Women are the only exploited group in history who have been idealized into powerlessness.

-- Erica Jong

Mother is a sacred object. It is a commodity whose value we don’t realize as long as it is with us. One must lose it to know what a precious possession it is....As long as my mother lived, she said every minute ‘Do this, Don’t do that’ And I remained a good son to her. The moment she died I changed. Its rare commodity, Sir, Its rare commodity.

from The Bachelor of Arts

Only once has my wife tried to interfere, and then I nearly broke her bones .........Women must be taught their place.

from The Dark Room

It is indeed ironical that a mother for her children is a commodity and a wife has to be shown her right place. Nevertheless, these are commonplace ideas having universal validity. Such ideas sustain the existence of male-oriented patriarchal social system. Such ideas also make in-roads into the citadel of literature. The dominant discourse on women in early Indian society has confined women within the household as daughter, wife, mother and in other roles. Women constitute practically undifferentiated group, with a fixed set of norms and duties they are supposed to adhere to. In a caste-ridden, tradition bound society like the Indian society with women as adjuncts, it is they alone
who seem to have been casualties of the upheavals in society. As adjuncts, women
neither are active agents in societal process nor do they represent various profiles.

The matrix out of which Narayan constructs Indian female identity largely stems
from the glorious ancient cultural past. However, he is definitely conscious of the
presence of the colonial past that helps him to reformulate women’s identity. Narayan is
well aware of the agony of the marginalized group, which is manifested in his work My
Days:

I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of woman as oppressed
to man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early
treatment of the ‘Women’s Lib’ movement. Man assigned her a
secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning
that she herself began to lose all notion of her independence, her
individuality, stature and strength. A wife is an orthodox milieu of
Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances.¹

Not only in his thought but also in personal life he has great respect for women.
His wife died only after three years of their marriage leaving a girl child behind to be
looked after. He never remarried and spent his entire life in the memory of his wife and
bringing up a girl child. But in his literary work his moral outlook is so subtly stated that
it needs a searching for meaning to bring out the status of women. This chapter is an
attempt to examine whether his sympathies for the marginalized would enable one to call
him a feminist or whether there is too much of the traditional patriarchal mindset in him.
Owing to the vast range of his works this research is restricted to the following novels only:


His first novel *Swami and Friends* (1935) is a delightful tale of an escapade of a ten year old schoolboy Swami. Life for Swami consists mainly of having adventures with his friends, avoiding the misery of homework, and coping as best as he can with the teachers and other adults whom he encounters. He is taken care of by his granny and his mother. He is expelled in succession from two schools and when things go quite out of hand he is forced to run away from home. Narayan portrays in this novel the child’s world as the child himself sees it.

*The Bachelor of Arts* (1936) is about the life of a bachelor Chandran who wants to marry Malathi with whom he has fallen in love. But Hindu customs come in his way of love-marriage. He rebels against arranged marriage and carries his frustration to the point of renouncing the world and becoming a wandering Sadhu. He finally returns home and marries Susila, a girl selected by his parents and lives happily.

*The Dark Room* (1938) is a poignant tale of a housewife Savitri who is tortured and humiliated by her husband Ramani. Ramani makes Savitri feel how completely dependent she is upon him and how meaningless her existence is. Savitri tries to assert herself by walking out of the house but she soon realizes that she must return to all that she has turned her back upon. She returns to her husband’s house although a part of her is dead.
The English Teacher (1945) is about a couple Krishna and Susila who enjoy a life of marital bliss, though it is very short-lived. Susila dies a premature death leaving a girl child behind. Krishna refuses to remarry and brings up his daughter on his own. He also finds a way out to communicate spiritually with his deceased wife. Narayan has written this novel in the loving memory of his beloved wife Rajam. It is an autobiographical novel.

Mr Sampath (1949) deals with the life of Srinivasa, an editor and Mr Sampath, a printer. Unfortunately the glamorous life of cinema goes to Mr Sampath’s head and chaos ensues. His liaison with the heroine Shanti creates unrest in the life of his wife. After many vicissitudes and tribulations everything returns to normalcy.

The Financial Expert (1952) is a story about Margayya, a financial advisor; he grows rich and takes up to financial wizardry. At the end he returns to where he had started. Like a boomerang, the curve of Margayya’s career comes full circle in the end. His prodigal and spoilt son Balu who is responsible for Margayya’s downfall, returns with his wife Brinda to his father’s house meekly.

Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) is the tale of a young man Sriram who is in love with Bharati, a social worker. His love for Bharati leads him into the entourage of Mahatma Gandhi. He fights for Mother India and finally marries Bharati.

The Guide (1958) won the Sahitya Academy Award. The principal character Raju is a romantic man. Trying to help Marco in his research, Raju involves himself in a relationship with his wife Rosie. Abandoned by Marco, Rosie realizes with Raju’s help her ambition of becoming a dancer. She becomes a famous dancer with the help of Raju. But Raju’s possessive instinct finally betrays him into a criminal action, and he is
charged and convicted of forgery. Coming out of jail he snaps all connections with the past and becomes a Swami. At the end of the novel he dies a martyr’s death for the villagers.

_The Painter of Signs_ \(^{(10)}\) (1976) is a bittersweet tale of love in modern India. This novel tells us the story of Raman, a young painter of signboards. A beautiful and attractive young woman Daisy enters in his life and commissions Raman to paint signboards on behalf of the population clinic. She advocates two-child norm and preaches birth control with religious zeal. Raman wanted to marry her and settle down in life by accepting all the conditions she puts before him. In spite of that Daisy realizes that she can not marry Raman and breaks the relationship abruptly and leaves Malgudi.

Narayan gives expression to Indian life with all its vicissitudes. Sometimes humorous, sometimes ironic, but he always writes within the four walls of his culture. His novels are considered to have brought forth the changing images of women in the Indian scene in all their fascinating varieties. He seems to be a champion of women’s cause. A close preview of female characters reveals the real intentions and motives of R. K. Narayan in portraying his female characters. His early novels are centered on male protagonists and their female counterparts work as adjuncts who embody the traditional Indian psyche with all its accompanying hopes and anxieties, born out of a deep-rooted belief in fatalism. This is certainly true in the context of his early novels like _Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts, The Dark Room, The English Teacher, Mr. Sampath_ and _The Financial Expert_.

In these novels R. K. Narayan’s orthodox intellectual and social background confines him to characterise women to certain established discourse roles –
grandmothers, mothers and wives - and discourse positions - marginal, passive and dependent. His woman remains more a symbol of relationships than a creature of flesh and blood. Very often many of his female characters have no names. They are addressed like, Swami’s mother, Swami’s Granny, Chandran’s mother, Krishna’s mother, Srinivasa’s wife, Sampath’s wife and Margayyas wife. They are also called by their pet names given to them by their husbands that objectify them. Ramani calls his wife Savitri ‘a pet’ and Shanta Bai ‘fresh rose’. Krishna calls his wife ‘jasmine’. These female characters of Narayan in his early novels are all examples of denial of individual identity to women.

They all exist in traditional Indian domestic settings. They are simple, suffering, selfless and sincere women. In Gilbert and Gubar’s words they are more like ‘Angel in the House’. Gilbert and Gubar argues that, “[t]o be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead. A life that has not story, like the life of Goethe’s Makarie, is really a life of death, a death in life.”

