Chapter - VI

CONCLUSION
In the gallery of women characters portrayed in the novels of R. K. Narayan, we encounter different facets of women. Sometimes they submit themselves to the dominant discourse for substantiation, and sometimes they favour inner corroboration in search of their free selves. It is true that R. K. Narayan conforms to his times and during the period he wrote, there was radical change in the status of women. Moreover, he maintains an objective detachment from his themes and characters. So, it is risky to draw any conclusion from his novels about his point of view and value system. What makes it more difficult is that Narayan seldom comments on his works or is generally reluctant to speak about his inner convictions. But however detached he is from his characters, it is possible to draw out conception and portrayal of women characters taking definite shape through his novels.

Narayan’s concept and understanding of women in the Indian society has given new dimension to his novels. Including granny, wife or a mother, Narayan also probes into synthesis of traditional and modern women, their strong concept of individuality and uncompromising attitude. His women discover their identity in the Indian middle class society.

This study of the different portrayals of women in the novels of R.K.Narayan enables us to say that R. K. Narayan knew the undeniable
presence of women in the society. He has established himself as a master of fictional technique. Contemporary of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan makes a remarkable triad, affiliated with them in time and sometimes in the choice of themes but not in his art as a novelist and a short-story teller.

R. K. Narayan portrayed his women in a kind of a realism which is something more than reportage; he grabbed the Indian mentality fully with its superstitious comprehension of life, its bewildering contradictions and its sarcastic comic irony. He is pre-occupied with incompatibilities rather than possibilities of human predicament. His characters dwell in the reality of our existence and the events narrated are like the occurrences of real life. From his novel it is possible to analyse his attitude towards women and he brilliantly captured the changing scenario in the status of the women with changing time.

From the beginning of his writing career R. K. Narayan was of a reformist temperament. His fictional world appears to be transcription of the actual world in which we live. In keeping with the middle class milieu of his novels, Narayan adopts a pedestrian style to portray his women characters.
Narayan embodies the pure spirit of Indian culture. He has certain unyielding ideas in his mind which we see fully expressed in his novels. His belief in moral order establishes itself. One takes a fresh looks at the myths and legends and finds a new meaning in them.

R. K. Narayan was essentially a story teller whose sensitive well drawn portrayals of Indian women characters were set mostly in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. Malgudi is his Casterbridge. But the inhabitants of Malgudi are essentially human and hence have their kinship with all humanity. In this sense Malgudi is everywhere. His women are rendered in a lively and realistic manner. He has created tiny but perfectly credible universe in Malgudi.

R. K. Narayan had a deep interest in middle class Life. He therefore recognised the importance of women, the Source of life. He had deep respect, love and sympathy for women in general and Indian women in particular. The critical study of his novels shows that his women are more colourful, more convincing and livelier than men.

R. K. Narayan believes that man and woman are complementary to each other. One can not exist without the other. He did not start with equality but asked for equal opportunity. In Malgudi, women are not just to be the shadow that follows the substance, but they are their original selves. He favours Inborn-Equality of men and women.
The traditional men-women relationship was one in which men continued to be the bread winner, assertive, bullying, and self-reliant. The women continued to be submissive, meek, and docile; accepted the role of dutiful housewives. The women were born only to be beaten by domestic problems, meaningless customs, traditions and conventions. The women’s fate was decided by someone else and they were never given an opportunity to shape their own destiny. Women portrayed in some of the early novels of R. K. Narayan conform to the traditional role.

The plight of neglected wife is R. K. Narayan’s favourite theme. Marriage denies individuality to women and forces them to adopt attitudes or ideals envisioned for them by males. Marriage enslaves orthodox women in his early novels. She spends aimless, endless days without interrogating its purpose.

The women who are submissive, adopt community’s charted path, are safer though they live in fearful survival strategy by always battling with their psyche. They derive inner satisfaction in having no need of asserting their own views.

To the traditional women, matrimony is incomplete without motherhood. Even a delayed motherhood is a cause of anxiety. Barrenness is a curse for orthodox women.
R. K. Narayan’s women seldom have their strong opinions. They are often judged in relation to the males around them and compared to them; women appear stunted, not fully formed in some of his early novels. They work within the confines of home. These women perform their domestic duties mutely.

R. K. Narayan glorifies the motherly portrayal of women although he loves to portray grand mother. He shows that women are always a mother whether they have their child or not.

In the early novels of R.K.Narayan, some women characters make certain attempts to go against the prevailing social customs and traditions, they simply cannot shake them off. They cannot stand the collective force of the society as a whole. The result is, they accept the defeat, remorse comes and they find happiness in submission. Narayan does not seem to approve of their attitude or any kind of rebellion on their part.

R. K. Narayan’s conventional female characters are all doting mothers, loving wives and gorgeous grannies; they may rebel against social exploitations and object to their husband’s extra marital affairs; but they are ready for compromise; and in no case they overstep the marriage bounds.

The traditional women characters in the novels of R. K. Narayan enjoy their particular status in the family and the society at large from
sacrifice and service. It is an ideal forming of the basic Indian ethos in an archetypal pattern.

R. K. Narayan’s spirited women simply leave all this man-made, anti-woman institutions. They have enough power to create their own world. Some of his women are absolutely free from male dependence. Rather than being beggars they declare their liberation.

In the name of women’s liberation movement what has happened is reaction, and reaction never liberates anyone because it is tied to the action. R.K.Narayan prepared the ground for the real revolution in his early novels and in his later novels his women are free, not out of hate, not out of anger, but out of understanding true spirit of freedom.

Women characters in the orthodox milieu of Narayan’s novels shine out as radical women who raise their head against social exploitation. They have freedom to voice their protest. They are vibrant women and act accordingly.

Of course, Narayan has made the thematic and episodic use of social evils like dowry system, craze for the male child as a progeny, the curse of barrenness, and nuclear family as an aspect of social change. But credibly he did not exploit these issues; he remains the detached observer with regard to the plight of women. Nowhere in his novels has he seemed to take sides either for or against women’s rights.
R. K. Narayan shows that women are unpredictable and incalculable. He dives deep into the women’s heart and declare that man can not understand some of her actions.

R. K. Narayan’s women know the problem of their nation. They are conscious of their rights as well as duties.

Some of the R. K. Narayan’s heroines are under impact of westernization. They cross the male-made threshold, without running a race with them. They do not underestimate their domestic duties as well. He shows that Indian women do not want freedom to that extant that they would feel emotionally invalid.

Narayan is far ahead of his time. His portrayal of educated, active and ambitious women highlights the empowered image of women. She rejects hegemonic structure and re-defines her role. Women step out of their traditional roles and find greater fulfillment.

Narayan through his own unique vision records the progress and change in the status of women. He synthesizes the traditionalism and modernity and bridging the gap; he voices the emergence of self-defined women in the orthodox milieu of the Indian society.

All the women characters feel the warmth of change. This new image of the women brings the ray of hope to the women who are
groping in the dark. R. K. Narayan has opened a new vista by infusing crusading spirit into them.

Some of the R. K. Narayan’s women protagonists transcend assigned roles and aspire to carve out an independent economic entity, according to their own taste, talent and inclination, though they belong to socially despised caste. Narayan recognised her undiscovered potentiality for self-reliance.

R. K. Narayan’s bold and spirited women carry a furnace of conviction. They burn up all the ambiguities and doubts. The strain of modernity and their interest in women’s own identity are assimilated in their personalities.

R. K. Narayan’s women are far sighted and posses the capacity to withstand the strains of an unexpected menacing situations.

R. K. Narayan’s women possess an astonishing degree of self-control. They realize the pressure of changing forces of the modern world and civilization. They become the powerful promoter of the process of change. They have an unorthodox thinking about pre-marital sex and love marriage.

R. K. Narayan’s spirited women dominate over their male counterpart in some of the cases because the intensity of their work keeps
their morale high and emboldens them to confront and overcome whatever handicaps their way.

R.K. Narayan’s career as a novelist spans almost eight decades. His perception and recognition of the women in the Indian society focus the past and present through his own unique vision over a period of time. He emerges as one of the greatest humanists in the twentieth century.

All the knowledge, all her conditioning, the whole process of her upbringing, her society, her education, and civilization— they constitute a shell which keeps her and her understanding imprisoned. R. K. Narayan breaks off this shell, which contains her whole painful past. Therefore his portrayal of women becomes fascinating.

R. K. Narayan’s women watch anything that is natural with serenity and revolts against all sufferings that are imposed by anybody. Their jealousies, their anger, and their frustration— they all bring pain. Their ambitions bring pain with a tint of satisfaction because they are self chosen.

R. K. Narayan shows some of his women characters having some weaknesses, which are unacceptable but, he believes that society is responsible to some extent, for whatever unacceptable in women.
R. K. Narayan never approves women’s slavish status. They serve man, because it is ingrained in their nature. Caring and sharing is the essence of womanhood. But service can not be compulsion to them.

R. K. Narayan suggests that economic independence can definitely help them to assert themselves to certain extent. He feels that women should not talk of freedom without self-sufficiency.

For the people of Malgudi, the institution of marriage matched by horoscopes holds the highest importance. But in R. K. Narayan’s later novels marriages are no longer made in heaven. Women’s attitude towards marriage has also changed. As result of economic freedom, women have been able to change the basic rules to some extent. It is self-sufficient women, who prefer to tie the knot; it is because they intend to share her life with someone in the fullest senses.

Earlier, women had little choice in either selecting their life-partners or refusing marriage altogether. It was almost taken for granted that they had to be married before they reach adolescences. In his novels, R. K. Narayan with the help of education and economic independence changes for the better. The quest for R. K. Narayan’s women is for deeper meaning in husband-wife relationship. He firmly believes that the true relationship is realized when the emotional and spiritual needs of women
get recognition in marital relationship, instead of the socially accepted ones of security and respectability.

There is something extraordinary in his fictions that gives jerk to the minds of an average reader. If a reader probes deep into the depths of his women depicted in his novels, finds that, since he successfully portrays the inner workings of a character rather than being merely satisfied with the outer behaviour. And this is what appeals to the most readers of this age.

The women characters created by R. K. Narayan are neither purely sexual objects nor modern and career oriented selfish women. Clinging to the basic values of womanhood they steadily grow in a heroic stature. He passionately presents the change in women from docile and submissive to powerful and competitive women.

The development of men-women relationship with changing status of women also grabs our attention. The development of this relationship leads to mutual trust and spirit of companionship that each acquires for the other. Women may meet physical death but their spirits survive.

R. K. Narayan believes that women can construct harmonious home from four walls of the house. In his novels they live sincerely, think independently and wish to make their identity living in the society, not out of society.
R. K. Narayan is not out to preach any morality or to plead any cause. He suggests that everybody has his own defects and merits and it would be unfair to take superior criticizing attitude towards the star-crossed heroines, who commit the mistake under the pressure of circumstances as they possess inherent goodness.

Thus, R. K. Narayan’s portrayal of women has the new approach. He is the harbinger and the supporter of the winds of change regarding women. He is neither reformist nor feminist. He portrayed emergence of ‘New’ women in a natural way as it came to him as an eagle-eyed observer. He is perhaps the most objective writer among the Indian English novelists. And such detachment requires discipline, poise and balance that he possesses naturally.

R. K. Narayan reigns supreme in presenting the music of life of the people around him in a lucid language. His women continued to be an enigmatic personality. Yet, he is aware of women’s issues and problems. If he offers us no solutions, and propounds no doctrines, it doesn’t mean that he had nothing to offer. At least he has the courage to focus on the plight of women and pleads for welfare reforms. He represents reality of women’s lives and he succeeds in his attempt to portray it in his novels. His novels are universal in appeal and have a place of pride in their own
right in the field of Indian novels in English. It is not accident that his works have been translated into many languages. This recognition has been brought to him by his works, which portray women and fundamental reality of Indian society in a sensitive and authentic manner.