Chapter Five

Despotism versus Democracy

One of the greatest contributions of the West to the world is democracy. The highest human values of equality, fraternity and liberty were introduced to nations and thereby to the people by the French Revolution. Tyranny that existed in the countries, societies and families gradually gave way to democratic ideas. Still, different forms of tyranny are found in different degrees in all societies including families, religious and political communities and nations. Sexism, racism, casteism, communalism, fundamentalism, regionalism etc. are all offshoots of tyranny. R. K. Narayan, through his novels fights against these tyrannies of his country men.

In the novel, *The Guide*, one of the central characters, Marco, the husband of Rosie, is an embodiment of tyranny. Raju, the protagonist of the novel, is a combination of tyranny and democracy. Rosie is the prey of tyranny but she upholds democratic values. Instances of such clash between tyranny and democracy are many in the novel.

Rosie belonged to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers. Even as a young girl she danced in her village temple. But a different life was planned for her by her mother. She was sent to school and college and she took Master’s degree in Economics. After the college life she was in a dilemma as she should be a dancer or do something else. Then she came across a matrimonial in the news paper: “Wanted an educated, good-looking girl to marry a rich scholar of academic interests. *No caste restrictions;* good looks and university degree essential” (G 85). She replied to the advertiser. Rosie continued her narration on it to Raju, “Well, we met, he examined and got married” (G 85). Before the marriage they had a discussion in her family whether
would be good to marry a person so much above her class and wealth. To quote from the text:

‘But all the women in my family were impressed, excited that a man like him was coming to marry one of our class, and it was decided that if it was necessary to give up our traditional art, it was worth the sacrifice. He had a big house, a motor-car, he was a man of high social standing; he had a house outside Madras, he was living in it all alone, no family at all; he lived with his book and papers.’ (85)

Rosie was telling these things to Raju when he asked her why she married an uncaring husband. Marco, her husband, was interested only in archeology. He should not have married if he could not fulfil the duties of a husband. Instead of loving her and caring her as a husband should, he was a dictator and never treated her in a democratic manner. After all, she was a postgraduate and he should have at least shared her views and opinions. To Raju’s question if she had a mother-in-law, Rosie replied, “I’d have preferred any kind of mother-in-law, if it had meant one real, live husband” (G 85). This remark shows how much she was neglected by Marco.

Rosie, having been left by her husband, comes to Raju’s house. When Raju asks her why she did not accompany her husband to Madras, she explains what had happened. Marco is completely pre-occupied with his studies. He never considers his wife as having individual opinions and tastes. He is so despotic that he is not willing to hear her talk about her tastes. She belongs to the temple dancers’ family and has good training in it. She loves this art and wants appreciation from others including her husband. After the marriage, since her husband Marco objected to her dancing in the temple, she had to
abandon it. But since Raju encouraged her art and appreciated it she wanted to get permission from her husband to continue practicing. She, though disinterested in Marco’s studies and readings in the terrifying cave, follows him like a dog and pretends to show interest in his findings and activities. Rosie expresses her desire to continue dancing but he considers dancing as street acrobatics and not an art ($G$ 147). Marco belittles it to a monkey’s action. It wounds her and she tells him that only he dislikes it, whereas people like Raju appreciates it. She then reveals how he danced before Raju at the hotel. This remark makes Marco suspicious of Rosie and then onwards he stops talking to her. Still she follows him for three weeks without a word talking or hearing from him. Finally he leaves her and goes to Madras taking only one Railway ticket for him. Thus left alone, she takes refuge in Raju’s house. Marco is an autocrat who gives no regard to his wife’s sentiments and individuality.

The relationships between Marco and Rosie, and Raju and Rosie offer a close analysis. Marco is a tyrant to his wife Rosie. He keeps her just like a servant. He never cares for her feelings or emotions. Rather he is against the likes and talents of hers. Instead of promoting Rosie’s dancing talents, Marco prohibits her to practice it even. He doesn’t even like to hear her talk about it. It is because of his disinterest in her art that Rosie falls into the snares of Raju. Raju at first pretends to like her dance and thus detaches her from her husband. Later on as Marco leaves Rosie, and she starts to live with Raju, he shows genuine interest in her performance as well as practice and does his best to make her popular among the public. Thus when she returns home after her show for the college union, she gives Raju a passionate hug and says, “Even if I have seven rebirths I won’t be able to repay my debt to you” ($G$ 184). Thus Raju proves to her an
ideal ‘husband,’ who behaves in a democratic manner, giving equal status to Rosie, and respecting her emotions, temperament and likes.

When Rosie became a celebrity a crowd of people came to their new house every day to have a look at her. Many musicians came there seeking a chance. To them all Raju behaved very roughly. He did not even give them a seat or allowed to meet Rosie. He sent them back to their dejection. Sometimes he eluded them going out when they appeared there. But he entertained higher grade of visitors including eminent politicians, textile mill owners, banker, municipal councilor, editor etc. “I had had no friends at all formerly; my friendship was now sought after by others” (G 189). They were allowed to meet Nalini (the new professional name of Rosie), practicing upstairs even without his permission. Like an autocrat Raju was dictating the proceedings of the house. Rosie was just dancing to his tunes. Rosie’s plight here is similar to the duchess in Browning’s poem “My Last Duchess.” But gradually Rosie started to take liberty. She found pleasure in the company of musicians, actors and dancers. Raju did not like her spending much time merrily with them. Sometimes he reminded her of the wastage of time. “I like her to happy, but only in my company” (G 190). “Gradually arguments began to crop up between us, and that, I said, put the final husband-wife touch on our relationship” (G 191). Her circle was widening. Artists of the first and second rank, music tutors, dilettantes, school girls who wanted her advice, and all kinds of people wanted to meet her. As far as possible he turned them back, but some managed to slip through and get upstairs. She kept them for hours enjoying their company. When Raju pulled her form such company she cried out, “Why should you come and pull me out of the company? Am I a baby?’ I expostulated with her that it was for her own good that I did so. I knew it
was only a partial truth. If I examined my heart I knew I had pulled her out because I did not like to see her enjoy other people’s company. I liked to keep her in a citadel’’’ (G 193).

Raju was arrested for forging Rosie’s signature in the document which was sent to her by the lawyers. He was in the lock-up for a couple of days. Rosie somehow mobilized ten thousand rupees and he was let out on bail. The greedy, materialist Raju had turned all their wealth to share certificates, on which the banks would not advance any money, and the rest he had spent in showy living (G 217). The master now became a slave and the slave, master. Rosie took command of the situation and became the mistress of the house. Raju was totally neglected and ignored. Rosie was not at all happy. She understood that he had defamed her and it will affect her profession. She even suggested that she would go back to Marco. But the vicious Raju retorted:

‘Do you think he will take you back?’ ‘Yes, if I stop dancing.’ I laughed in a sinister manner. ‘Why do you laugh?’ she asked. ‘If it were only the question of dancing, he might.’ Why did I talk like this? It hurt her very much. ‘Yes; you are in a position to say such a thing now. He may not admit me over the threshold, in which event it is far better to end one’s life on his door step.’ (G 220)

Rosie’s indifference and tyrannical attitude towards Raju is a reward for what he had done to her. He had kept her like a slave, exploiting her weakness.

Marco is depicted in the novel as an unemotional historian. All he could do in life was to copy ancient things and write about them, as Raju says. All public affairs of life
seemed impossible to him. His real name is unknown. Raju calls him Marco, reminded by the medieval traveler, Marco Polo. Krishna Sen writes:

His unpredictable nature is seen when he sends a copy of his book to Raju and Rosie, even though he as completely dissociated himself from both of them. The same quirkiness is seen in his legal letter to Rosie regarding division of the jewels—it is difficult to understand his motive in bringing up this matter after such a long separation. Also for such an unemotional man, his relentless pursuit of the forgery case against Raju, possibly to take revenge, is some what unexpected. One can not help suspecting that Narayan was less interested in developing Marco as a consistent and credible character than in exploiting his “strangeness” for the purposes of advancing the plot. (62-63)

The character of Marco reaches the readers as filtered through Raju’s perception. So one can not know whether he is inexplicable as Raju makes him out to be. The distancing of Marco from the reader may be to focus the reader’s attention more on Raju. Again it was not at all normal for a well-established high caste man to voluntarily marry a devadasi. “Yet precisely this situation is required for the purposes of the plot, and the justification for it can be laid at the door of Marco’s ‘strangeness’” (Sen, Krishna 63).

A traditional Indian wife is a mother first and wife later. Rosie seems to be aware of it. Her husband, Marco, is a strange kind of man. Apparently women disgust and irritate him when they start asserting themselves beyond a limit. He does not wish to be mothered excessively. He does not feel the urge to relate to his wife on any other plane except the functional. To quote Ram Dial, “His Eros principle seems to be very weak and
consequently, his anima repressed mercilessly. His ego derives its nourishment from a substitute source—his scholarly pursuit of archeology. Rosie is thus deprived not only of a father experience but also the experience of a man in proper sense” (142).

Rosie is described as a snake-woman by almost all characters of the novel. This recurring image of snake-woman lends a pattern and rhythm to the novel. Was Rosie really a snake-woman, a venomous tempter? The answer is of course an emphatic no. In the words of D. K. Chakravorty:

While the characters of the novel abuse her they only betray their blinkered vision married by petty self-consideration. . . . In the ultimate analysis then, it appears that the author’s recurrent use of a serpent imagery is deliberate. Rosie, the so-called snake-woman, makes us acutely aware of the agony and suffering of a modern Indian woman, who happens to possess an independent spirit and a desire to measure herself against all the odds of our male-dominated society. (117)

Narayan through the novel *The Guide* shows his serious concern for the vulnerability of, and vicissitudes in, the lives of Indian women. Through the poignant course of Rosie’s life Narayan chats the silent anger of Indian womanhood at the futility and meaninglessness of female-life. In the words of Akhileswar Thakur, “Narayan’s voice is not that of a belligerent feminist but a cool, mature and meditative thinker who sees the problem in the complexities of its configuration with a sensibility rooted deeply in the Indian ethos. His care and concern for the wounded womanhood is related to the purely traditional and scriptural wisdom of yore” (116). Both Marco, her husband, and Raju, her lover used her for their own selfish motives. Marco only wanted her as a
servant who follows him and cooks food for him. Raju wanted only her body and money. He also worked for her popularity, by which he can become popular and rich. He spent hours watching her rehearsal of Bharatanatyam, not because of love for the art but to enjoy the curves of her body. “The Guide” (1958) reveals the boredom, frustrations and fatigue punctuating the life of an Indian wife, not merely a docile housewife like Savitri of The Dark Room, but a woman of substance, endowed with beauty, education and sensibility” (Thakur 116).

The Guide is a network of constantly shifting power equation. The three major characters, Raju, Rosie and Marco, form relationships that are characterized by the domination of one over the other. The dominated characters use various ways to overcome their handicap. Ravi Nandan Sinha writes, “This struggle to be free from dominance also results in a search for individual identity. These relationships show an inequality which is based not only on class but also on gender” (30).

Marco does not allow Rosie to dance. He gives three reasons for disallowing her: dance is no art; Rosie has no training in dance; Rosie wishes to rival him. In the words of Harsharan Singh Ahluwalia, “The reasons are so incoherent and contradictory that it seems Marco does not want her dance because of the conservative Indian male’s reluctance to give his wife an opportunity for self expression and assertion of her identity which is what dance has always symbolized” (129-130).

Raju makes the best of the opportunity given to him by the neglectful Marco. He gives Rosie the common pleasures which Marco denies her. But basically both Marco and Raju are the same: they are both selfish. Both of them regard her as a thing, not a person. If Marco “took” Rosie as a wife, Raju’s attitude towards her is expressed in
phrases such as: ‘I had a *monopoly* of her,’ ‘She was my *property*,’ ‘I liked to keep her in a *citadel*.’ “Whereas Marco is absorbed in his scholarship, Raju in the later part of the novel is absorbed in drinking, gambling and wasting her money” (Ahluwalia 130).

Rosie wanted to live alone, left to herself. She needed freedom to be herself which was denied to her by her husband, and lover too. In the words of A. K. Mukherjee, “Male-dominated society failed to hold a meaning to her existence; it betrayed her. She at last, returned to her art. Art, at least, will not leave her in despair” (82).

Rosie is the only major character who shows democratic or benevolent values. She is considerate, loving and sympathetic to her husband Marco. She respects his individuality and freedom and even when he deserts her she is not antagonist to him but keeps love for him in her mind. Rosie is compassionate and subservient to Raju’s mother. Similarly she is democratic and loving to Raju, and even when she understands that Raju is exploiting her, she does not behave despotic to him.

Raju’s mother also bears democratic values. She loves Raju like a true mother. In fact she is living for him. When Rosie comes to her house as a refugee she does not send her away. She loves her as her own daughter. She is compelled to leave her and Raju when they start living as married couple without marriage.

Undemocratic and tyrannical tendencies are found occasionally in the conduct of Jagan, the protagonist of the novel *The Vendor of Sweets*. Mali’s nature is mainly tyrannical, denying the freedom and personality of Grace, and even that of his father, Jagan.
Though Jagan was a self-proclaimed Gandhian, many of his actions proved otherwise. He had given up sugar and rice. But he made sweets with sugar to be given to the public. He is apparently selfish and unconcerned about the health hazards.

In Jagan’s house he had to seek appointment to talk to his son. Time was fixed for his interview. He was an indulgent father. He had to obey the commands of his son. Jagan wanted to have an interview with his son about the story writing machine. So he told Grace, “I want to talk to Mali; is he free?”

“. . . He is busy, I think,” she added. “I will tell him.” She went up and came out a few minutes later with an air of importance. “He will see you in fifteen minutes.” For a moment Jagan felt as if he were a petitioner in his own house, and there flashed across his mind those far-off days when Mali used to stand at his door, cringing for some concession or for cash, and for a brief second he was aghast at the transformations that had come with time” (VS 75). Jagan waited for his son’s call and after some time a bell sounded from Mali’s room. Grace told Jagan that Mali is free and she led him to Mali’s room where he took the visitor’s chair. This incident shows how modernity and western education changed a son to dictate terms with his father. The strong and intimate relation between parents and children are severed due to the evil influence of the west.

Jagan had no freedom in his own house. He had to get appointment to meet his own son in his house. A vegetarian and a Gandhian he had to bear with his son Mali and his ‘wife’ Grace who was a non-vegetarian. They compelled him to grant a huge sum of money for their whimsical Book-writing machine. Jagan had real apprehension and doubt with regard to the book-manufacturing machine. Finally when he was told that Mali had not married Grace and was unwilling to marry her, Jagan had no option but to leave the
defiled house to them and seek a place elsewhere. At the age of sixty he decided that he should free himself of all household activities and to enter vanaprasta. To quote Barry Argyle, “Towards the end of the novel, when he has decided to leave his shop and his son and be with the sculptor on the overgrown plot of land, surrounded by broken images of gods, Jagan says that he is ‘a free man’ . . . He has entered a new janma, a new period of his existence as a result of being imaginatively aroused . . .” (39-40).

As Grace was reluctant to Jagan he wanted to approach her to ask her about their project. One afternoon as Mali was away from the house, Jagan came to his house to have a private talk with Grace. After a period of silence Grace told him,

“Father, Mo wants me to go back.”

“Why?” Jagan asked, halting.

She hesitated. . . . She said very calmly, “It’s all over, that’s all.”

“What’s over?” She didn’t answer. He asked, “Is it his idea or yours?”

She repeated, “He wants me to go back. He says he can’t afford to keep me here nay more.” . . . She went on. “I used to work. I had two thousand dollars when I cam here. All that’s gone.”

“How?” She merely said, “Mo has no more use for me.”

“Use or no use, my wife—well, you know, I looked after her all her life.” Grace said rather shyly, “The only good part of it is there is no child.”

. . . He said, “If you read our puranas, you will find that the wife’s place is beside her husband whatever may happen.”

“But we are not married, Grace said simply. “He promised he’d marry me in the Indian way, because I liked it, and brought me here.”
“And the marriage didn’t take place, after coming here?”

“Wouldn’t you have known it if it had?” she said. (VS 134-135)

Mali has been corrupted to the core by modernity and its offshoot, materialism. He broke away his Indian tradition as he landed in America and brought a lady with his as he returned. He gave her false hopes that he would marry her after coming to India. He wanted to make money with her. He had planned to extract money from his father for his story-manufacturing business using her as the mediator. When it failed he had no reluctance to send her back. Mali’s cruelty towards Grace is evident here. He had no prick of conscience to lead an immoral life with her in his Gandhian father’s venerable house. After sufficient immoral life with Grace he does not feel any guilt in asking her to go back to her country. Earlier Mali had told his father that women were as free as men. His wife could go out anywhere any time. He talked like a feminist and found fault with the Indian husbands’ sense of superiority over their wives. But his words contradict his actions. He is no better than a male chaunist Indian husband. He cheated Grace like a tyrant and threw her out after use.

Jagan was disgusted with his son’s immoral stay with Grace in his house. He had less contact with them. He could not concentrate in his business. On the way home he sat before the statue and began to ruminate over his marriage and life with his wife. He was studying in college when he got married. He had been married to Ambika for almost ten years then. He had repeatedly failed in the Intermediate and was failing in BA also, and still there was no sign of a child in the house. Jagan’s mother began to grumble that there were no children at home; it was one more stick to beat the daughter-in-law with. When she was tired with housework . . . she went about muttering, “All one 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 . . . Why can’t a girl bear children as a million others in the world do?” (VS 164). These words are characteristic taunts which Indian wives face when they beget no children. Even if the cause for infertility was with the husband, the wife was blamed. The cynical attitude of in-laws to the helpless wife is the aftermath of the patriarchal system that exists in the society.

Jagan’s troubles started when both Mali and Grace together put pressure on him; the former rather rudely and the latter subtly. They tried to coerce him to be the major shareholder in their business project—manufacturing story-writing machine. Jagan decided not to involve himself in this foolish venture and thereby send a huge sum to America. “It hurts him even more when he is forced to suspect that “Grace’s interests, friendliness and attentiveness might be “a calculated effort to win his dollars.” He tries to resist their moves by “ignoring the whole business.” This is his version of “non-violent non-co-operation”’” (Jayantha, “Gandhi” 67).

Jagan gave more leisure time to the kitchen staff in his sweet-shop but he imposed the Gita on them thereby inviting their discomfiture. The reduction of the price of sweets and the granting of more leisure hours were the after effects of Jagan’s inner conflict. In fact it was Jagan who needed the teaching of the Gita rather than the workers who toiled and wailed. When he read the passage from the Gita where Lord Krishna exhorted Arjuna to fight for a cause even if he had to kill his brothers, cousins or even sons, Jagan saw himself as another Arjuna engaged in a fight, though it was against his own son (Jayantha, “Gandhi” 67).
The father-son relationship seen in this novel is different from the usual relationship found in the Indian society. In Narayan’s other novels also fathers and sons, however deeply attached to each other, are seldom embarrassed than in each other’s presence. Conversation between them is monosyllabic; the father gives an order and the son obeys. Plans and ideas are communicated through the mother. Jagan’s relationship with his father was on these lines (Sundaram, “The Vendor of Sweets” 93). The relation between Jagan and Mali is complicated. Mali believes that there is nothing he can learn from his father. Since his father has immense wealth he should be given the due share with out any questioning. He wants his father to obey him. A father in America may kick his son out if the son behaves like Mali. But “the relation between an indulgent Hindu father and his spoilt son—his only child, motherless—is not something that will admit of such a solution. There are fathers who pushed to the wall, will make no farther concessions: one such obviously inspired the story. But there are an equal number, if not more, who will either go on yielding or simply run away as Jagan does” (Sundaram, “The Vendor of Sweets” 93).

As Waiting for the Mahatma is a Gandhi novel and the background is India’s freedom struggle, Gandhi exhorted the people to fight against tyranny and bring democracy into the country. Instances of clash between tyranny and democracy are found throughout the novel.

Sriram wanted to become Mahatma’s disciple and follow him wherever he went. The main reason for it was his attraction to Bharati. Since Gandhi had learned from Sriram that his Granny did not like him to be the follower of Gandhi, he insisted that Sriram should get permission from her. To quote from the text, “Sriram was told that he
could accompany Mahatmaji in his tour of the village on condition that he went home, and secured Granny’s approval. Sriram tried to slur the matter over, he said it would not be necessary, he hinted he was an independent man used to such outings from home” (WM 78). Sriram’s tyrannical attitude is corrected here by Gandhi.

Sriram bade goodbye to his Granny for ever and became a permanent follower of Gandhi. Along with Bharati and Gorpad he visited villages as part of Gandhi’s mission. Sriram and Bharati enjoyed their mission as they could be together. Seeing the famine-stricken villages Gorpad was oppressed with a sense of tragedy. “He said: ‘See what the British have done to our country: this famine is their maneuvering to keep us in enslavement. They are plundering the forests and fields to keep their war machinery going, and the actual sufferer is this child,’ pointing at any village child who might chance to come that way, showing its ribs, naked and pot-bellied” (WM 89). The manner in which England tyrannized over India is spoken out through Gorpad’s words.

Sriram was entrusted to paint “Quit India” on the walls of the villages. He was about to paint it one the wall of a house. The novel reads:

He wished that he didn’t have to write the letter ‘Q’, which consumed a lot of black paint. . . . They were launching on a war with a first-rate, war-equipped nation like England, all their armament being this brush and black paint and blank walls. They could not afford to squander their own resources in writing just a single letter. It also seemed to him possible that Britain had imported the letter ‘Q’ into India so that there might be national drain on black paint. (WM 103)
Though humourously presented, Sriram exhibits his attitude to tyranny and how he hates it.

While Sriram was painting “Quit India” on a wall, a school teacher came there and expressed his disapproval of the British government quitting India. He doubted if India was capable of ruling herself. Sriram then warned him, “Be careful, you will be beheaded when Britain leaves India. We have a list of everybody who has to be beheaded” (WM 105). Sriram’s words declare his resentment to tyranny and foreign rule.

As the shop owner who sold English biscuits was unwilling to destroy the foreign biscuits, Sriram started Satyagraha in front of the shop by lying on the ground and thus preventing any sale in the shop. To the woman who came to the shop to buy salt, Sriram said lying on his belly, “It’s for people like you that Mahatma Gandhi has been fighting. Do you know that he will not rest till the salt tax is repealed?’

‘Why, Sir?’ she asked innocently.

‘For every pinch of salt you consume, you have to pay a tax to the English government. That’s why you have to pay so much for salt’” (WM 120).

Sriram was imprisoned at the Central Jail as part of freedom struggle. He occupied a cell with a few others and slept on the cement floor. Use of the public toilet sickened him most. Once the IG came to inspect the prison. The prisoners in file had been asked to stand stock-still and not to utter a word or move a muscle when the man passed. Narayan writes:

But when Sriram saw the great god approach his part of the file, he could not resist the impulse to step forward and begin: ‘I have a complaint and request to make, sir.’ At once several people seized him and pulled him
out of the way; and the great man passed on, pretending not to have
noticed anything. After he was gone, Sriram was summoned to the superintendent’s office. The guards held his biceps and kept him standing at attention before the superintendent’s table. The superintendent looked up and said: ‘You have violated jail discipline and you are liable to receive punishment.’

‘What punishment?’ Sriram asked.
The man, who had trailed like a meek puppy behind the visitor an hour ago, stamped his foot under the table and shouted, ‘I will not have you to talk to me in that manner, understand?’ (WM 189-190)

The tyrannical behaviour of the British rulers is portrayed here.

Sriram was called to the superintendent for having behaved impudently to the IG. He asked him what he wanted to request the IG. Sriram replied that he wanted to ask about the privy arrangements. The superintendent told him that he would not be given any better arrangements. He continued, ‘“If it had been any other time you would have been shot without a word, remember.’

‘But there has been no trial. How long am I to be here?’

‘There is no need for a trial in cases such as your. The whole world knows why you are here’” (WM 191).

The conversation shows how tyranny prevailed in prisons.

Gandhi came to Malgudi to address the people during the freedom struggle. He asked them to develop a sense of unity. He clapped his hands and requested the people to clap rhythmically. He asked to clap louder like the drum beats of the violent soldiers
marching on to cut the chains that bind Mother India. Gandhi told them that he would speak only Hindi as a matter of principle and not in English which is the language of their rulers. English has enslaved the Indians. Gandhi wished that he could speak to the people of Malgudi in their sweet language, Tamil.

Gandhi asked the people to discipline themselves. His speech was eloquent. He told them that he saw before him a vast army. Every one of them has certain good points and certain defects, and they must all strive to discipline themselves before they can hope to attain freedom for their country. They, the citizens of the country are all soldiers, a non-violent army, but even such an army has to practise a few things daily in order to keep itself in proper condition.

In Waiting for the Mahatma one does not find any ideological commitment. Narayan remains detached from the raging social and political issues and dilemmas of his time and seems committed to his artistic vision alone. In the words of Satish C. Aikant:

R. K. Narayan as young man was forbidden by his family from having anything to do with the agitators for freedom. In fact, the more benign aspects of the ‘British presence in India, notably its educational institutions, had brought their own kind of freedom and career opportunities for the middle classes, which Narayan’s father, a school headmaster, thought could be made use of, if adopted to traditional ways (92).

Thus Gandhi’s revolutionary ideas of democracy did not make the desired impact in the main character Sriram or on the people depicted in the novel. Despite the all-pervading presence of Gandhi in the novel, the focus of attention, ironically, is on Sriram’s life and
his quest for Bharati. Sriram too, gradually comes under the spell of the Mahatma and begins to identify with his cause without really knowing its implications. Gandhi’s ideas do not come to him directly and as a matter of conviction; they are transmitted to him through Bharati. “The nationalist movement itself is seen in terms of small, localized events, rather than in terms of abstract ideas, and the narrative is filtered through the limited view point of Sriram, who can not see beyond his immediate concerns” (Aikant 93). The democratic ideas are hard to enter the minds of the people who have been enslaved by several generations of tyranny by the native kings as well as foreign rule.

The colonial ambivalence is visible in the contrast of characters in the novel. Characters like Bharati are prepared to lay down their lives in the non-violent pursuance of the Mahatma’s mission. On the other hand there are those like Jagdish who pervert Gandhi’s non-violent methods for their own subversive activities. “At several places Gandhi’s meetings are followed by the loyalist gatherings. The audiences are common. Thus people’s claims and convictions overlap, creating a general atmosphere of ambivalence. Of course Narayan deals with the whole situation with his characteristic irony and humour” (Aikant 95-96).

The humane aspect of Gandhi stands out in the passages where he is depicted. “Gandhi is seen endearing himself to people and commanding universal reverence not merely as a votary of truth and non-violence, but by his child-like qualities, his spontaneous humanity and compassion” (Jayantha, “Portrayal of Gandhi” 61). The novel implies that for the average man and woman the Mahatmahood of Gandhi is pre-eminently due to these humane qualities in him.
Waiting for the Mahatma should not be treated as a mere love story of Sriram and Bharati against the background of freedom struggle. In the words of O. P. Bhatnagar:

It is in fact a serious novel defining love as a composite of non-violence and freedom both in its individual and collective implications. Although the gimmicks of Sriram underplay the serious significance of the Gandhian movement, they only confirm the need for a greater reorientation of the Indian consciousness both towards individual and national upliftment in the struggle for freedom in a non-violent way. (61)

There are five characters in the novel who are “representatives of different types of politicians—Bharati, the true Gandhian disciple, Sriram, the man of mixed motives in need of a leader always, Jagdish, a believer in non-violence and sabotage, Natesh, the typical politician too common in our country, and Granny, the affectionate old woman in love with conventions” (Patil 85). Though they are emblematic, Narayan makes them appear like live human beings. Gandhi is the true hero of the novel as it is implied in Narayan’s own statement, “... I wrote it (the novel) because he was a great personality” (qtd. in Patil 85). Gandhi is present either in person, as in the first and last part of the novel, or through his close disciple Bharati or though the oblique actions of Sriram. Gandhi’s complete indifference to material comforts, his positive dislike of luxury, puritanical habits, punctuality in all his activities and innate honesty endear him to all he comes in contact with (Patil 85).

Daisy, the heroine of the novel *The Painter of Signs* is more a man than a woman. Her dealings with others very often appear to be despotic and commanding. Raman is ruled by her and he acts according to her commands.
Daisy was narrating her past to Raman. She did not like the joint family life in her house. She wanted to escape from there. When she was of marriageable age, her father and her uncle started discussing it. Studies of horoscopes and talks of wedding celebration went on in the house. She says:

People now looked at me with a meaning; I did not like it. My mother called me one day into a side room and told me to be prepared to be inspected by a prospective bridegroom. They had a shock at home when I told my people that I’d rather do the inspection of the groom. They felt outraged and my father’s younger brother, my father being too angry to speak to me, took me aside and said, ‘Don’t be mad! Don’t you know that it’s not done?’ I relied, ‘It’s better that someone starts doing it now.’ (PS 130)

Daisy’s reaction to her mother and uncle is impudent and disobedient, never expected of a teen age girl. Though she was educated she could not but behave such a way as to avoid her marriage. Her education at school made her democratic and she could not surrender her desire and principles even to her parents.

Daisy was unwilling to allow the prospective bridegroom to inspect her. She wanted to inspect the groom instead. Her uncle scolded her for being so impertinent and told her that it was not done. But she replied that it was better that she started that practice. Her uncle continued, “‘What’s the matter with you, my dear? Why do you want to spoil your chance of settling down in life?’ I had to explain that that was not my aim in life. I had other aims. I said that I would like to work, rather than be a wife” (PS 130).
Daisy, decorated with jewellery, was persuaded to stand before the prospective bridegroom. She was upset and felt that she was losing her identity. Though she was the central figure in that meeting with the groom and his parents, it did not prevent her from feeling amused. She viewed it as a sort of entertainment and behaved irresponsibly. She says, “When the moment came for me to pace before the visitors coyly and reverently—I just strode up like a soldier, the jewellery jingling and the horrible lace sari rustling... My mother said, ‘Make your obeisance, prostrate yourself on the ground.’ I shook my head. I have always hated the notion of one human being prostrating at the feet of another” (PS 132). The education she received in the Missionary school has taught her the democratic values and to consider all people as equals. Hence she could not prostrate before any one through they were elders. To Daisy, her parents and uncle seemed despots since it was they who decided her future without seeking her opinion or choice.

The prospective bridegroom asked Daisy as part of his meeting her at her house:

‘What class are you studying in?’ a routine question that all would-be brides have to answer modestly. But I turned it round to ask what class are you studying in?’ and that completely bowled them over, since the bright young fellow did not seem to have got beyond the kindergarten, his only merit and qualification being wealth. They got over this shock and asked,

‘Can you sing?’

‘Can you?’ I asked. (PS 159)

Daisy, a born feminist, has challenged here the male superiority in marriage. It is a pity that the bride has no choice in selecting her bridegroom, asking him any questions when
he comes to see her. Thus Daisy rebuffed the despotic male superiority in the ceremonies connected with marriage.

When Raman proposed to Daisy for their marriage she made certain conditions. She said that she would not be called Mrs. So-And-So:

Daisy had laid down two conditions before accepting his proposal. One, that they should have no children, and two, if by mischance one was born she would give the child away and keep herself free to pursue her social work. . . . “If you want to marry me, you must leave to my own plans even when I am wife. On any day you question why or how, I will leave you. It will be an unhappy thing for me, but I will leave you . . .” (PS 158-159)

Daisy seems to be despotic here, dictating terms to Raman. Instead of requesting him to treat her as equal to him, that is democratic, she orders him to be like her servant. Her conditions are improper and unbecoming any bride. One can find some justification in her attitude because she dislikes marriage and bearing children. She wants to be independent and continue her mission of population control programme. But Raman compels her for marriage and she finally yields making such conditions. She likes his company and a life with him under a roof but not the trouble of rearing children. She is a modern Western woman who only wishes to cohabit without bearing children.

Ramani of The Dark Room, Marco of The Guide and Daisy of The Painter of Signs are three central characters of Narayan who try to dominate. Tejinder Kaur opines:

By harmoniously and ironically presenting the extremes of over-dominance and assertiveness on the part of both male and female partners like Ramani, Marco, and Daisy, Narayan suggests that lack of
understanding care and respect for each other’s emotions and interests
leads to disharmony and conflict in man-woman relationship, thus
harming the smoothness of family life. The extremes of assertiveness of
all kinds on the part of a man and woman need balancing and a man’s
double standard policy for his wife and mistress as Ramani has, should be
altered. (19)

Daisy’s kind of attitude leaves before us the issue of woman’s liberation open.
S. P Bhardwaj makes a very interesting observation in this regard by saying that “In
Daisy Narayan has viewed perhaps the model of women who would be prospering after
the women’s lib movement and such other hue and cry raised for the betterment of
womankind all over the world. If that is so, every Raman must be cautious to call a lady
his wife” (qtd. in Kaur 19).

Through Savitri of The Dark Room and Daisy of The Painter of Signs Narayan
deals with the problem of women’s condition in India. Both Savitri and Daisy are in open
revolt against the society. Savitri , Shanta Bai (heroines of The Dark Room) and Daisy
behave like deliberate social misfits. “To make it clear that they challenge the grounding
of traditional Indian society where arranged marriages are supposedly “made in heaven”,
Narayan portrays supporting female characters who gently shake the yoke of marital
obedience. They revolt in a way which satisfies their egos and which is acceptable to men
as it does not fundamentally challenge their traditional authority” (Pousse 1-2). There is
little doubt that the Indian woman’s status will change when, and only when, the male
approach to male-female relationship changes. In the words of Michel Pousse:
From *The Dark Room* to *The Painter of Signs* males have changed, or say, some have and some haven’t. Savitri fights against male dictatorship within the family, Shanta Bai fights against social fetters, Daisy is a blend of both . . . It is typical of Narayan’s sense of irony that while the scriptures impose the constant authority of a male over a woman (father, husband, brother if widow) in order to protect her from her own impulses, he makes it clear that men are relentless hunters, out to seduce. (2-3)

Daisy’s sexual feelings, once aroused, do not stand on convention. Hence she comes for Raman. Apparently she cannot forget him. But she is never so deeply in love with him as to place him first and herself only second. “Her training by the missionaries has taught her that social service is more important than personal satisfaction. She is weighed down by a cause” (Sundaram, P. S. “The Painter of Signs” 101)

Beside Daisy, Raman fades into insignificance. He appears unheroic, weak-minded and often a comic figure. “It is amusing to see him think of himself as a ‘considerate husband’ charmed and frightened by Daisy’s imperious manner while she sits in authority like Queen Victoria or Rani Jansi (p.65). Enthralled and yet confused, Raman is bewildered, unable to decide what to accept and what to reject. His male superiority is exercised only at the level of imagination . . .” (Bande 108).

In *The Painter of Signs*, Daisy is the quester, the conqueror. She goes on a tour and Raman tags along; in the end, she leaves Malgudi and he is left behind to await her return. “Interestingly she is in the driver’s seat; Raman is willing to let her drive because ‘two drivers cannot be at the steering wheel of a motor car’ . . . He was quite prepared to
surrender himself completely to her way of thinking, and do nothing that might leave him in the plight of Santhanu” (Bande 109-110).

By the portrayal of Daisy, Narayan does not glorify whatever she thinks or does. As Som Prakash says, “Narayan clearly disapproves of Daisy’s adverse attitude towards children, her disregard for the traditional values attached to sex and marriage, and her negative influence which reinforces Raman’s superficial self while threatening the very foundation of his deeper, traditional self. Daisy fails because she rejects familial duty and traditional wisdom” (192).