Therefore, these heroines are, if not dead, not alive either. They are typical devoted housewives, who are very particular about performing domestic duties that are repetitive, boring, tiring and above all unpaid, and bring no recognition, neither social nor personal. They do household work such as: serving, sweeping, cleaning, nurturing the children, preparing food and housekeeping. They are expected to know the needs of their husbands and get the things done beforehand. They do it with great pleasure without any complaint. For them housekeeping is the ultimate objective in life. May it be Savitri, Swami’s mother, Krishna’s mother and his wife Susila, Chandran’s mother, Sampath’s wife, Srinivasa’s wife, Margayyaya’s wife or Balu’s wife.
"The family is the foundation of a country. And within the family, woman as mother was the foundation." For a mother bringing up the children and cooking the food is the foundation of her existence. In *Swami and Friends* Swami’s mother performs all the household duties with honesty and remains all the time in the kitchen so much so that Swami misses her in the kitchen and feels uncomfortable without her attention when she is in bed for two days to have another child. “My mother was all the time in the kitchen. I couldn’t get it (‘it’ referred to lime pickles.)”(p.14). When Chandran in *Bachelor of Arts* returns home after eight months and does not find a single speck of dirt on his table asks his mother surprisingly the reason behind it. His mother replies innocently: “[w]hat better business did I have”(p.117)? Ramani scolds Savitri in *The Dark Room*: “[n]o lack of expenses, money for this and money for that. If the cook can’t cook properly, do the work yourself. What have you to do better than that”(p.2)? Krishna talks about his mother in *The English Teacher*: “House-keeping was a grand affair for her. The essence of her existence consisted in the thrills and pangs and the satisfaction that she derived in running a well-ordered household. She was unsparing and violent where she met slovenliness”(p.29). He also tells about Susila, “My wife had picked up many sensible points in cooking and household economy, and her own parents were tremendously impressed with her attainments when she next visited them” (p.29). Susila is dexterous housewife and knows every skills of housewifery. Krishna lightly mocks at her: “[s]he went in and brought out a little more and pushed it on to my plate and I ate with relish just because she was so desperately eager to get me to appreciate her handiwork” (p.37). In *Mr Sampath*, Sampath’s wife Kamala does all household work and rears up five children ranging from nine to three. When Srinivasa shows his sympathy towards her
Sampath plainly replies: "[s]he has got to do it in any case, sir. We've five children at home and they constantly nag her - so this is no extra bother. Please don't worry yourself on that score" (p.86). Srinivasa asks his wife if he should pay the rent to landlord's son-in-law: "[c]ertainly", she said, "not liking to be interrupted in this job she liked so much. She would give her consent to anything at such a moment" (p.165). In *The Financial Expert* Margayya's wife and daughter-in-law also do their household duties with great responsibility. The fabulous thing about these women is that they themselves know that they do not have better work to do than doing this drudgery. They accept it with a sort of contentment and never try to inquire about their lot. Wollstonecraft rightly remarks: "I wish to persuade women to endeavor to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrase, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with the epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are always objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt."

Narayan's women are all alike having exactly the same job to do. They serve food to their husbands' in the same manner. A faint aroma comes from everyone's sarees and dishevelled look is the common look of all of them. Their husbands eat first and they are the last to eat in the family. Even when they are hungry, they wait. No matter if their husbands come at midnight or the next day. They cannot even think of having meal before their husbands. Ramani says to Savitri in *The Dark Room*, "What a dutiful wife! Would rather starve than precede her husband. You are really like some of the women in our ancient books" (p.14). Krishna's father writes a letter to his son complaining in the novel *The English Teacher*, "still keeping late hours for food-the last to eat in the house"
Krishna’s wife Susila serves him food and eats after him. In *The Financial Expert* Margayya’s wife waits for Margayya till midnight and when Margayya tells her to eat before him she replies: “[h]ow could I without knowing what had happened? In future, if you are going to be late” (p.37). In *Mr Sampath* Srinivasa’s wife waits for him late hours and when she is told by Srinivasa to have meal before him she simply says: “I can’t do that” (p.38). These women put their husbands on high esteem. It could be because, they are very emotionally attached to their husbands; it could be because they love their husbands too much; it could be because of social fear; it could be because of some religious implications - whatever be the reasons the women of Malgudi show the essential feminine nature of traditional Indian women.

Not only women, Narayan’s men are also traditional. They are the embodiment of patriarchal mindset. Men are the masters of the house and their wives are mere subordinates. They want from their wives the absolute submission. They do not want any kind of opposition in the house. They construct the rules for their own vested interests and do not hesitate to break it again for their vested interests. They are educated, sensitive, independent and imaginative. Their early upbringing helps them to be ready for the task to rule the world around. Swami’s father yells when his little son starts crying instead of taking him on his lap: “[h]ere, boy, as you go, for goodness’ sake, remove the baby from the hall. I can’t stand his idiotic cry... What is the matter with him?... Is your mother deaf or callous? The child may cry till he has fits, for aught she cares” (p.59). Chandran says to his mother: “I am speaking in a debate this evening. I am now going to my room to prepare. Nobody must knock on my door or shout near my window” (p.3).
Ramani tells his wife Savitri, “I will count sixty. You must dress and come out before that” (p.26). Instead of counting sixty he goes on talking: “[w]omen are exasperating. Only a fool would have anything to do with them” (p.26). Further, he comments to his wife while watching a movie: “[n]ote how patient she is, and how uncomplaining” (p.29). Ramani scolds his son Babu for playing with dolls because only girls can play with dolls. Since childhood, people are taught to be a gendered self. When Savitri fights with him for his adulterous relationship with Shanta Bai instead of being ashamed of himself he blames Savitri for behaving like a servant:

[a] terrific indignation welled up in him: so she was trying to nose-lead him with threats of leaving, like a damned servant! She could please herself, the ingrate. All the kindness and consideration wasted on her. When his bank balance was low he had somehow bought her the gold-laced saree and jumper because she desired it, and the diamond studs on her nose...the ingrate! (p.111)

Ramani is a true disciple of Rousseau who recommended that a husband should occasionally, even unjustly blame and rebuke the wife to keep her in proper place. Both Ramani and Mr Sampath commit adultery and forgive themselves by saying that a man must have right to enjoy his life outside. On the other hand, it is an unforgivable sin for women. Savitri says to Ramani, “You are dirty, you are impure. Even if I burn my skin I can’t cleanse myself of the impurity of your touch” (p.112). Savitri feels the impurity
indirectly but Ramani is undisturbed and raises his hand to hit Savitri and tells her to go away. After the departure of Savitri, Ramani reflects:

they mustn’t attempt to ape the Western women, all of whom, according to Ramani’s belief, lived in a chaos of promiscuity and divorce. He held that India owed its spiritual eminence to the fact that the people here realized that a woman’s primary duty (also a divine privilege) was being a wife and a mother, and what woman retained the right of being called a wife who disobeyed her husband? Didn’t all the ancient epics and scriptures enjoin upon woman the strictest identification with her husband? He remembered all the heroines of the epics whose one dominant quality was a blind stubborn following of their husbands, like the shadow following the substance (p.141).

Narayan has fears that Westernization of Indian culture would bring curse on the society and suggests that women should refrain from aping the Western culture. Ramani decides that he will not be worried about Savitri because she dares to cross the four walls of the house and so must be punished:

[s]he had walked out of her own will; she would have to face the consequences, of course; old enough to know what she was doing. Firmness was everything in life; that was the secret of success with
women. If they found a man squeamish they would drive him about with a whip. He was certain she would return and apologized when her madness passed. This was only a different version of sulking in the dark room (p.142).

The priest of the temple says to Mari, a locksmith, in the novel *The Dark Room*, “If she won’t let you rest, thrash her; that is the way to keep woman sane. In these days you fellows are impotent mugs, and let your women ride you about” (p.167). In this context, Dorothy Allison justly opines that, “some people begin to believe that the security of their families and communities depends on the oppression of others, that for some to have good lives there must be some whose lives are truncated and brutal. It is the belief that dominates the culture.”

When Susila instructs her maid to serve food to her husband and goes off instead of serving food herself, Krishna thinks: “[d]oesn’t even care to wait and see me served. She doesn’t care. If she cared, would she sell my clock? I must teach her a lesson” (p.49).

Women are satisfied, happy and careless about their existence and the nature of work they perform throughout their life. But a man like Srinivasa becomes irritated to bear domestic responsibilities. Srinivasa finds domestic duties an extra burden and reflects: “[t]his is going to leave me no time for attending to the paper”(p.36). He also does not react to what his wife says for: “[h]e knew that it must be the same set of causes over and over again: first and foremost his late-coming; secondly, his lack of interest in home management; thirdly, his apparent neglect of his child; fourthly, insufficient money; and so on and so on” (p.38). Although he feels for his wife and wonders how
lonely she is, he never acknowledges that woman is the slave without whose labour the whole structure of family collapses. Meenakshi’s father and her son Balu both are typical traditional men. Balu reminds her of her father:

[the more she saw him, the more she was reminded of her own father in his younger days; exactly the same features, the same gruffness, and the same severity. People had been afraid to speak to her father even when he was in the sweetest temper, for his face had a severity without any relation to his mood. She saw the same expression on the boy’s face now. The boy’s look was set and grim. His lips were black with cigarettes which she knew he smoked: he often smelt of them when he came home...But she kept this secret knowledge to herself since she didn’t like to set up her husband against him. She understood that the best way to attain some peace of mind in life was to maintain silence....She did her best not to contradict him (her husband Margayya): she felt that he strained himself too much in his profession, and that she ought not add to his burden (p.137).]

Once or twice Meenakshi tells her son Balu to be more mindful of his father’s wishes and orders, but she is told by him to keep her mouth shut, and she remains quiet for everything that happens in the house. She does not like her sister-in-law and for this
Margayya sighs and says: “Half the trouble in this world is due to women who cannot tolerate each other” (p.23).

