mission. (WM 243 pt. 5)

Gandhiji worked throughout his life for this mission and died by leaving this incomplete mission to be completed by those who understood him.

The personality of Bharati is so influencing that it is but natural for a young man like Shriram to wait for her consent. Waiting for the Mahatma is the only novel of R. K. Narayan in which the heroine is depicted more influencing and far better than the hero himself. Sriram says about Bharati that: “She spoke English, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, and god knew what else. She spoke with great ease to men, women, young boys, and old men of all nationalities. She had a smile or a word for everyone” (WM 247 pt. 5). Her command of various languages like English, Hindi, Tamil, Urdu and etc. becomes a strong tool for her to interaction with people of different languages. She has a pleasing personality that is why she is liked by everyone and even by the Mahatma also. She is the true follower of the principles of the Mahatma. She is one of those who have been trying to walk on the footsteps of the Mahatma. It is her devotion, good learning abilities, love for the nation, and reverence for the Mahatma that make her the more prominent figure in the novel. Being a true follower of Gandhiji, Bharati gets an opportunity to accompany Gandhiji everywhere; either it may be Malgudi or Bangal or Delhi.

Women in towns and villages are not expected to do the work outside the home even today also; women in urban areas are exception to it. But one can imagine the conditions for the women during the pre-independence period of India. Bharati, among all the female characters of Narayan, is the strongest
character. She has the qualities of a true leader. Sriram is impressed not only by her physical appearance but by her internal qualities, her courage, her leadership, her command of various languages etc.

Bharati is a very bold type of lady. She has been to jail many times. Mahatma is not ready initially to take her with him to all the places where he goes. But she insisted him to allow her to come with him. She says, “I don’t know how many villages I have seen. We follow the Master through burning villages. Of course, anything might have happened to us anywhere” (WM 244 pt. 5). Bold Bharati becomes more courageous in the company of the Mahatma. She says to Sriram that:

Mahatma had advised women as a last resort to take their lives with their own hands rather than surrender their honor. There was no sense of fear where Mahatma was. But… if any unexpected thing happened, I was always prepared to end my life. (WM 245 pt. 5)

When Sriram hesitates to tell Gandhiji about their marriage, Bharati whispers: ‘Be natural and truthful. And tell him about the marriage’ (WM 250 pt. 5). It means those who are natural and truthful are bold and courageous like Bharati.

Sriram wants to marry Bharati anyhow. He says that: “Sriram muttered, ‘Yes, this can be. No one can stop me and you from marrying now. This is how gods marry’ (WM132 pt.2). The statement by Sriram shows his eagerness to marry Bharati and it has mythological implications. Some examples of such type of forced marriages are found in Hindu myths where gods marry secretly and forcefully to some woman. It means sastras give permission for such type of _gnadhavv vivah_. In such type of marriages the will and the consent of the woman is not considered but only the strong desire of the person to have that woman is enough. In this way, woman is treated as an object which a man gets as per his will. It gives moral support to the wrong doer. There are a number of other such reasons which inculcate the same on the minds of Indians.

One day Bharati comes to meet Sriram in the evening on a hill. She comes there barefoot and goes away after some time. “Sriram watched her go downhill. ‘Some day, someone is going to abduct her; she doesn’t seem to feel
she is a woman,’ he thought and turned in” (WM 101 pt. 2). The way Bharati comes there and argues how she is correct in not wearing sandals. Thereafter she says that she is there to tell Sriram that he cannot see her for some days as she is going to Madras. She says, “I have been summoned for instructions. The police are watchful, no doubt, but I can manage to go and return without any trouble” (WM101pt. 2). The way Bharati comes; the way she talks; the way she goes all is strange for Sriram. Bharati is not only a woman of principles but also a bold modern woman who breaks all the traditional ideas of womanhood.

Bharati is strong and confident to not only to go and meet Sriram and come all alone from the hill, but able to manage police also. She says to Sriram, “I am not afraid of cobras or lonely road. Otherwise I should not be here” (WM100 pt. 2). Thereafter Sriram says her that she should not be afraid of him; and others must be afraid of her. The reply given by her is very interesting and important too. Bharati says to Sriram, “Yes, because I am your Guru” (WM100 pt. 2). When Gandhiji presented him a spinning wheel Bharati has taught him how to insert a cotton thread, how to turn the wheel, and how to spin. Sriram tries to spin cotton in a wrong way, Bharati remarks: “You will waste all the cotton in India and Egypt before you make yourself a yard of yarn” (WM 97 pt. 2). All this shows that Bharati is a bold, confident modern woman, who has her own voice.

Sriram’s grandmother is a good person. But her problem, according to Sriram is that she never treats him as a grown up man. She never gives him one hundred rupees, but only fifty rupees. So he imagines that: “I am an adult with my own money, going home just when I please. Granny can’t ask me what I have been doing…” (WM 19 pt.1). Sriram is a grown up man, but he is not treated so by his grandmother. It shows the authoritative and elderly position of grandmother and the subordinate position of Sriram in the house. Though the grandmother remains at home, she controls the financial matters, and even Sriram’s remaining outside the home is also controlled by her. It shows that grandmothers in Indian societies have certain rights and authority.

Peyman notes:
Subalternity is overcome when the subaltern speak back to the structure of subalternity not in terms imposed by the latter’s discourse but in terms that undermine, at times subvert, the hegemonic terms of the structure. Subalternity is ended, in other words, when locution becomes interlocution. (Peyman 109)

Marco and Rosie come to Malgudi and by chance they meet Raju, the tourist guide. The relation between Marco and Rosie is not healthy; and it provides an opportunity to Raju to enter in their marital life. Marco is dominant; he thinks that he has made a good turn on Rosie by marrying her. He is rich; and as a matter of sympathy he has married Rosie, a girl belonging to the family of temple dancers. The bond between Rosie and Marco is not of love but of sympathy. The relation between them is not of husband and wife, but of master and servant.

It is true that Raju tempts Rosie. It is also true that he makes her to leave her husband Marco. Raju becomes the cause of the breaking the relationship between them. Raju and Rosie live together, and such living is absolutely wrong from social point of view. Raju’s mother opposes it. Such relation is not considered as social; and it is considered as immoral. Raju’s mother, his uncle, Marco or other people in the society do not accept such living together of Raju and Rosie. But if the case is studied from Rosie’s individual point of view, then it will give a different understanding. Is Rosie treated as a human being by Marco? Is she considered as his equal by Marco? Whether Marco gives due respect to her and the artist in her? The answer to all these questions is ‘no’. If it is so; then what about Rosie’s human rights? What about the dream with which her mother brought her up? Rosie is not a thing that can be treated as per his will by Marco. She is a modern educated lady with certain dreams and expectations from life. Rosie’s leaving of Marco is the result of the treatment given by her husband Marco; and Raju’s skilfully taking her first physically and then emotionally and mentally away from her husband Marco.

The study of all the novels and the female characters in Narayn’s novels shows that he has given full justice to the female characters in his novels. There are small girls like Leela, teenagers like Malathi, young like Susils, middle
aged like Chandran’s mother, old like Swaminathan’s Granny and etc. The old and middle aged women are traditional. Young and educated ladies like Rosie, Bharati are modern, who try to break the traditional image of a woman. Some little are lucky to have a loving and caring father like Krishna, but not all. Some unmarried girls are trained for marriages like Malathi. Most of the women are voiceless like Savitri, but some are happy and some are unhappy. But certainly there are some women like Rosie, Shantabai and Bharati who raise their voice against the suppression.
Works Cited:


