CHAPTER - IV

WOMAN

Woman in Indian thought has been accorded a very complex place in society ranging from the mystical source of life to a mere possession to be kept safely in custody. Often this astounding variation is the result of the big gulf between theory and practice. There have also been sociological, cultural and historical factors which accounted for the changed actual position whereas the theoretical position was retained as such. Social scene never being static, even the present position is marked by significant changes, which a truthful and perceptive observer of the social scene, is hardly likely to miss. R.K.Narayan's novels authentically portray the orthodox position of women where they are expected to be seen, not heard. He also endows them with the characteristic attributes which in popular perception, they are supposed to possess. But what is most noteworthy and where Narayan reveals himself to be in possession of penetrating social consciousness is the depiction of women in a transitional phase, where they revolt in their own ways against the passive role accorded to them but where they stop short of carrying out a clear-cut, well-defined alternative role-model for themselves. The present chapter seeks to examine these trends
and advances in characters like the granny, *(Swami & Friends)*, Raju's mother and Rosie's mother *(The Guide)*, Malathi, Susila and Chandran's mother *(The Bachelor of Arts)*, Savitri and Shanta Bai *(The Dark Room)* and Rosie *(The Guide)*.

The traditional position of woman in the Indian family system is not at par with that of man. The women are supposed only to look after the children and impart moral teachings to their sons. Hans Nagpaul says:

> The traditional position of women in Indian family system has been portrayed as that of “obedience, sacrifice, and service.” It is true that the social separation of men and women exists in all walks of life... The wife has a great deal to say about the upbringing of the children, their work and play, and their future employment.¹

Thus in the Indian Traditional Family System the women played an important role for the upbringing of her children. She was very much concerned with the education and other activities of her children. She always worked under the instructions of her husband as per the social status assigned to her. In the Indian traditional set up, the position of women has been portrayed as that of obedience, sacrifice and service. She was required to pay full attention for the well-being of the male members in the family. The female were considered as having less importance in the traditional family system and only the male members had a say in the family. Many
sociologists have pointed out that the status of female was not considered equal to that of males. We notice that in the Traditional Indian Family, whenever a male child took birth, it was considered as a living evidence of the successful continuation of the family;

...The child is considered as living evidence of the successful continuation of the family; religious traditions favour the presence of at least one male child in the family, but girls are loved nonetheless.²

For the continuation of the traditional family system, a male child was required in the family and according to the religious beliefs and traditions, there must be a male child so that there is furtherance in the family. On the other hand, whenever if a female baby takes birth, this was not liked by the members of the family and hence they did not pay any attention towards her and even the female baby was not loved by the family members. Here we notice that in the traditional family system in India, the females were not given the status equal to that of males and only a male was considered better, keeping in view the different aspects in the social set up. The female could not provide further continuation to the traditional family system and they were only required to look after the needs of the male members in the family. The women were required to look after the household activities and they were not even supposed to tender their advice
in the household matters. The elder women in the household were required to look after the children and impart moral teaching to the children.

The status of women was not good even in the Vedic Period too. Though she was treated only as mistress of the household matters, yet she was not granted the status equal to her husband. Many historians have substantiated this viewpoint about the status of a woman in the Vedic period. On this R.C. Majumdar says:

The wife, though subject to her husband, was the mistress of the household, and had authorities over farm labourers and slaves... They were fully attentive to their household duties, and we have a refreshing picture in the Rigveda as to how they rose at early hours, set the household servants at work, and made themselves active, 'singing songs while working.'

In the early Aryan society, the women too did not enjoy equal status to men. In all her actions, she was required to take permission from her husband. Although we notice that she was the mistress of the household and also had authorities over the farm labourers and slaves. She was required to pay entire attention towards her domestic duties. In Rigveda, we find a mention that she was required to rise early and was required to attend to her domestic duties. But on the other hand, we also notice that the girls enjoyed considerable freedom in choosing their life partners. Thus in the Vedic period, we find that the status of the women was not equal to that of...
men in any sense. She was subject to her husband. She was dependent on her husband in all matters. Without the permission of her husband, she could not do anything. In the early Vedic period too, the status of women in the society was not better than the Vedic period. We also notice that the status of women became worse in this period. On this R.C. Majumdar says;

The general position of women changed for the worse. They lost the right to the Upanayana Ceremony, and all their sacraments, excluding marriage, were performed without the recitation of Vedic mantras...there are unerring signs that her status and dignity were lowered a great deal during this period... She was not allowed to attend the political assemblies. A submissive wife who would keep her mouth shut and dine after her husband is now held up as the ideal. The birth of a daughter was most unwelcome; for she was regarded as source of misery and a son alone was the saviour of the family.4

The status of women in the later Vedic period even worsened. Certain rights, which were enjoyed by the women earlier, were withdrawn. The woman was not allowed to attend political assemblies too. As per the views expressed by various historians, the status of women was not dignified. According to R.C. Majumdar, a wife who is submissive to her husband and who does not go against his wishes and dines after her husband was treated as an ideal wife in the later Vedic period in the traditional Indian society. Even the birth of a daughter was considered as unwelcome
in the family as she was regarded as a source of misery. On the other hand, a son was highly liked by the people in the traditional family system and as earlier discussed, he was considered as a source of continuance of the family in the Indian society.

There was a great difference between a son and daughter in the Vedic period and the later Vedic period in the Indian society. The woman was restricted up to the four walls of the house and she was supposed to take care of the males especially the children in the houses. The women were forbidden even to study Vedic literature as contained in the Manu Samhita. Thus the status of women was having a degraded status in the Vedic period of the Indian social set up.

While going through the novels of R.K.Narayan, we notice that he reflects most truthfully the general social thinking on this aspect of Indian society. Narayan through his consciousness of the social customs, traditions and religious beliefs has projected the status of a woman in the traditional Indian society in his different novels. Through the various characters presented by R.K.Narayan, we easily get a thorough knowledge about the status of woman in the Indian social set up. Through these characters, the novelist has shown that a woman was only supposed to look
after the welfare of the males in the family. She had no say what-so-ever in managing the house. The males dominated even in the early years of the Twentieth Century. The woman was supposed to remain within the boundary of the house. The elder woman was responsible for the moral teaching of the children at home and she used to tell stories of the kings and their honesty and their bravery before going to bed. The elder male dominated in the household matters and he was not inclined to accept the suggestions tendered by the female. He was the sole owner of the property and finances in the house. On the other hand, the wife was supposed to bear the children and her sole function in the house was to deal with the household matters and upbringing of the children. She was always required to look after the well being of the males in the family. A traditional wife who looked after the needs of the males properly and who had deep faith in the conventions and religious beliefs was considered an ideal wife. She was even expected to take food after her husband. Any woman who violated these traditional conventions was not considered a good wife and she was even deserted whenever she committed any violation of the set traditions. Thus in this chapter, we shall discuss the status of a woman in the traditional Indian society vis-a-vis her duties towards the family and the
status provided to woman in the Indian social set up during the early years of the Twentieth Century.

In *Swami and Friends* R.K.Narayan has dealt with the relationships of its central character with his friends, parents and his granny. Many scholars have laid down that during the early years of Twentieth Century, there was a traditional family system according to which Hindu families everywhere had a basic structure. It usually consisted of parents, their married sons with their wives and children, all unmarried children and sometimes other dependents such as grand parents, uncles, cousins, nephews and widowed daughters. In this traditional family system the head of the family was generally the eldest male, who was responsible for the supervision of the family, finances, property and others activities. Socialization of children was widely shared among parents, grandparents, and many times with uncles and aunts as well.

The woman in a traditional set up was only supposed to look after the family members and her husband. She could offer suggestions, in any matter, but it was not a binding on the male counterpart to agree or disagree with the suggestion so offered by the female counterpart. In *Swami and Friends*, R.K.Narayan has demonstrated this through relationship of Swami, the central character with his mother and granny. Swami’s mother was a pious lady and religious type of woman. As per the status of
woman at that time, she was expected to cater to the needs of the family members. We find that she is an affectionate mother and provided every help to Swami. When a new baby arrives at Swami’s home, still he is not neglected by his mother but she has to pay greater attention to the newly born baby as well as to Swami;

He was taken to her room, where he saw her lying dishevelled and placed on her bed. She asked him to come nearer. She asked him why he was looking emaciated and if he was not eating and sleeping well.5a

Even though she was confined to the bed on account of delivery, yet she was very much concerned about her son Swaminathan for his proper health care and he was brought into her room. She wanted to keep Swaminathan close and enquires about his state of health and enquired as if he had not eaten food and slept well. Inspite of the fact that she is confined to bed, yet she is still performing the duties of a traditional mother and inspite of her illness, she does not run away from the moral responsibility of a traditional mother. Thus through the projection of the character of Swaminathan’s mother, R.K.Narayan has projected the consciousness of a traditional mother, who is solely and exclusively dedicated towards the welfare of the male members in the family especially the children. As per the social traditions, the mother was supposed to ensure that her son is learning good manners and education. Swami’s mother reports to her
husband that Swami goes out of the house and loafs with his friends in the afternoons. Thus the most important role as mother was supposed to look after the children. Likewise Swami’s mother made a complaint to her husband about the loafing of Swaminathan in the afternoon;

Mother added, just appearing from somewhere, ‘there is no limit to his loafing in the son. He will die of sun stroke if he keeps on like this.’

Here we notice that being a traditional mother, she even complains about her son Swaminathan to her husband, who is the ultimate authority in the house. She is very much concerned for the welfare of her son Swaminathan. Swaminathan’s mother is exclusively and particularly devoted for the well being of the male members of the family especially the children. When Swaminathan is suffering from fever, his mother requests her husband not to send Swami to school;

Mother vetoed this virtuous proposal. Swaminathan faintly said, ‘But father may not like it’. She asked him to lie down on a bed and hurried along to Father’s room. She stepped into the room with the declaration, ‘Swami has fever, and he can’t go to school’.... Mother insisted, ‘Something has gone wrong with the thermometer. The boy has fever. There is no better thermometer than my hand. I can swear that he has 100.2 now.’

Thus being a traditional mother, she keeps every care for the welfare of her children. When Swaminathan is not feeling well due to fever, she...
makes a request to her husband not to send Swaminathan to school since it does not matter if he misses the school for a day. For the sake of her son Swaminathan, she is even ready to swear that her son is not feeling well and is suffering from high temperature. Even when Swaminathan felt bedsore and requested his mother to allow him to go to school, she makes a violent protest;

He went to his mother and informed her that he was starting for the school. There was a violent protest at once. She felt him all over and said that he was certainly better but in no condition to go to school. Swaminathan said, “I am feeling quite fit, mother. Don’t get fussy.”

Inspite of the fact that Swaminathan requested his mother to allow him to go to school, as he was now feeling quite well, yet the mother had a feeling that he was not in a condition to go to school. Here also, we notice the consciousness of a traditional mother, who is devoted to the well being of the males in the family especially children. She has a deep sense of dedication of service and sacrifice for the well being of the males in the family in the traditional Indian social set up. The mother of Swaminathan had deep rooted feelings for Swami and a sense of deep attachment with him. We also come across such a situation when one day when Swaminathan disappears from home all of a sudden and she lost her senses
for the reason that her son was the apple of their eyes and without Swaminathan she could not live since she had a deep attachment with her son. She makes a request to her husband to restore Swaminathan;

His wife stood like a stone image, looking down the street. The only tranquil being in the house was the youngest member of the family, whose soft breathings came from the cradle, defying the gloom and heaviness in the house.... his wife asked in a trembling voice: 'Did you search in the hospital?' and broke into a hysterical cry.

R.K.Narayan through the projection of the character of Swaminathan's mother has presented the consciousness of a traditional mother. She has such deep feelings for Swaminathan, that without him, the house looks gloomy to her. Being a traditional woman, who is exclusively devoted for the well being of the male members of the family, she cannot live without her son. Such were the deep feelings of Swaminathan's mother and makes a strong request to her husband to locate her son. At last when Swaminathan is restored back, the mother of Swaminathan heaved a sigh of relief and was very much happy;

His granny and mother were hovering round him ceaselessly, and it was with a sneaking satisfaction that he saw his little brother crowing unheeded in the cradle, for once overlooked and abandoned by everybody.
At last when Swaminathan returns back home, his mother was very much happy because Swaminathan’s arrival in the house turned the gloomy atmosphere of the house to a house full of laughter. Thus in the character of Swaminathan’s mother, R.K. Narayan has projected the consciousness of a mother who is having her affiliations towards the traditional culture and the religious beliefs, and devotes herself to the well being of the male members in the family, which a traditional woman is required to do.

The novel also projects the consciousness of the status of old women in a traditional set up. The granny loves Swami very much and Swami too loves her very much. The status of the traditional old woman has been described by the novelist;

In the ill-ventilated dark passage between the front hall and the dining room, Swaminathan’s grand mother lived with all her belongings, which consisted of an elaborate bed made of five carpets, three bed sheets, and five pillows, a square box made of jute fibre, and a small wooden box....

From the position explained above, we come to know about the status of an old woman in the traditional Hindu society. The granny of Swaminathan was housed in the dark passage and confined to that passage only. It was not well ventilated and was not having proper light arrangements. She lived there with her petty belongings and her bed was
made of five carpets and three bed sheets and with some other belongings like a wooden box etc. This old woman was not provided with any room but a temporary passage was converted for her living. She had no privacy of any sort because this passage was just between the front hall and the dining room. Moreover, her bed was consisted of left over and less required items like bed sheets and pillows. Here the status granted to an old woman becomes clear to us. Nobody cared for her and she was lodged in a dark passage.

The granny used to tell the religious and old stories to Swaminathan. Like traditional grannies her exclusive job seems to be to relate stories from religious books to Swami so that Swaminathan gets moral lessons and know about the past glory of the Indian social system;

.... and then begged leave to start the story of Harichandra, who, just to be true to his word, lost his throne, wife, and child, and got them all back in the end. She was half way through it when Swaminathan’s rhythmic snoring punctuated her narration, and she lay down to sleep.  

The traditional grandmothers used to tell the stories of the kings and their honesty to their grand children so that they could acquire the moral education and know about the sociological background of the past. In the same way granny of Swaminathan also told stories of old kings like
Harichandra, who being a true and honest king, lost his kingdom, wife and the child. From such type of narration of the old king’s stories, the children acquired the moral education at home itself and equipped them with the full knowledge of the glory of the past Indian social system. She even ensured that Swami did not waste time in the useless activities outside home. When Swami’s father was away from home, Swami used to go outside the house with his friends and granny noticed it and tried to retain him at the house;

‘Come here, boy’, she cried as soon as she saw him. ‘I can’t. No time now’ ‘Please. I will give you three paise’, she cried. Swaminathan ignored the offer and dashed away.¹³

The granny not only looked after Swami but also she enriched his knowledge about the kings, their bravery and the Hindu mythology. She had a role of a grand mother to ensure that her grand son does not loaf here and there in the afternoons and catch fever. But when Swami is away from home, granny feels herself restless and walks up and down the room. On the other hand, the grand children too likewise had their deep attachment with their grand mothers. Swaminathan too had a deep attachment to his granny and found solace while in her company:

After the night meal, with his head on his granny’s lap, nestling close to her, Swaminathan felt very snug and safe in the faint-atmosphere of cardamon and cloves.¹⁴
Thus before going to bed and after taking the meal, Swaminathan used to be in the company of his grand mother and Swaminathan felt safe and happy while he was with his grand mother. This depicts the social consciousness of a grand mother and her deep rooted love for her grand children. But the traditional grand mothers were less cared by the family members and nobody cared for them. In Swami and Friends we notice the status of granny of Swaminathan in the house. For instance, when a new baby is to take birth in the family, she was conscious of busy feet scurrying along the passage and the arrival of a lady doctor and wanted to know about the state of matter;

.....Meanwhile Granny kept asking something of everybody that passed by, and no one troubled to answer her.  

Here we feel that a traditional grandmother was totally disregarded by every member in the family was given the least information by any body. She is very much excited but her feelings are not regarded by anybody in the house. The traditional grandmothers were also economically dependent on the male members in the household. The granny of Swaminathan has also no money with her. When Swaminathan asked his granny to give some money she says;

She almost shed tears that she had no money, and held her wooden box upside down to prove how hard up she was. ‘I
know, Granny, you have a lot of coins under four pillows.'
'No, boy. You can search if you like'. Swaminathan ordered
Granny to leave the bed and made a thorough search under the
pillows and the carpets.\(^{16}\)

The granny makes it clear that she has no money and she is passing
through hard times at the edge of life. The status of a traditional
grandmother becomes more clear when granny is ordered by Swaminathan
to leave the bed so that he can make a thorough examination of her bed.
She is not only dependent on the male, but also she is also less attended by
the family members. Even Swaminathan does not regard her in this
particular instance, she is asked to leave the bed. In another instance too,
we notice that Swaminathan disregards and disobeys his grandmother, when
she asks him to bring lemon juice since she was suffering from the stomach
pain. On this Swaminathan says;

'If you want it so urgently, you had better go and get it
yourself'. It was nearing five-thirty and he wanted to be in the
field before sun-set. ... She said, 'I have a terrible pain in the
stomach. Please run out and come back, boy.' He did not stay
there to hear more.\(^{17}\)

Although she was suffering from stomach pain, yet her request made
to Swaminathan was rejected by him outrightly. Swaminathan attaches
much importance for his play ground activities than the granny, who was
suffering from the stomach pain. But when Swaminathan comes back he notices;

Granny’s passage had no light. It had only a shaft feeling from the lamp in the hall. In the hall darkness, he could not see her face clearly. She lay still. Swaminathan was seized with a horrible passing doubt whether she might not be dead of stomach-ache. He controlled his voice and asked, ‘Granny, how is your pain?’ Granny stirred, opened her eyes, and said, ‘Swami, you have come! Have you had your food?’

The ill-ventilated passage where granny has been lodged is further described by Swaminathan when he returns back to the house. There was dark in her room and he could not see her face clearly. Though Swaminathan had rejected the request of his grandmother to bring lemon juice, yet she is very much concerned about her grand-son and enquires whether he had taken food or not. And when Swaminathan leaves the house and returns safely, Granny says;

......that she would have to set about fulfilling the great promises of offerings made to the Lord of the Seven Hills to whom alone she owed the safe return of the child.\(^{15}\)

Thus the traditional old women in the Indian social set up were exclusively dedicated towards the well being of the family members especially of the males. We also come to know that yet the elder male paid the required regards to the old woman but her status in the house was not
better. She was fully dependent on the males economically too. This
depicts social consciousness of a traditional grandmother in the India social
set up. We get a clear picture of the society in which the respect and dignity
was accorded to the granny. The granny has transferred the reigns of power
in the family to his son voluntarily and herself placed in a tacit resigning
status to a subordinate position. In the character of granny and her son, we
notice that there is no clash between the two generations. The son in turns
ensures respect and dignity for his mother. While the wife, though also a
female has greater say in running the affairs of the house as compared with
the grandmother. Hence no simplistic formulation is possible.

In *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) R.K.Narayan has presented the
consciousness of a traditional woman in the character of Chandran’s
mother. She is representative of a Hindu mother, who intends to get her son
Chandran married to a girl with best dowry after adhering to all the social
customs and traditions. The love marriage of Chandran with Malathi could
not be solemnized since it was against the social traditions and the mother
is against such marriage, which violates the social restrictions because the
horoscopes of Chandran and Malathi do not match. R..K.Narayan through
this novel depicts the norms, manners and conventions of a South Indian
middle class family. In this novel we find that there is reaction to the
customs. When Chandran tells his parents that he
would only marry Malathi, gives a shock to the mother of Chandran
because Malathi’s father is a mere Head Clerk and not a big officer and he
could not afford big dowry. Chandran’s mother protested;

"...We do not know anything about them, who they are, what
they are, what they are worth, if the stars and the other things
about the girl are all right, and above all, whether they are
prepared to marry their girl at all..."  

Here we notice that Chandran’s mother is aware of the rank
consciousness and is having her notions towards the materialism. Love
has been considered as immaterial consideration for contracting marriage.
She is conscious of the unequal status of Malathi’s parents. Chandran was
adamant to marry Malathi but the parents were not happy. For long the
parents could not bear this sight of unhappiness and for the sake of
Chandran, they were even prepared to compromise to this extent and agreed
to consider the proposal if the proposal comes from the parents of Malathi.
Chandran’s parents are conscious of the traditional subservient role of the
bride’s family. The parents felt that as per social norms the proposal should
come from the bride’s side;

"...Anything done contrary to this would make them the
laughing stock of the community."
The parents of Chandran are traditionally bound and in case of violation of the set traditions, they will become the laughing stock of the people. In the parents of Chandran, the consciousness of the parents in the traditional society has been depicted by the novelist. While adhering to the social norms of the society, the marriage with Malathi could not be arranged and Chandran’s love met a dissatisfactory end like most of the love affairs in India. K.R.S. Iyengar says;

With rigid caste prohibitions to be respected and difficult astrological hurdles to be crossed, how can there be ‘love marriages’ in India?21

Here we notice that R.K. Narayan shows Indian society’s orthodox belief in astrology. It depicts how free choice of emotional relation is made limited by fate and astrology and the choice of life partnership is determined by the mercy of astrologers. Narayan feels that free communication between a boy and a girl before or without marriage is impossible in the society. There is emotional relation which leads despair because he is not allowed to marry despite all fitnesses as the society believes that;

“It is all a matter of fate,” said Mother. “You can only marry the person whom you are destined to marry and at the appointed time.”22
Here Chandran’s mother makes clear to Chandran that you can marry a girl with whom you are destined to marry as provided in the fate and at the appointed time. Chandran’s mother had deep rooted faith in the traditions and customs which were inherent in the society during the early years of the Twentieth Century in the Indian social system. Actually in Chandran’s mother, the novelist has projected her as representative of the traditional Indian womanhood as is Raju’s mother in *The Guide*:

....she sat in the back Veranda, turning the prayer beads in her hand, looking at the coconut trees at the far end of the compound. As she turned the beads, her lips uttered the holy name of Sri Rama, part of her mind is busied itself with the thoughts of her husband, home, children and relatives, and her eyes took in the delicate beauty of coconut trees waving against a star-lit sky.23

Chandran’s mother is a religious type of lady, who has great faith in Sri Rama and she is simultaneously well aware about her duties and responsibilities as assigned in the traditional customs towards her husband and son. She is committed towards the traditional values and is a challenge to the glitter of the new civilization. Her dedication towards the social customs become more clear when she says;

“We have a status and prestige to keep. We can not lower ourselves unduly... We can not disregard custom.”24
In any case, she is not going to disregard the social customs and traditions and lower down their status in the society. Here we notice that R.K. Narayan has presented the consciousness of a traditional Indian womanhood, who cannot violate the set traditions even for the sake of her son since it will make them degraded in the eyes of the people in the social set up.

Chandran’s mother is a true symbol of traditional Indian womanhood. She is a religious type of lady and has deep faith in the social customs. She is always aware about the social responsibilities of a mother and looks after for the welfare of her husband and son. She wants to marry her son with a beautiful girl, who could also bring a big dowry, since her own father had spent a large sum and paid a large number of vessels. About the traditional Indian womanhood William Walsh has observed;

"...in Narayan’s novel... the women rather than the old represent ‘Custom and Reason’ and know what is and what is not proper."

The sweet old world of Malgudi is sustained by grandmothers and mothers in the novels of R.K. Narayan by adhering to the old traditions. Through the wives of Srinivas, Sampath and Natraj, the very pictures of docility, who are still devoted to their household responsibilities have been projected. But we find that the women characters like Shanti, Rosie and
Daisie do not fit in the social set up, hence they have attracted criticism. These women merely escape the suffocation of the traditional Indian orthodox beliefs. But in Chandran's mother, we notice that she is a challenge to the new world of glitter and she in any way worse than the present age;

.... his mother replied that she at any rate belonged to a generation which was in no way worse than the present one for all its observances, and as long as she lived she would insist on respecting the old customs.\textsuperscript{26}

Chandran's mother is not feeling worried at her being attached to the old customs and she in any case would not go against the old customs in the society. Although Chandran's mother played an important role in the household matters, yet the sole authority rested in the hands of the male i.e., her husband Jayant K.Biswal says;

.....a traditional Hindu society where men rather than women hold a superior position... women are generally confined to home and the hearth and all sorts of taboos and traditions are clamped on them. But as in the milieu gradually changes from it a strictly orthodox one to that of progress and liberation which comes in the wake of modern civilization, women slowly and subtly begin to assert their independence in the society.\textsuperscript{27}

Thus according to Jayant K.Biswal, a traditional woman in the Hindu society did not enjoy the status equal to man and she was only confined to
the home and she had to observe the taboos and traditions in the society to maintain the dignity. In the Indian milieu, the mother has been considered as the giver and preserver of life. On this aspect Anu Celly says:

In the complex fabric of the Indian society and family, the mother has been envisioned as the Matrishakti, the giver, protector and preserver of life.... In India, the idea of womanhood is inseparable from motherhood, and all that it entails by way of honour, responsibility, resilience and patience.

In Chandran’s mother, we notice that she plays the role of a mother and she looks after every interest of her son Chandran and she has a say in whatever decision Chandran’s father takes. Such a smooth transfer of power is possible when Swami marries, has sons, and his parents relegate themselves to a position of ineffective dignity. But due to the changing scenario, we notice the women are trying to come out of that confined place in the traditional family system. Shanta Bai in The Dark Room is a character who is against the old traditions and customs and violates the old customs to come out of the confined place. Malathi and Susila in The Bachelor of Arts are the female characters, who are also bound to adhere to their bond of marriages. The parents arrange their marriage and these two characters do not go beyond the status provided to a woman in the Indian traditional family system. They do not go beyond the family restrictions as
Shanta Bai goes in *The Dark Room* by violating the set rules of the society. Although Chandran is infatuated with the beauty of Malathi, yet she does not make any advances on this account. Since the horoscopes did not match, hence their marriage could not be solemnized and the parents of Malathi arrange her marriage with their cousin. Thus Malathi is restricted by the social customs and she does not violate the social norms. In Malathi, the consciousness of an innocent girl has been projected by R.K.Narayan, who is fully dependent on her parents and she does respect their wishes. In the case of Susila, we get a character who is also socially and economically dependent on her parents and the true consciousness of a girl is presented through Susila who is bound to obey the traditional customs and beliefs. The marriage of Susila is arranged by her parents as per the social traditions and she is a happy bridegroom. This all depicts that the marriages arranged by the parents after screening all the pros and cons turn to be blissful marriages.

*The Dark Room* (1938) presents sociological study of an Indian household which demonstrates the typical Indian attitude of life where the husband is the lord who dominates in the house. The wife is supposed to obey him and if she disobeys him it is considered sinful as per the Indian social traditions and customs. At that time in our society, there was clear-
cut discrimination between the male and the female. Their role in society as well as their domain of action were demarcated precisely and deviation therefrom was frowned at. The house-wife was supposed to look after the household affairs only and she had no say whatsoever in the decision making of the family. She was only limited to the four walls of the house. The house was run by the eldest male member of the society. Regarding the existence of the traditional family system many scholars have expressed their views. As per this traditional family system, the eldest male member of the family was to maintain the family property and finances etc.

R.K.Narayan in The Dark Room has presented a sociological study of the early years of the Twentieth Century of the Indian milieu. At that time the sole authority of male counterparts existed and the female sex had nothing to say on any issue of the household. This aspect has been testified by many scholars. Savitri represents the traditional Indian woman who is dedicated to her husband irrespective of the fact that he is domineering and that he insults her at every stage. She was just treated as a household property. On the other hand, Ramani creates terror in the house and the children as well are terrified by his behaviour.

Through the social consciousness of the novelist towards the Indian social system, we have a peep into the condition of women and their role
during the early years of the Twentieth Century. Ramani considered Savitri as a maid-servant whereas she was totally dedicated to her husband having her affiliations with the traditional Hindu wife in a joint family system. The true sense of the Indian womanhood, through Savitri has been presented by the novelist in The Dark Room too. Though she is totally innocent, yet she has no say what-so-ever in the household matters. She only receives rebukes and nothing else. She has no independent status. She has a meaning only when supported by the male counterparts.

The status of women in the traditional Indian society was not over the men and the men always dominated the Indian society. Ramani in The Dark Room is also dominating and he bosses over his wife Savitri. We notice that Babu, her son is not feeling well, she asks her son not to go to school, but Ramani does not agree with her;

Babu, get up! Do not miss your school on any account”.....  
She said, “Lie down, Babu. You are not going to school today”.  
Ramani said, “Mind your business, do you hear?””The boy has fever.”

No, he has not. Go and do any work you like in the kitchen, but leave the training of a grown up boy to me. It is none of a woman’s business.30
In the traditional family system in the Indian milieu, the woman was supposed to be within the four walls of the house. She was required to look after the kitchen work and she was not required to interfere in the household matters since it was the job of the male in the family. Savitri listens all impatiently and she does not say a word against the wishes of her husband, since she was a representative of the traditional Indian womanhood, who considered their husband as god. On the other hand, the wife is dependent on her husband economically as well. In the typical Indian attitude of life, the husband is lord and master in the house and he governs the house authoritatively and the wife is not supposed to poke her nose in the domestic affairs. They are supposed to obey their husbands ignoring their own views and wishes in the traditional Indian life. P.S. Sundaram says:

It is a sort of thing that takes place in every society where the old strands are still valid and the women are economically so helpless that they just have to lump what they do not like.3

R.K. Narayan has depicted the consciousness of a wife in Savitri, as a victim of domineering and cynical husband and the resultant circumstances. Ramani belongs to the middle class family who believes in the old conservative set and feels that marriage is an institution in which the wife has only to obey and bear the children ungrudgingly. Savitri is a dutiful
wife but he never responds to her goodness rather he bosses over his and children for the money he earns and spends over the household matters;

.... month, I do not know when I shall have a little decent food to eat, I slave all day in the office for this mouthful. No lack of expenses, money for this and money for that.  

Ramani is always dominating over his wife for no fault on her part. But she never goes against his wishes. We know that the woman are the incarnation of tolerance. By the ill-treatment or misbehaviour anybody else can break his relations with such type of people. But is only Savitri who has great power of tolerance. She knows about her status and says;

.... she had not the slightest power to do anything at home, and that after fifteen years of married life. Babu did look very ill and she was powerless to keep him in bed.

She is feeling ill about her status in the family and yet she does not go against the wishes of her husband being a traditional woman. The position of Savitri becomes more embarrassing when a friend comes home with Ramani. In the presence of the guest, Ramani says to his wife;

Make it rule every day to give some food to the beggars. Remember, if I see any beggar turned away from our door, I shall be very wild.

Here we notice that the husband, in Ramani bullied his wife without any justifiable reason and he ever misbehaved with his wife in the presence
of the outsiders. While Savitri on this did not speak a word against her husband and quietly engaged herself in the domestic work. And being a traditional woman, she even does not take food prior to her husband. Savitri inspite of the misbehaviour and domineering nature doesn’t violate the social conventions towards her moral responsibility of looking after her husband and children. She even does not take food and Ramani is also aware of it;

After undressing and changing, Ramani came very quickly towards the dining hail and said to Savitri, “Hope you have finished our dinner.” “Not yet” “What a dutiful wife! would rather starve than precede her husband. You are really like some of the women in our ancient books.”

Ramani is also aware about her faithfulness being a traditional womanhood. In our traditional customs, an ideal wife is considered who dines after her husband and thus is Savitri. But when Savitri comes to know about the illicit relationship of her husband and Shanta Bai, the endurance of Savitri comes to an end when she learns about the absence of Ramani at nights. While having a strong protest against her husband, she says;

Things? I don’t possess anything in this world. What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything else that she has is her father’s, her husband’s or her son’s.
Now Savitri feels that a traditional woman has nothing her own except her body and always she has to depend on the males. In the childhood, she has to depend upon her father, in her youthful days on her husband and on her sons when she is widow. Hence she feels irritated at the status of a traditional Indian woman, who requires the support of male in the social set up. Her frustration is further increased by the illicit relations of her husband with Shanta Bai. The awareness of Savitri is further strengthened by Gangu which incites Savitri. When Savitri feels that her dignity is threatened by the affair of Ramani and Shanta Bai, she decides to revolt against her domineering husband.

In the case of Savitri, we notice that due to the illicit relationship of Shanti Bai, an office Assistant in the Englandia Insurance Company, where the husband of Savitri also works, she makes up her mind to revolt against her husband. She leaves the house and decides even to commit suicide but of the timely help of Mari, she is rescued from committing the suicide. She starts living in the village temple but in a few day, she feels home sickness since she is representative of a traditional Indian womanhood and the main responsibility of a traditional woman is to look after her husband and children. Savitri has felt that her own defeat;

This is defeat. I accept it. I am no good for this fight. I am a bamboo pole...
She is not as bold as Savitri in *The Mahabharat*. In *The Mahabharat*, Savitri is different type of woman, though she was also a traditional Hindu wife. She was bold and she even saves her husband Satyawan from Yama and she was victorious at the end but in *The Dark Room* Savitri is timid, weak type of character. She has no courage what-so-ever to face the consequences and fight against the ill treatment by her husband and Shanta Bai. Thus Savitri is depicting the consciousness of a woman, who believes in the traditional beliefs and she has no say in the household matters. She has no power at home without the consent of her husband. We also come across the other Indian housewives who are totally helpless and who lead a life of complete dominance of their husbands. Savitri herself feels that a traditional woman is like bamboo pole which cannot stand independently and without the support of her husband, father or son. In the character of Savitri the consciousness of a woman has been projected, whose revolt is an indication of the growing awareness of their individual selves in women. Though it is against the traditional norms. If a husband commits adultery and sinful activities with any woman, he is still considered a lord in the household while if a woman commits adultery, she is discarded and pushed out of the house. Savitri’s revolt is indicative of the slow but steady change
in the mindset of the women. Savitri is projected as a woman, who is not seeking fulfillment of her individual demands and neither she is challenging the subordinate position accorded to her in the marital relationship, but she is only suggesting meekly enough that a line be drawn beyond which the husband be not permitted to stray. But in the end, she has to call off her rebellion reveals how the mother in her prevails over the conscientious individual in her and the other point for her return back to the house is her dependence for economic matters on her husband and her love for the children.

In the character of Ponni, we notice that Narayan has presented the consciousness of a woman, who ignores the old traditions and customs. Ponni holds Savitri responsible for family disharmony. Ponni says that she should have asserted herself a little more at the beginning of her married life and then all would have been well. Ponni has a clear cut philosophy of husband management which she boastfully expounds to Savitri;

....Keep the men under rod, and they will be all right. Show them that you care for them and they will tie you up and will treat you like a dog.”

Thus we find that Narayan has depicted through the character of Ponni, who does not feel inclined to adhere to the social customs in which a
wife is considered nothing else but only to look after her husband and children.

In the character of Shanta Bai, we get the consciousness of a female, who is against the traditional status of a woman in the Indian social milieu. She has joined the employment arena for her upward mobility in the modern world and is a professional as well as the modern type of woman. She has deserted her husband and she disregards the conventions of the traditional Indian milieu;

"I thought you might think it a bit unconventional." "Oh, I love unconventional things", she said, "Otherwise I should not be here, but nursing children and cooking for a husband."

Since she does not believe in the conventional traditions, she allowed a married man to enter her house. She further adds that had she been a traditional woman, she would have been nursing children and cooking food for her husband. She feels that life is boredom and as a result she wants to enjoy it to the fullest extent by her own way she likes;

"Life is one continuous boredom," Shanta Bai said, locking her arms behind her head and leaning back on the pillow.

Through the depiction of Shanta Bai, we know that she is a woman who violates the sacred bond of marriage and establishes illegal relationships with Ramani and wants to enjoy the life to the fullest extent.
character of Shanta Bai, Narayan has presented a clash between the traditional role of a woman and modern and professional role in the background of the Indian society.

In the character of Shanta Bai, we notice that she is trying to come out of the domestic setting in the traditional Indian social milieu. She has no faith in the traditional beliefs. On this Jayant K. Biswal says;

Even women, forever confined to the family in an orthodox household now have learnt to be independent. Shanta Bai, the glamorous lady, says, “Oh, I love unconventional things. Otherwise I should not be here, but nursing children and cooking for a husband.”

In the character of Shanta Bai, R.K. Narayan has presented the consciousness of the women to come out of the confined place in the house, whose chief aim in life was to look after the needs of her husband and the children. Shanta Bai is a glamorous type of lady having no faith in the old traditions and is trying to come out of the four walls of the house. Shanta Bai is a “modern” woman depicted by R.K. Narayan. She is a woman who is an unattached woman and freed from all societal inhibitions. She is economically independent because she has entered the employment arena and is not dependent on any male since she is a deserted woman. She has deserted her husband. Such type of woman is sure to be disruptive of people’s secure marital lives like that of Ramani. Since the woman in the
modern age is joining the employment arena and they are becoming more and more self dependent. These women hitherto were exclusively dominated by menfolk, have rendered men insecure. Thus in Shanta Bai the consciousness of a woman who has least faith in the social conventions and who is struggling to come out of the limited circle in a traditional household has been projected. She has rendered the marital relations of Ramani and Savitri more worse through her interference. Here we notice that the picture is suggestive of conservative bias, which is inherent in the men, who hitherto dominated over women.

The Guide (1958) is chronologically a later novel which has been set in a later chronological period. The women are depicted struggling to come out of the limited boundary of the house to which a traditional woman was limited. She is depicted having entered colleges and the employment arena. She has attained education to come out of the role of a traditional Hindu wife. She has struggled to attain this position. Though she has made so many efforts to reach equality with the male counterpart, yet still she has to struggle for the position. Though she has improved her position, yet she is not fully independent and still she requires the support of a male for her identification in society.
R.K. Narayan projects social consciousness of the changing role of women in society in *The Guide*. Narayan here makes a point that the status of woman was not good and she was ill treated by the male counterparts. She was just required to look after the personal needs of the individuals as was in the case of Marco, while Rosie was trying to come out of the bonds of the social customs. Although she belongs to the family of Devdasis in whose family the education of woman was never desired and they only liked the profession of dancing. Rosie did her Postgraduation. Not only this, she gave an advertisement in the newspapers and got herself married with Marco. We also notice Rosie-Nalini polarity in Rosie. While she is at the house of her parents she is Rosie and when she enters the field of arranging Dance Shows, she is Nalini. In Rosie we notice that there is a desire in her to come out of the encircled atmosphere of the family of Devdasis and she desires to get herself free from those bonds and resultantly she gets herself married after getting Postgraduation Degree irrespective of the fact that there was no female who had attained such a degree and got married in a family above their status.

Thus we notice that the position of woman in the early years of the Twentieth Century has improved to a certain extent and Rosie is an advance stage of Savitri, who was representing the traditional womanhood in the
Indian milieu. She has impact of modern society. She has acquired good education. She deviates from the set traditions of the Hindu family system. She comes out of the traditional family of Devdasis, yet she has a feeling in her of upward mobility and thus she married Marco for the sake of improvement in her status.

Through Raju's mother the consciousness of a traditional Indian mother has been projected by R.K. Narayan. She has deep faith in the social conventions and she is a religious type of lady. She has deep roots in the Hindu mythology. As per the traditional norms, she is required to look after the children and her husband. She is well aware of her responsibilities towards her son. While sending her son Raju to school, she prepares her son in a required manner. Raju says:

My mother fed me early and filled up a little aluminium vessel with refreshment for the afternoon. She carefully put my books, and slate into a bag and slung it across my shoulder. I was dressed in clean shorts and shirt; my hair was combed back from the forehead, with all the curls falling on my nape.42

Thus in the character of Raju's mother, we notice that every traditional mother is required to undergo such type of preparations. She prepares her son in a decent manner. But when Raju is a grown up boy and involves himself in the illicit relationships with Rosie, she has a moral duty to warn him against such type of activities. Since this violates the social
codes of conduct, Raju’s mother does not approve the living together of Rosie and her son Raju;

“Oh, dancer! may be, but don’t have anything to do with these dancing women. They are all a bad sort.”

As we notice that Raju’s mother did not like the snake charmer. As she says that such people belong to Burma and worship the snakes. She does not place such people at high level and treat them as a bad sort of people. Thus since Rosie belonged to the family of dancers and he is illicitly living with her son, she does not approve their relationships since Rosie is a married woman and while living with her son, she has violated the traditional conventions. Traditional morality comes in violent clash with an existential project of high order. But Raju can’t forsake Rosie because through her he looks at a prospective world of glamour and failure. He is conscious of the force of the traditional morality that still rambles in his veins but the reason of his material lack in life has also its incisive force. He realizes the calm logic in his mother’s warning;

Have some sense, Raju. She is another man’s wife. She must go back to him.

The traditional morality and the stark existential being prove equally powerful. The mother can not bear the pollution of the ancestral home and so she lives her brother. Thus for the sake of traditional morality, she even
decides to leave her husband’s home. She cannot bear the illicit relationships of her son Raju and Rosie, a wife of another person. Thus we can say that in Raju’s mother, R.K.Narayan has depicted the consciousness of a traditional Indian woman, who has deep roots in the Indian traditional beliefs and for adhering to such conventions, she even breaks up her relations with her only son and leaves her husband’s house.

Rosie’s mother is a woman, who believes in the old traditions and she belongs to a class traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers. The caste of dancers, to which they belonged was not considered as good. Even Rosie says that they are not considered good in the eyes of the public;

‘We are viewed as public women, she said plainly, and I was thrilled to hear the words. ‘We are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilized.’

Rosie’s mother belonged to a caste, which was not considered as a respectable caste and though she belonged to this caste in which they were restricted as dancers but she planned a life for Rosie in which, there are no caste restrictions and hence Rosie was made to come out of the old traditions;

A different life was planned for me by my mother. She put me to school early in life; I studied well.
In the character of Rosie's mother, we find the consciousness of a traditional mother who desires her children to study well and hence Rosie was put in a school early in her life so that she may come out of the old restrictions of the society like caste and creed system. From the character of the mother of Rosie, we find that position of the lower classes in society like Devdasis was not good. In the social hierarchy, they have been placed in a lower rung of the social set up. As a result of this, these people feel frustrated being discarded by the society. Rosie's plays social role without challenging the norms set for them in their particular contexts. The characters like Rosie, who belong to the discarded position of Devdasis, they have been depicted by R.K.Narayan as making their efforts for upward mobility through high education and attainment of excellence in some specific field. Rosie has been depicted as a newly awakened woman, who is aware of her individual self. For achieving this goal she acquires good education;

I studied well. I took my master's degree in Economics.\textsuperscript{47}

After attaining higher education, she wants to get herself married to a person, who could provide her high status. She responds to the advertisement appeared in the newspapers and sent her photograph;

I had myself photographed clutching the scroll of the University citation in one hand, and sent it to the advertiser.
Well, we met, he examined me my certificate, we went to the Registrar and got married.48

Thus having her postgraduation in Economics, she wants to break away from the traditional way of life of the Devdasis, to which she belonged and for the social sanctification through marriage with a respectable high class person. Even the women of Rosie’s family were impressed at her marrying a person who does not belong to their caste and is owner of a big house and has wealth;

But all the women in my family were impressed excited that a man like him was coming to marry one of our class.49

Her marrying a person who does not belong to her family of dancers is a matter of surprise for the women of Rosie’s caste. In this, novelist presents the consciousness of the women, who are bound in their caste and they are not allowed to marry in other castes and are not considered good in the eyes of the society. In presenting Rosie as a female character belonging to the lower strata, novelist projects the image of an average woman who gets herself married in the upper class society. She feels happy at her marriage in the upper class. She struggles to come out of the social restrictions. But we notice that their marriage was not arranged by the parents as in the case of Chandran’s marriage, and it is neither a love marriage but she has adopted an intermediate device of matrimonial
advertisement. The matrimonial advertisement is the device of marriage in an expanding society where people dispersed in different corners and hence suitable matches cannot be personally known and accessible. But we notice that such marriages solemnized through the matrimonial are imperfect for no full details of the two families are matched and there is no intervention of the elders in the family. The different details of the would-be spouses are not properly taken into account and in the absence of such details, the marriages are ill-matched. In the case of marriage of Rosie and Marco, we come across such a marriage, which was solemnized without having full details of both the sides and that too without the screening of all the pros and cons of the couple by their elders. While we notice that the match of Chandran and Susila, which was arranged by the parents after considering all the pros and cons, is a good and successful match. Rosie knows that Marco has no family, and he lives alone and lives with his books and papers, yet she is fascinated by his wealth;

He had a big house, 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 books and papers.50

For the attainment of high social status, Rosie did not worry at the fact that Marco had no family and he was living alone and ignored this aspect. Here we notice that the novelist is depicting the value of old
traditions in which they used to arrange their marriages after consulting all aspects of the bride's or bridegroom's side. Although Rosie was aware of the imperfections in Marco yet she refused to accept them uncomplainingly, which is an important contributory factor in this failure of marriage. Rosie here is different from Savitri, she had deep affiliations with the old customs and beliefs and her marriage was solemnized by the parents and the marriage of Rosie has been neither an arranged marriage nor a love marriage. The lack of sexual fulfilment also made a contributing point in the failure of marriage of Rosie. She is not satisfied with her husband who is not interested in her but gives most of his time in the caves and paintings. She says to Raju;

He is interested in paintings and old art and things like that.
But not one which can move its limbs.\footnote{51}

She is not feeling happy at the behaviour of Marco and she feels annoyed at his activities of ruin collecting and paintings. This factor made Rosie dissatisfied with Marco. Now Rosie is attracted by Raju and there are illicit relation between Rosie and Raju and Raju takes charge of Rosie;

I seemed to hesitate, and then looked up at the girl for a moment. There was a mute appeal in her eyes.\footnote{52}
Here Rosie is attracted towards Raju and involves herself in adulterous activities, which a married woman is not supposed to involve herself in as per the set traditions of society. The other aspect which led the failure of marriage of Rosie and Marco was that Marco was interested in the paintings and caves whereas Rosie liked the art of dancing very much. This liking of Rosie was seriously negated by Marco; and he treats it as a morbid desire. We notice that she wants to see a king cobra. She has great interest in it. But Marco treats it as a morbid desire and he says:

If it interests you, you can make your own arrangements. Don’t expect me to go with you. I can’t stand the sight of a snake; Your interests are morbid.\textsuperscript{53}

Here we notice that the views of Marco and Rosie differed at great length. Rosie liked the art of dancing whereas Marco liked the cave paintings and old monuments. On the other hand, Raju appreciates her art and when Marco does not approve the proposal of Rosie to see a king cobra, he says:

I disliked this man. He was taunting such a divine creature. My sympathies were all for the girl; she was so lovely and elegant.\textsuperscript{54}

The support which she received from Raju for appreciating her art of dancing led the departure of Rosie from Marco and this led to the violation
of the sacred institution of marriage. Had Marco been least considerate towards his wife, she might not have been departed from her husband. Marco is equally responsible for her departure. Marco has no room for Rosie’s art and he is deadly interested in the cave paintings and dead art whereas he does not like the living art of Rosie. Basically Rosie is a good girl. When her husband throws her out, she had no place to go and that was the reason that she met Raju, who is always appreciating her art. She has a God given gift after coming to Raju, she gives perfection to her art. On the other hand, Raju wants to get the success in not only material gains but also sexual as well as the fame in the society. Raju commits forgery and Rosie comes to know the clear picture about Raju. On this Rosie feels that Raju is a fraud and he has played a havoc with her life and made her depart from her husband. After feeling all these aspects Rosie comes back to reality;

Rosie’s traditional devotion returns to her when she finds a mention of Marco’s achievements in books and magazines. All sources of information on Marco are secretly and cunningly removed to a safer distance. The greed obsesses Raju so much that he does not hesitate to affix false signatures on a legal document.\(^{55}\)

We notice that before this Rosie was quite ignorant of social bonds. She was not well aware of the social codes, which a Hindu female is desired to observe. She feels pride in Marco’s attainments and she becomes aware
of Marco's magnanimity. When Rosie, being a career woman, needs no male proprietors for existence, is suggestive of Daisie in *The Painter of Signs*. We find no parody of a modern woman in Rosie, even if it is there in Daisie.

In the Indian society women are considered the soft sex. The traditional role of a wife or mother or daughter is to be one who is to be seen not heard. In the Indian social set up, there is greater say of wife as compared with a daughter or a mother, especially if the husband is not a wayward as is Ramani in *The Dark Room*. We notice that the traditional woman is considered as a key to harmonious joint family life in the smooth transfer of power when a son comes of the age and raises his own family and takes over the reigns of action. The women are generally believed to be superstitious, jealous, quarrelsome is a part of the general male bias through which they are viewed. But in to-day's society, the education has played a vital role to bring awakening in the female sex. Due to this awakening, we find conflicts in the lives of Rosie in *The Guide* and Savitri in *The Dark Room*. In today's society, the women are joining the employment arena and they are becoming more and more awakened towards their right and their becoming of economically independent is the emancipation of woman.
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