There is only one male character Krishna who does not fit in the framework of patriarchal society. Krishna is not a character in the novel, he is Narayan himself. Narayan states in My Days: “More than any other book, The English Teacher is autobiographical in content, very little part of it being fiction. The “English Teacher” of the novel, Krishna, is a fictional character in the fictional city of Malgudi; but he goes through the same experience I had gone through....”

Krishna wants Susila to read books and spend her time in stitching, reading, gardening and so on: “[y]ou must spend some more time reading, stitching or singing. Man or woman is not born merely to cook and eat” (p.42). He insists her to engage a maidservant while she is for saving money and rejects the idea of engaging a maid. He promises his wife to have only one child though he is not very happy with her decision but respects his wife’s desire. He serves his sick wife for months and rears up the small child happily. After the death of Susila, Krishna works tirelessly from office to home. While performing these duties he never for once thinks that it is a woman’s task and a man should refrain from doing this. On the contrary he enjoys it:

In three or four months I could give her a bath with expert hands, braid her hair passably, and wash and look after her clothes, and keep correct count of her jackets and skirts. I slipped in to my double role with great expertness. It kept me very much alive to play both father and a mother at the same time. My one aim in life
now was to see that she did not feel the absence of her mother (p.97).

Krishna’s mother always implores him to marry again but he refuses this proposal sharply. When it comes to the question of re-marriage and bringing-up a child he breaks the old myth into a thousand fragments which his mother reiterates: “[m]en are spoilt if they are without a wife at home....A man must marry within fifteen days of losing his wife” (p.99). Krishna feels proud of his dual task of mother as well as father: “[i]t was a matter of fact my chief occupation in life. I cared for little else. I felt a thrill of pride whenever I had to work and look after the child. It seemed a noble and exciting occupation - the sole responsibility for a growing creature” (p.103). Narayan here presents an ideal relationship between a man and a woman.

Not only men, women themselves carry patriarchal ideology and transfer it to the next generation through the institution called ‘family’. The family system is the institution that determines and constructs the specific character of the female sex. Women are forced to accept the various traditions and taboos assigned to them by the society. If they refuse they have to face dire consequences. In The Bachelor of Arts we encounter Chandran’s mother screaming and yelling: “[t]hey can’t be all right, if they have kept the girl unmarried till sixteen. She must have attained puberty ages ago. They can’t be all right. We have a face to keep in this town” (p.69-70). She calls Malathi a ‘hefty, middle-aged girl’ and does not see any defect in her twenty-three year old son. Krishna’s sister-in-law does not like doing domestic work for this she is hated by her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law comments, “I really don’t mind doing it for everyone, but there are those who neither know nor learnt when taught, I feel like kicking them when I came across
that type" (p.29). The sociologist, Veena Das, describes such women as female "patriarchs", old women who often speak on behalf of men. She writes: "In fact, if women didn’t internalize the voices of men and speak like patriarchs themselves, the social order could not be maintained. Coercion and force can never ensure the authority of the rule as an internal voice."16

When Savitri sulks in the dark corner of the room at her husband’s rude behavior, Janamma, her friend, makes her understand the situation:

[y]ou should either let your words out or feel that everything your husband does is right. As for me, I have never opposed my husband or argued with him at any time in my life. I might have occasionally suggested an alternative, but nothing more. What he does is right. It is wife’s duty to feel so..... Men are impetuous. One moment they will be all temper and the next all kindness. Men have to bear many worries and burdens, and you must overlook it if they are sometimes unreasonable (p.59-60).

She tells her many traditional and mythological stories about devoted wives in order to remind her that her behavior is not for an ideal woman. She recounts instances of the patience of wives:

her own grandmother who slaved cheerfully for her husband who had three concubines at home; her aunt who was beaten everyday
by her husband and had never uttered a word of protest for fifty years; another friend of her mother’s who was prepared to jump into the well if her husband so directed her; and so on, till Savitri gradually began to feel very foolish at the thought of her own resentment, which now seemed very insignificant (p.60).

Nobody dare tell anything to Ramani because he is all powerful - economically, physically and emotionally. The subjugation of women is rooted in the socio-economic structure of the society, which is further made sacrosanct by religious ordinances. Women carry these ideologies smoothly to other generations. It is well said: “Of all the subjects that women might learn, housework is the most important...whatever knowledge she may acquire, she cannot claim any reputation unless she is proficient in housework.” Therefore, it is none other than women who mould and curb the behavior and character structure of women, and teach them to submit to the established authority.

The women of Malgudi are not financially independent. Unpaid work by them in the home brings no money. Therefore, they have to ask money from their husbands. They wait for their husbands’ approval for anything that has financial implication. Husbands give them money as if they give alms to beggars. Swami’s mother does not have money to give to the tailor who has been asking money for four days. Her husband gives her money but with a comment: “I don’t know how I am going to manage things for the rest of the month, he said, peering into the purse. He locked the bureau, and adjusted his turban before the mirror” (p.23). When Swami’s Granny is asked money by Swami: “[s]he almost shed tears that she had no money, and held her wooden box upside down to
[s]he has written wonderful letters to me to-day, has addressed me as ‘My own darling’ for the first time; she has sent me twenty thousand kisses though I sent her only fifteen thousand in my last letter....” Or “She likes very much the silk pieces that I sent to her. She says that they are wonderful.” ....“Poor girl! She writes asking me to take very great care of my health. Says that I ought not to get up so early every morning. She has inquired about the business and wishes me more subscribers. She wishes the Daily Messenger long life and health. She has a very great sense of humour (p.165).

Susila’s intelligence is nothing but a newly wed husband’s fanciful observation of his wife. During crisis women of Malgudi either cry or sulk in the dark room. If they do not cry and sulk they prate and shout to get over the crisis. Margayya says, “Women can’t hold their tongue” (p.53). They do not know any other way to enjoy life, release their anger and anxieties. They hardly know how to please themselves. Ramani observes that his wife: “never made an effort to conquer her moods; that was why, he felt, women must be educated; it made all the difference.... If Savitri had little more education, she might have been even better” (p.88-89). Meenakshi becomes sad when she discovers that her husband has brought a book instead of a saree. The book is on the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. She refuses to read it and when Margayya insists upon it, she listens to it both ‘horrified and fascinated’. When Balu flees away from the house Meenakshi becomes hysterical while Margayya thinks that he is now a rich man and it is
the time for celebration. He loathes Meenakshi for spoiling the atmosphere of the house by crying and sulking in the dark room.

Krishna’s mother-in-law is superstitious and believes that: “the Evil Eye had befallen on her daughter and that at the new house a malignant spirit had attacked her” (p.83). Susila blindly follows what her husband says of the affairs outside home. For this trait of Susila, Krishna muses: “[s]he took sides with me in all my discussions and partisanships, and hated everyone I hated and respected everyone I respected. She told me a great deal about my neighbours, their hopes and fears, and promises and qualities” (p.37). She uses her intelligence in discovering the cheating done by the shopkeeper. “She was very proud of her list. It was precise. Every quantity was conceived with the correct idea as to how long it should last. There were over two dozen different articles to be indented and she listed them with foresight and calculation. She was immensely proud of this ability” (p.40).

Srinivasa’s wife is shy and inarticulate in the presence of a stranger. She follows every tradition blindly without giving a thought to it. When Srinivasa comes to know that she has not eaten anything for two days during travel, he cries: “[w]hat foolish nonsense is this? ...He stood looking at her for a moment as if she were an embodiment of knotty problems. He knew what it was: rigorous upbringing, fear of pollution of touch by another caste, orthodox idiocies- all the rigorous compartmenting of human beings” (p.35). She reads novels and journals but she always tells her husband to write something to interest women in his publication.

Socially, after her marriage, woman has no independent social or economic status of her own. Her social status is directly determined by and is dependent on her husband’s
status, though it is subject to and is strongly qualified by her husband's wish to give her that status. He can, if he wishes, deny her that status though she is his lawfully wedded wife. Srinivasa leaves his wife in the village and neglects his son and wife keeping himself busy with his job. After a long time when he sees his wife and son in rags he realizes how he has neglected them. Ramani scolds Savitri for wearing rags at home. He says:

Why can't they put on some decent clothes and look presentable at home instead of starting their make-up just when you are in hurry to be off? Stacks of costly sarees, all folded and kept inside, to be worn only when going out. Only silly-looking rags to gladden our sight at home. Our business stops with paying the bill. It is only the outsider who has the privilege of seeing a pretty dress (p.26).

Krishna always tells his wife to wrap herself in beautiful sarees. Margayya looks at his wife and thinks: "how plebian she looked, with her faded jacket, her patched, discoloured saree and her anaemic eyes. "How can anyone treat me respectfully when my wife is so indifferent-looking" (p.20)?

Women are under social fear from the cradle to the funeral pyre. Narayan's women of the early novels are no exceptions. Women are expected to behave and lead life in a very restricted manner. A woman should be gentle, soft-spoken, shy, tolerant, submissive, compassionate and pure even to those who may doubt her motives and be harsh and unjust to her. A woman is expected to be perfect in all aspects rather than a
simple human being with virtues and vices or precisely, she should be an ‘Angel’ or ‘Devi.’ Women fear to transgress the limit of the decency level. They suffer and tolerate every heap of insult with patience and fortitude for the fear of getting socially isolated; they do not expect help from their partners in bringing up the children or managing the household for the fear that if they do so, they will be branded as selfish or bad mother.

Chandran blames Malathi for not responding to his love and curses her: “[l]ittle sign did she show of caring for a fellow; she couldn’t say that she had no chance. She had plenty of opportunities to show that she noticed him. Where there was a will there was a way. She had only been playing with him, the devil. Women are like that, they enjoyed torturing people” (p.112). He loves Malathi and tries hard to marry her but never asks her directly. Her father rejects the proposal on the ground of mismatching of horoscope. She is ignorant and completely at the receiving end. For all her innocence, ignorance and powerlessness she is charged of being a devil. Therefore, justly it is said by Rajendra Lal Mitra: “[i]n it [Hindu marriage] there is no selection, no self-choice, no consent on the part of the bride. She is an article of gift, she is given away even as a cow or any other chattel”

Savitri dare not ask her husband about his love affair and prefers to suffer in silence. She even conceals her husband’s affair for she fears that this would bring disgrace to her family. Ramani continues his shameful act without any fear because he knows well that his wife will never confide it to anyone. Margayya’s daughter-in-law, Brinda, does not dare to tell her husband’s vices to her father-in-law. She hides it till Margayya comes to know about this from others. Srinivasa’s wife tells him, “When you have a house, why should you go out for coffee? What will people say if they find master
of the house going out for coffee” (p.37). She also does not raise her voice for the fear of the neighbor who will think of her as a bad-tempered woman. While her husband Srinivasa thinks just contrary to what she thinks:

[h]e felt, with an extravagant seriousness, that the whole civilization has come to an abrupt stalemate because its men had no better basis of living than public opinion. He raved against their upbringing....A child’s life was reduced to a mere approved behaviour in the midst of father, mother, grandmothers and uncles; and later in life parents-in-law, husband, and so on and on endlessly till one had no opportunity to think of one’s own view on any matter (p.37).

Every woman is scared of something or the other. This scary temperament weakens them from taking any bold decision and forces them to sacrifice even their own selves. Even when calamity falls on them they seek help from others rather than doing anything positive to get the things solved. They only pray and make several promises to God. When Swami disappears his mother cries and prays to God. When Chandran’s mother comes to know that flower-thief is a Sanyasi she allows him to go because she dare not punish a Sanyasi: “[a]h, leave him alone, let him go. She was seized with fear now. The curse of the holy man might fall on the family. ‘You can go sir,’ she said respectfully” (p.43).
Narayan seems to convey that a woman has to live within the boundaries of patriarchal framework, that there is no escape for her. If she tries to break the social norms she would herself disintegrate and that is the only stark reality of life. In *The Dark Room* Shanta Bai, a divorcee at the age of eighteen, is a master of her own will. She is a graduate and can say no when she feels so. She is a woman who thinks that being a housewife and bearing all the atrocities inflicted by husband is sheer foolishness. She dismisses films like *The Ramayana* as sheer mythological nonsense. She flirts with Ramani to promote her own personal interests. She combines her feminine independence with a shrewd opportunism that characteristically belongs to the new civilization. She believes in having a life of adventure and looks down upon the traditional housewives. She herself admits: “[o]h, I love unconventional things ...Otherwise I shouldn’t be here, but nursing children and cooking for husband” (p.79). But she forgets that she lives in a society which has stored epithets for her - slut, slattern, concubine, hooker, harlot, keep, prostitute, whore etc. In order to lead a free life she loses respect from the society, which every single human being craves for. She pretends that she is least bothered about the social norms but she could not make herself entirely free from the shackles of social tradition. She sometimes becomes restless and seeks permanent peace that is lost in the course of becoming an emancipated woman. She asks Ramani to move from one place to another hysterically at midnight but she does not get peace. She admits to Ramani that she is rather mad tonight and, “I can’t sleep tonight” (p.91). Juliet Mitchell posits that, “[h]ysteria is the woman’s simultaneous acceptance and refusal of the organization of sexuality under patriarchal capitalism. It is simultaneously what a woman can do both to be feminine and to refuse femininity, within patriarchal discourse.”20
In Mr Sampath Shanti, a widow, is a beautiful young actress having arched eyebrows, rosy-complexion, almond-shaped eyes and perfect figure. She is very enchanting who keeps a handbag made of cobra-hood which signifies danger. Srinivasa is surprised to see her bag made of cobra-hood: "[b]ut I was struck by her bag because it seemed such a symbolic appendage for a beautiful woman and for us men to see and learn" (p.155). Shanti is a brave and adventurous woman. But soon she realizes that her beauty will bring no good to her except ruffians. She goes back to her son to lead a normal life leaving Sampath at the station who is going to make her his second wife. Like Shanta Bai, she is also free from the traditional shackles but these women are mere victims of society - victims who fly off for a better life but return to their roots humiliated and frustrated because there is no escape from this worldly trap.

Chandran’s idea about marriage: “people married because their sexual appetite had to be satisfied and there must be somebody to manage the house. There was nothing deeper than that in any man and woman relationship” (p.123). This statement is somewhat true in the early representation of Narayan’s female and male characters. Most of the marriages are not based on mutual trust and companionship. The wives can not discuss their problems freely and confidently. A wife throughout her life shows obedience and submission while husband shows dominance and supremacy. There is no intimacy between Swami’s mother and father. Chandran’s parents indulge in bickering and seem to be always apprehensive about their sons’ future. For Savitri marriage has become a source from where she can fulfil hers as well as her children’s needs.

The only exception in this relation is Krishna and Susila. Though they are placed in the patriarchal set-up of the society, the bond between the two is subtle and strong.
They love and share their happiness and grief. Krishna sets an example. When his wife falls ill he serves his wife and child and manages household with great pleasure: “But I liked it immensely. It kept me so close to my wife that it produced an immense satisfaction in my mind. Throughout I acted as a nurse. This sickness seemed to bind us together more strongly than ever”(p.81). Krishna contacts his wife after her death spiritually and talks to his wife Susila for hours and feels happy and contented. He feels happy more than any other couple whose wife is alive. He says, “The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved. It was a moment of rare, immutable joy - a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death” (p.184).

Margayya’s relationship with his wife revives after reading books on sex but soon it dissolves in the air as the issue of their son’s education comes in between them. Srinivasa has sympathy for his wife and accepts that she leads a lonely life. “I have neglected her lately. It seems ages since I touched her; for when all is said and done a husband- wife relationship is peculiar to itself, being the most tactile of all human relationships”(p.48). He somehow admits his fault, “Family duties come before any other duty. Is it an absolute law? What if I don’t accept that position? I am sure, if I stick to my deeper conviction, other things like this will adjust themselves” (p.33). But Sampath is an incorrigible rascal. For him marriage means:

Some people say that every sane man needs two wives - a perfect one for the house and a perfect one outside for social life...I have the one. Why not the other? I have confidence that I will keep both of them happy and if necessary in separate houses. Is a man’s heart
so narrow that it cannot accommodate more than one? I have married according to Vedic rites: let me have one according to the civil marriage law (p.179).

He plans to remarry with Shanti and when his lawfully wedded wife objects he thinks that it is in woman’s instinct to create a scene but she will be all right; she must get used to it. He further says that:

Here goes my solemn declaration that my wife and children shall lack nothing in life, either in affection or comfort. Will this satisfy you? If I buy Shanti a car my wife shall have another; if I give her a house I will give the other also a house, it will really be little expensive duplicating everything this way, but I won’t mind it. Later on, when they see how much it is costing me, I’m sure they will bury the hatchet and become friends again (p.180).

Narayan’s women are too unrealistic in their assessment of the world and their place in it. In almost all of his early novels, there is always a role for the grandmother and the mother. But grandmothers and mothers, in spite of being senior members of the family have no power in taking decisions in the family affairs. Grandmother’s role is confined only to telling stories to their grandchildren. Swami’s Granny is old and experienced but the most ignorant person in the house. One full chapter is written on her
ignorance titled 'Granny shows her ignorance'. She is never obeyed by either Swami or her son. Instead of giving orders to her son, she says to him: “[y]ou are not in the habit of explaining things to me….you all are big men” (p.130). Similarly, Swami's mother has no power to stop her son from going out to play in the sun. She tells her husband to stop him.

Ramani tells Savitri: “[g]o and do any work you like in the kitchen, but leave the training of a grown up boy to me. It is none of woman's business” (p.1). Srinivasa's wife says: “[t]his little fellow, Ramu, he was like an elder. I never knew he could take charge of me so well” (p.33). Meenakshi has also no authority over her child, Balu. Margayya blames her: “[s]he has completely spoilt him, beyond remedy; I must take him out of her hands and put him to school. That is the only way; otherwise he will be a terrible scoundrel” (p.53). Women feel proud of their status as mothers but children are beyond their control. Mothers are assigned to bring up children and train them but all the powers are in the hands of fathers.

Through Savitri, we learn about the anguish of wifehood in 1930s, when women began to ask for something better than what conservative Hindu marriage could offer them. Savitri, an upper middle-class woman is different from other housewives though she possesses characteristics of traditional Indian wife. Unlike most of the female characters of Narayan, Savitri is a sensitive character who has female friends in whom she can confide. One of them is Gangu and the other friend is Janamma. Narayan gives description of Gangu in this way:
She prepared for her film career by attending two Tamil pictures a week and picking up several screen songs, in addition to wearing filmsy crepe sarees and wearing her hair and flowers in an eccentric manner. She talked irresponsibly and enjoyed being unpopular in elderly society in South Extension. She left home when she pleased and went where she liked, moved about without an escort, stared back at people, and talked loudly. Her husband never interfered with her but let her go her own way, and believed himself to be a champion of women's freedom; he believed he was serving the women's cause by constantly talking about votes and divorce. Gangu was tolerated in the Extension: she was interesting; with all her talk, she was very religious, visiting the temple regularly, and she was not immoral (p.19).

Narayan emphasizes Gangu's religious nature and morality and thus she secures her position to be a friend of a good woman like Savitri. Janamma is a rich woman who walks on the lines of an ideal Indian woman. Savitri has great regard for her and consults her whenever crisis befalls on her. Savitri is on good terms with both of them and enjoys their company. There is another woman Ponny, who helps Savitri out in her bad days. Ponny, a lower class woman, leads a free life. She gives advice to Savitri, “Keep the men under the rod, and they will be all right” (p.136).

Savitri has a growing awareness of her own powerlessness. She longs for the life of liberty; she likes to be respected and exercise some power within or outside the four
walls of the house; she is the woman who is quite realistic in her approach to life, she does not live in imagination. No doubt she is humiliated more than any other character, but she is the one who realizes things as they really are. She has become inure to her husband’s running commentary but always longs for freedom and power: “[h]ow impotent she was, she thought; she had not the slightest power to do anything at home, and that after fifteen years of married life” (p.7). She speaks philosophically before leaving her husband: “[t]hings? 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” (p.113). She wants to take the children with her but her husband refuses to give them to her. Out of sheer anger she walks out of the house like Ibsen’s Nora in the play The Doll’s House. In Ibsen’s drama we do not know what had happened later but here in The Dark Room Savitri has to face the repercussions for deserting her house, husband and children. She realizes under the open blue sky that there is one definite thing in her life - Fear:

Fear from the cradle to the funeral pyre, and even beyond that, fear of torture in the other world. Afraid of a husband’s displeasures, and of the discomforts that might be caused to him, morning to night and all night too. How many have I slept on the bed on one side, growing numb by the unchanged position, afraid lest any slight movement should disturb his sleep and cause him discomfort (p.116).
Sulking in the dark room gives Savitri a dark vision but when she is exposed to the whole world she faces realities of life and becomes clear and more practical in her approach. She earns rice for her work in the temple and feels proud of herself, “This is my own rice, my very own; and I am not obliged to anyone for this. This is nobody’s charity to me” (p.184). But soon she realizes that she is going to live on other’s charity wherever she goes. Therefore, she returns home and decides to live on the mercy of one man rather than many. She accepts this stark truth although a part of her body is dead. That is the reason why she does not call Mari to her house and reflects, “Why should I call him here? What have I”(p.210)? A. N. Kaul, a critic, argues: “[t]he point here, however, is not that, unlike Ibsen’s heroine, Narayan doesn’t bang the door but has it banged on her and that in the end, her dream of feminine independence and dignity over, she returns submissively to the house never again to stray in thought and deed.”21

However, in the open blue sky Savitri comes to know the purpose of her life and her future course of action. Her love for Ramani is lost somewhere in her three days of excursion where she meets Life. Ramani tries hard not to be a loser but he actually is one. Although, apparently Savitri looks foolish and humiliated coming back to Ramani’s house, but Savitri is now transformed to a practical and clear-headed woman who knows her position and her destination well. Ramani leaves her to face the miseries of life but this becomes a blessing in disguise for her. She stops worrying unnecessarily for her husband and starts working for her daughters Sumati and Kamala’s future because now she wants her daughters to be independent and free. Savitri realizes:

> If I had gone to a college and studied, I might have become a teacher or something. It was very foolish of me not to have gone
on with my education. Sumati and Kamala must study up to the B.A. and not depend for their salvation on marriage. What is the difference between a prostitute and a married woman? - the prostitute changes her men, but a married woman doesn’t; that’s all, but both earn their food and shelter in the same manner. Yes, Kamala and Sumati must take their University course and become independent (p.120).

She locates herself in the struggle for social transformation. Every act she performs is embedded in an incredibly intricate network of pressures, constraints and necessary compromises. Despite all these obstacles and impediments blocking her way to happiness, she still manages to have her say about her inner desire not for herself but for her daughters’ self-fulfilment, self-nourishment, self-enhancement and self-empowerment.

In course of history the role-ideal expected or the actual one does not remain static in any society. It changes from time to time depending upon the economic conditions and political structure of the society. Social values of the people change with the change in economic structure and ideology. Therefore, historical location of the novel Waiting for the Mahatma is significant because it is set at the time when Gandhiji directed the nation’s spiritual and moral strength to the non-violent struggle for freedom; there was also a far-reaching change in women’s position in the family and the society. It was a time of political social and cultural turmoil, and though woman still remained in
the family, she was part of the stirring movement. The character of Bharati reflects the
contemporary situation of Indian woman during the 40s and the 50s.

According to Simone-de-Beauvoir, the central project for both men and women
is to transcend the natural limits of being human. But they have different relationships to
it and this sexual dichotomy is evident right from the beginning in Waiting for the
Mahatma. The novel starts with the sentence: “[h]is mother who died delivering him and
his father who was killed in Mesopotamia, might have been figures in a legend as far as
Srirama was concerned” (p.5). Delivering a child is a natural aspect, and is compared to
fighting in battlefield, which is a valued aspect. So, two different spheres for two
different sexes and through the sexual identity the humans are expected to find
themselves and their places in the world.

Narayan has created the character of Bharati, a character relatively independent
and autonomous, as Dr D.V. Rajyalakshmi notes:

[s]he is cast in Gandhian concept and mould of Indian
womanhood, standing for her ideals of non-violence, personal,
integrity, social consciousness, and the responsibility and the
amelioration of the status of woman and love and compassion for
the downtrodden and socially disadvantaged sections of
humanity. Bharati is an image of an ideal women leader of
Malgudi, who finally masters and achieves a dynamic balance
between the claims of private individuality and those of public
responsibility.22
However, in reality she is as traditional and ideal as any other housewife. She is cast on the lines of typical gendering of the society. She is restricted from enacting her independence because of the sexual dichotomy. In spite of being in a public role as an active freedom fighter, she is expected to be an ideal traditional Indian woman because construction of female identity depends on her roles as wife, daughter, mother, and sister and not on her mission or goal.

Bharati is an orphan who is brought up in an ashram. She is born at a time when the freedom movement is at its peak and everybody is contributing for Mother India's liberation. She becomes a freedom fighter not by choice but by chance. She speaks Tamil, English, Hindi, Urdu and many more languages but again it is a gift of the environment in which she is brought up because command of the language is not a matter of knowledge, it is a matter of practice as it is postulated by famous linguist Bloomfield.

Bharati’s movement is restricted and controlled by ‘Chalak’. She has to seek permission from ‘Chalak’ to step out or to see visitors at odd hours. She tells Sriram:

I am practicing kindness, otherwise I should not be speaking to you at all. If I didn’t want to be kind to you I wouldn’t have gone in and taken my Chalak’s permission and come right away here. We must have permission to talk to people at this hour. There is such a thing as discipline in every camp. Don’t imagine that it is Mahatmaji’s camp it is without any discipline (p.57).
She herself acknowledges: "I do whatever I am asked to do by the Sevak Sangh. Sometimes they ask me to go and teach people spinning and tell them about Mahatmaji’s idea. Sometimes they send me to villages and poor quarters. I meet them and talk to them and do a few things" (p.59).

Not only her movement her communication power is also restricted. She is a speaker of truth and can talk on any subject but she shies away when it comes to the talk of love, sex and marriage, because in Indian context this is considered an indecent talk. She finds Sriram’s company delightful but she hides it from everyone while Sriram avowedly tells everyone about his love. He does not hesitate to tell this even to Gandhi. He confesses before Gandhi: “I like to be where Bharati is” (p.70). Bharati grows angry at his boldness and reacts sharply: “[i]f you can, of course, but if you can’t then the best thing is to do is to maintain silence...This is enough to irritate even the Mahatma. Now what will he think of me if he realizes I am encouraging a fellow like you to hang about the place, a fellow whom I have not known even for a full day yet” (p.71-2). Bharati is smarter than Sriram. She can talk to Gandhi and all the visitors with ease and in different languages but she has limitations. When Gandhiji asks her about her consent to marry Sriram, she bows her head and fidgets. Gandhiji says, “Ah, that is the sign of dutiful bride” (p.252).

Bharati’s task as a freedom fighter is nothing but a mere extension of her familial duty. There is no spirit of autonomy in the character of Bharati. She talks a great deal about Gandhiji and India but when asked from where she has learnt all these, she simply replies- from wise men. She collects money, takes care of Gandhiji’s needs. She herself admits, “I attend to Mahatmaji’s needs” (p.59). She teaches people spinning and makes
an attempt to spread Gandhian ideology. She is a master spinner and wins prize in a khadi competition. She carries messages and attends to visitors. She also takes good care of orphan children:

She was always attending on children, changing one’s dress, combing another’s hair, engaging another group in dance or play, and continuously talking to them; besides this she had a great deal to say to a lot of miscellaneous men and women who came in search for her. Hers was a full time occupation. She gave the children a wash, fed them, put them to sleep on mats in various sheds, drew their blankets over them, said something to each one of them, and finally came back to her own room, sat down on her cot and stretched her arms (p.241).

For this Gandhi crowns her with the name ‘mother’, which is a traditional certification of Indian womanhood. In the words of Swami Vivekananda: “[t]he ideal of womanhood in India is motherhood - the marvelous, unselfish, all suffering, ever-forgiving mother.”\textsuperscript{23} Gandhiji says: “I hope your children are flourishing. You are a mother of thirty already. What a blessing”(p.250).

In \textit{The Second Sex} Simone de Beauvoir argues that economic liberation is the sine-quotan of every other form of liberation. Her uncompromising message is clear - motherhood and marriage can not alone make a woman happy, paid work alone secures her independence. Bharati is a social worker and she is not paid for her services. She is
dependent upon the male centric ashram people. In the ashram her rank is low. She has no share in decision-making. She only carries out the orders she receives. Although she works for a bigger cause she can not decide what is right or what is wrong for her. Not only her movement but also her desire is restricted. Bharati and Sriram have delight in each other’s company and she enjoys when he caresses her but she never encourages him because of her moral impulse and also feels guilty when he embraces her. She wants to marry Sriram but in the absence of her parents she seeks permission of Gandhi. On the other hand, Sriram never bothers to seek permission of his Granny (who has brought him up like his parents) when he plans to marry Bharati.

Her name plays a significant role in moulding her character. ‘Bharati’ means the daughter of India. She has option to get married and have kids but she responds to the call of mother India and willingly pays the price like an ideal daughter. She sacrifices her love for her first commitment towards Mother India and Bapu, her Godfather. In the end, she achieves the mark of female adulthood - marriage and secures her future with a man. She has to pass through the trials and she invariably passes through many of them before being worthy of marrying the hero of the novel, Sriram. Throughout the novel she proves that she is a virtuous woman and she is as untouched and uncorrupted as any decent girl of a decent family. Bharati, a Satyagrahi, has to retreat to the house because she has no better work to do when the freedom struggle is over.

A woman exists only to be acted upon by men as a sensual object. Narayan also emulates this formula of portraying Bharati as a sensual object. The whole novel is replete with Sriram’s observations of Bharati’s physical appearance while we only know about Sriram’s appearance that he is of medium height. Sriram almost always describes
Bharati in terms of her physical appearance and feels thrilled when she comes close to him. He always watches her with lustful eyes. He measures her body and her figure arouses wild emotions in him:

What a dangerous thing for such a beauty to be about (p.23).

Whether it was the wearer who was enriching the cloth or whether the material was good in itself (p.31).

she had the lightening-like motion of a dancer, again the sort of pirouetting movement that she had adopted while carrying off other people’s coins in a jingling box (p.56).

he struggled in the grips of unholy thoughts when she stooped over him, held his hand, and taught him the tricks. He concentrated until his mind was benumbed with the half whispering movement of spinning wheel. His fingers ached with holding a vibrant ever-growing thread, and his eyes smarted (p.98).

He could see her left breast moving under her white Khaddar Sari. She seemed to be unaware of the feelings she was rousing in him (p.131).
Symbolic devices such as the attribution of defilement make women inferior objects. The purity/pollution belief makes a woman weak, cowardly and a commodity. Bharati casts out the fear and steps out. At the same time her task becomes to resurrect the whole/holy body, which she must preserve, even to the extent of killing oneself. Bharati says: “Mahatmaji had advised women as a last resort to take their lives with their own hands rather than surrender their honour. There was no sense of fear when Mahatmaji was. But...if any unexpected thing happened, I was always prepared to end my life” (p.245). Women are prepared to end their lives if someone tries to outrage their modesty. This act is considered to be a revered act.

Sriram has traditional patriarchal attitude. He is jealous of Bharati being very close to Mahatma although he loves her. He thinks about the women staying in the ashram:

...he stood looking ruefully towards the women’s quarters. There a lantern was burning, people seemed to be awake and moving about. He thought, ‘What if the lantern is burning? They may be sleeping with the lights on. Women are cowardly anyway.’ The stirring he heard might be them rolling in their beds, noisy creatures! Unaccountably he was feeling irritated at the thought of women, the species to which Bharati belonged (p.64).
Before joining freedom movement when Mahatma asks him to take permission of Granny he feels: “angry at the thought of Granny, such an ill-informed, ignorant and bigoted personality! What business had she to complicate his existence in this way? If he could have had his will he would have ignored his grandmother, but he had to obey Mahatma now” (p.79-80). He also speaks sharply to his Granny trying to make her understand who Gandhiji is. He rebukes his Granny for understanding only edibles, dinner, fasting at night and nothing else. He feels elated being served and cared by Bharati. He reflects: “[s]he is almost my wife, she is doing what a wife would do, good girl! God bless her” (p.240). Mahatmaji makes Bharati Guru of Sriram. Gandhi says: “Be happy! Bharati will look after you…. Remember that she is your guru, and think of her with reverence and respect, and you will be all right and she will be all right” (p.93). Sriram takes time to digest this statement and thinks that, “the whole thing is extremely false. She ought to be my wife and come to my arms” (p.100). Sriram’s patriarchal ego never allows him to think Bharati, a female, to be his Guru. “Absurd to think that she was just his ‘Guru’, Guru indeed! Absurd that a comely young woman should be set to educate a man! Educate him in what? He chuckled at the thought” (p.101). He embraces Bharati to satisfy his male ego and enjoys her discomfiture: “[h]e had never seen her so girlish and weak. He felt a momentary satisfaction that he had quashed her pride, quelled her turbulence” (p.133).

Dr D.V.Vijayalakshmi, observes: “Bharati, the heroine of Waiting for the Mahatma is a sensible Malgudi Portia who turned her Bassanio (Sriram) from a mere irresponsible romantic hero to a self-disciplined leader capable of sacrifice, altruism and charity.”24 However, Bharati does not bring any kind of transformation in Sriram’s
character. In psychological terminology transformation is taken to mean a deep change in the existing personality structure. Sriram’s personality remains the same throughout the novel. His actions constructive or destructive are solely done for the purpose to have Bharati as his wife. It has got nothing to do with his personality transformation which is evident from his statements like: “[t]hat if she had married me I should probably not have died or something like that” (p.155). He wishes “Britain would leave India, so that he might return to Kabir Street and live in peace with Bharati and Granny” (p.162). Bharati does not give his whole life a new meaning and a new dimension because at the end of the novel Sriram is same man as he was. The development of his character is in circular motion. He ends where he starts which is evident by his statement towards the end of the novel: “Trust. Who wants her trust? I only want her” (p.241). Sriram waits for five years thinking of nothing to fulfil his desire to marry Bharati. He is focused and dedicated. Therefore, eventually he wins the battle to have Bharati as his wife.

As in almost all his early novels, we also have in this novel a character of Granny whose character is reflected in the words of her grandson Sriram: “[s]he who dominated the landscape under the roof of Number 14 lost her stature completely in the open” (p.11). Granny herself confesses: “[w]hat else can I know?, a poor ignorant hag like me! Do I read the newspapers? Do I listen to lectures? Am I told what is what by someone” (p.83)? This is the stark reality of all the grannies Narayan has depicted. Granny dominates over the things lying under the roof not the people living under the roof. Granny wants to invite people on Sriram’s birthday but he strictly forbids her and she refrains from it. Sriram never tells his Granny about his movements and intentions. She keeps on waiting for him all the time and when asks his whereabouts she gets insulted.
Sriram feels that, "he had a far greater problem to tackle than appeasing the mood of a mere Granny" (p.63). Sriram never reciprocates Granny’s love although he believes that Granny has always been a father and a mother to him. Granny is a character who comes within the framework of ‘pātvrata’ tradition, where she suffers silently. She is the daughter of the soil and has inherited age-old tradition. Her courage lies in meek or at times cheerful way of facing poverty and calamity.

Narayan’s character Bharati is an idealization of women in the modern Indian context and Bharati, as an ideal woman is a combination of all the best things, all in one. Therefore, she is neither an emancipated woman nor a passive one who accepts her position as a way of the world, but she is an ideal character Narayan has ever created. Throughout the novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* Narayan offers a number of explorations of what it is to be an Indian woman and makes his heroine a role-model for Indian women. Virginia Woolf’s description of the status of a woman is perfectly applicable to Bharati:

> Imaginatively she is of highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant; she pervades poetry from cover to cover, she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction, in fact she was the slave of the any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips. In real life she could hardly read, could hardly spell, and was the property of her husband. 25
In 1947 after fifty years of agitation and political pressure on the part of social reformers, Madras Devdasi’s Act was passed and devdasis were forced to give up their profession and an unusual way of life. They were stranded, having no source of income. Narayan presents the predicament of devadasis in the novel *The Guide* by making his heroine Rosie, a devadasi. Rosie is a product of the reformers’ campaign to eradicate temple dancing in South India.

*The Painter of Signs* was published in 1976 at the time when women’s movement had stirred up the whole world and U. N had decided to celebrate the year 1975-85 as an International Women’s Year. Women had started protesting for their social, political and economic rights besides all other demands. In India family-planning program was introduced. Men and women were recruited for this job. The novel *The Painter of Signs* was inspired by this very movement.

Much of our history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: male/female, dominate/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior, moral/immoral, black/white. We are living in a bifurcated world and the bifurcating nature of our species forces us to see everything in terms of binary oppositions. In that way, woman is considered not a human being as a whole who could have human weaknesses and strengths but: “[w]oman has traditionally been seen as either saint or devil….Virgin Mary or Eve.” She is respected as mother and suspected as seducer. But with the advent of women’s movement norms have changed. Female characters of grey shades who are neither black nor out and out white are portrayed. Nonetheless, there remains a considerable lag between changes in attitudes and in
behavior and structural lag in developing and adopting such kind of literary discourses. Narayan, even after being an advocate of female freedom and individuality, could not successfully come out of this binary opposition.

*The Guide* (1958) and *The Painter of Signs* (1976) by Narayan, which set new waves by introducing many trends are in fact, very traditional and orthodox as far as the role division of the sexes is concerned. These novels are emphatic affirmation of the patriarchal set up, which reduces women to either stereotypically angelic or stereotypically demonic. Rosie from *The Guide* and Daisy from *The Painter of Signs* are portrayed as immoral or dangerous seductresses who lead to the downfall of the male protagonists because they refuse to be selfless; they act on their own initiatives and reject the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for them. They are the source of transgressive female power, which is clearly evident even at the time of their introduction.

The moment Rosie descends from the train she demands to see cobra-dance. She becomes ecstatic to see cobra-dance and begins dancing like cobra which signifies danger, threat and bad omen for Malgudians: “[s]he watched it swaying with the raptest attention. She stretched out her arm slightly and swayed it in imitation of the movement; she swayed her whole body to the rhythm-for just a second” (p.68). Raju, her boy friend, also acknowledges her bad effect on him: “[m]y troubles would not have started but for Rosie” (p.9). Narayan’s female character ‘Shanti’ in *Mr Sampath* also carries a handbag made of cobra skin. She is also a threat to the Malgudians. Snake and snake dance symbolize Rosie’s passionate love for dance and throughout the novel she is known as a ‘snake-woman’. In *The Painter of Signs* Raman, the protagonist also thinks of Daisy, the heroine: “[s]he looks terrible... She seemed to grin and looked like a demoness!
Soorpanaka’s approach should have had the same effect on Rama” (p.43). Narayan compares these female characters with demonesses and witches because according to Gauthier: “[i]f the figure of witch appears wicked, it is because she poses a real danger to phallocratic society.” For witches and demonesses are the most deliberate violators of societal tradition so are these heroines and this is the way society defines women who break conventions.

Narayan has made these heroines too emancipated to be ideal Indian women. Their English names Rosie and Daisy suggest the lack of traditionalism. Raju wonders why she calls herself Rosie. She does not come from a foreign land. She is just an Indian. Rosie changes her name to ‘Nalini’ considering: “[i]t’s not a sober and sensible name” (p.176). Daisy about whom Raman observes: “[w]hat a name for someone who looked so very Indian, and traditional and gentle” (p.31). These two heroines also do not have surnames. Hence, these women can not be absorbed in their husbands’ or parents’ identity.

Not only name, but their professions are also very unorthodox. Rosie is a dancer. People only from lower strata of the society prefer this occupation. Rosie, a fatherless girl, tries to transform temple dance into an art form for public stages and considers her dance as a national treasure. Still this transformation of dance does not bring proper respect for her because in Indian society dancing is basically a profession of devdasis who are considered as ‘public women’, ‘temple prostitutes’ and ‘dedicated women’.

Daisy is a family planning officer. In executing her job she has to lecture men and women on birth control. She explains to the villagers the process of birth and its control. “Daisy explained physiology, anatomy and sexual intercourse, with charts or, if a
blackboard was available, with sketches in chalk. She never felt shy or hesitant but sounded casual” (p.59). Narayan shows that if a woman steps out to be a career woman she has to be bold enough to execute her job.

Rosie and Daisy have much in common. They are outsiders coming to Malgudi. They do not have glorified past. Rosie has low birth. She is a daughter of a devadasi. She is an M.A. She knows only her mother’s name. She does not know her father’s name. She herself admits:

I belong to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers; my mother, grandmother, and, before her, her mother. Even as a young girl I danced in our village temple. You know how our caste is viewed?....‘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 (p.84).

Daisy runs away from home at the age of twelve because she wants to build her career. She renounces her parents and family life for the sake of independence. She is an orphan in spite of having parents. Narayan wants to convey that only women of low birth can do what these heroines do and they can not be fitted into the framework of this ideal world.

Both Rosie and Daisy challenge the belief that women are inherently better adapted to traditional female sex roles. Their adaptability to the public role is astonishing. Daisy travels tirelessly. She sleeps on a little piece of carpet; she eats whatever food is available - without taboos of any kind. She bathes in a public well, washes and dries her
clothes anywhere, stays in a lonely hut and is an extremely understanding woman. She has a perfect timetable and routine. She gives proper guidance to the villagers to follow birth control norms. Raman acknowledges her passion for work: “[w]hat a lot of policing she was doing! Raman thought. She must really be mad! She will fight and shun people who bring up large families. Some madness must have got into her head quite early in life and stayed on there” (p.67). She is like a yogi whose eyes are fixed on the centre of his nose, seeing nothing else in life. Similarly, Rosie dances tirelessly. She does household work happily with Raju’s mother without complaining. She is least bothered about the past and looks forward hopefully to the future. Even when she is taunted and embarrassed by others, she never stops her dance practice. She is a woman who adapts herself in any situation and in any place; whether it is her mother’s house, husband’s, boyfriend’s or her own. She manages everything in the absence of Raju and for that reason Raju feels jealous of her self-reliance. With the help of characters like Rosie and Daisy Narayan tries to explain that a woman has to be tough and committed to the chosen ideologies to be an independent woman - not only committed but she has to be passionate and obsessed. He depicts their passion towards work as a sort of madness. He gives an impression that these two women are somewhat mad in pursuing their professions.

These two heroines practice self-interest and self-gratification that are supposed to be prime virtues of men. Being educated, both of them know how to please themselves. Rosie marries Marco because he for Rosie is an instrument of getting all her needs fulfilled. She herself says:
The question was, whether it would be good to marry so much above our wealth and class. But all the women in our 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 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 (p.85).

Marco perhaps, “married out of a desire to have someone care for his practical life, but unfortunately his choice was wrong - this girl herself was a dreamer if ever there was one” (p.113). In order to seek forgiveness from Marco for her adultery, Rosie breaks the relationship with Raju abruptly without explaining things to him. She follows Marco day after day like a dog waiting for his grace leaving aside all the pride and self-respect. But Marco, adamant in his decision, deserts her. Rosie who deserts Raju carelessly, returns to him. At Raju’s house, she is insulted and abused by Raju’s mother and uncle but she does not retort back and tolerates everything patiently. With the help of Raju she becomes a professional dancer and gradually rises to fame. One day she tells Raju: “[e]ven if I have seven rebirths, I won’t be able to repay my debt to you” (p.184). But she fails to tolerate even extravagance and commercialization of her dance by Raju. When Raju is apprehended for forgery, she firmly speaks to Raju: “[i]f I have to pawn my last possession, I’ll do it to save you from jail. But once it’s over, leave me once and for all;
that's all I ask. Forget me. Leave me to live or die, as I choose; that's all” (p.221-222). She asks forgiveness from Marco and abandons Raju mercilessly. She shows her intense desire to spend the rest of her life with her husband Marco. Rosie fails both as a respectable wife and as a glamorous beloved because she is there all for herself.

Daisy is modern in her outlook and temperament. She herself admits: “[a]lthough I was thirteen I had my own notions of what was good for me...I would like to work rather than be a wife” (p.131). Daisy, a family planning officer, knows not only how to achieve her goal but also to keep people in place. She is authoritative, determined, decisive, cold, callous and commanding; she is every inch an embodiment of ‘male’ qualities. Daisy is clear in her goal as well as mission. She herself says, “I like to serve the people in what seems to me the best way, that’s all. And in this area allotted to me now, if I can help arrest the population growth by even five percent within this year, I’ll be satisfied” (p.58). She asks Raman to accompany her and to paint the walls on the tour of villages. “She had offered him the privilege of accompanying her and he had accepted it, that was all. She treated him as a sort of a trailer” (p.63). Her ambition is to arrest the population growth and she pursues this aim with religious intensity. She develops physical relationship with Raman and plans to marry him. Raman madly falls in love with her and also wants to lead his life with Daisy. “I can’t live without her” (p.77). For him: “[l]ife without Daisy’s company seemed impossible” (p.110). He often expresses his love to her, “I like you, I feel lost without you” (p.125). But for Daisy, “‘I love you,’ ‘I like you’, are words which can hardly be real. You have learnt them from novels and Hollywood films perhaps. When a man says ‘I love you’ and the woman repeats ‘I love you’ - it sounds mechanical and unconvincing. Perhaps credible in Western society, but
sound silly in ours. People really in love would be struck dumb, I imagine” (p.125-126). She puts two conditions before Raman: first, that they should have no children and second, if by mischance one is born he will give the child away and keep herself free to pursue her social work. She also tells him, “If you want to marry me, you must leave me to my own plans even when I am a wife. On any day you question why and how, I will leave you” (p.159). Raman makes all the compromises. Despite that Daisy deserts him ruthlessly.

Raman says, “That is the tragedy of womanhood – utility articles whether in bed or out” (p.46). Ironically, here the roles of the sexes are reversed and Raman and Raju become the utility articles for Daisy and Rosie respectively. Although it is Raman and Raju who are fascinated by these heroines and they themselves initiate these relationships, yet it is they, who are trapped. Throughout the novel they express their love and run after their beloveds but their girlfriends’ attitude towards them is purely mechanical. Their love is only for their profession and they are ambivalently and ambiguously physically attracted towards their paramours. They develop physical relationship with their boyfriends because for them sex is “all powerful instinct which demands fulfilment against the claims of morals, belief and social restrictions.”

They never show any kind of guilt or repentance and forgive themselves at the very first hand. Raman tries hard to save himself from her but succumbs to magnetic power of Daisy. Although he knows well that Daisy, “is a sire, planning to eat me up, I suppose. I must be careful” (p.47). He takes a very good care of her like a traditional Indian housewife. “What a fool I am not to have noticed her mood! He said to himself. Smiling mood and non-smiling one, talking mood and silent one, caressing and non-
caressing. How on earth am I to judge when to do what, when to say what, and how to do the right thing at all times" (p.171)? When Raman dare ask her where she is going, she snaps the relationship with him. Raman pleads: “I’ll no way interfere with you, live as you live, in the open or in a hut, walk barefoot in the forest paths, seek nothing, demand nothing, I will not mind any hardship if I can be with you. Please” (p.178). But Daisy adamant in her decision speaks coldly to Raman: “I want to forget my moments of weakening, and you must forget me. ‘that’s all” (p.179). Then she speaks rather earnestly, “Oh, forgive me for misleading you” (p.180). Finally she speaks like a typical Indian man: “don’t again talk of the past or think of it. I am wiping it out from my mind” (p.181). She breaks the relationship and leaves Malgudi. Raman could only say like a traditional Indian woman, “I’ll love no one except you. Understand, you are my wife. Come back to me. I’ll keep the home always ready for you” (p.182).

From Raju’s tongue superlatives drop glibly for Rosie and he reduces himself to a man whose purpose of life is to amuse his girlfriend Rosie. He reflects, “The only reality in my life and consciousness was Rosie” (p.118). While Rosie, after developing extra-marital relationship with Raju, starts paying extra attention to Marco’s need. Raju feels that, “[s]he was trying a new technique on him, after the inauguration of our own intimacy. She arranged his room. She spoke to Joseph about his food” (p.114). She starts saying, “After all he is my husband. I have to respect him. I cannot leave him there.... After all he has been so good to me, given me comfort and freedom” (p.119-120). C. D. Narsimhaiah remarks in this context: “especially in the way he takes care to preserve Rosie from inner taint Narayan seems to be affirming what has been hailed in the Indian tradition as the Feminine Principle in life.”
However, it does not seem that Rosie's inner self is not tainted. She deserts Raju and wants to be with her husband Marco. But when Marco refuses to accept a wife who has committed adultery, she returns to Raju. After that, she neither for once remembers Marco, nor does she mention his positive aspects. She always shows the dark side of Marco until she sees Marco's photograph in a leading magazine 'Illustrated Weekly.' The photo of Marco in the book drives her crazy. She suddenly forgets her husband's apathy and cold behaviour towards her. She again starts saying, "After all, after all he is my husband" (p.201). "I do, I deserved nothing less. Any other husband would have throttle me then and there" (P.201). She starts all these acts just to have Marco back in her life because the respect she can get from Marco can never be given by Raju and one must not forget that she marries Marco only for social prestige. Now she has name and fame, she wants someone equal to her own status and Marco, no doubt, if not superior, is her peer. She sees that there is a possibility of reunion and if she reunites with Marco she will get the same status she has always craved for. She is again ready to sacrifice her dance for him. Therefore, she leaves Raju easily and tells him to forget her. For Raju it is a big blow:

I couldn’t understand her. I had an appalling thought that for months and months I had eaten, slept and lived with her, without in the least understanding her mind. What were her moods? Was she sane or insane? Was she a liar, did she bring all these charges against her husband at our first meeting just to seduce me? Would she be leveling various charges against me now that she seemed to
be tiring of me - even to the extent of saying that I was a moron and imbecile? I felt bewildered and unhappy. I didn’t understand her sudden affection for her husband (p.202).

A woman has to change and use the man as per her convenience if she wants to be emancipated and only monster women are supposed to do this who are voracious, all devouring and consuming. Rosie and Daisy follow this principle and become the perfect example of monster women. The patriarchal myth that female biology automatically makes a woman feminine and that motherhood is her natural instinct, desire and ambition, which gives her the qualities of nurturing, caring giving and sacrificing is subverted by Rosie and Daisy. Motherhood is neither a compulsory duty for them nor a cherished ambition. Before marriage Daisy puts condition before Raman that they should not be having children or if, there is one by mistake, she will give the child away. Daisy goes against the ancient values, denies the importance of children and motherhood in women’s life and even goes against Shashtras. She views children as symbols of defeat for her cause of family planning. Similarly, Rosie has no kids and never desires for them. These heroines are far cry from conventional feminine types.

Nevertheless, Narayan tries to make the character of Rosie and Daisy acceptable and to win some kind of sympathy by making them appear as victims depicting Raju, Marco and Raman in normal patriarchal set-up. Marco, a traditional Indian husband, keeps himself busy in his cave-research and hardly cares for his wife Rosie and accuses Rosie of having morbid interests and says, “If a man has to have peace of mind it is best that he forget the fair sex” (p.71). He himself commits adultery but when he comes to
know about his wife's relationships he stops talking to her, stops eating the food she
touches and finally says: "[t]his is my last word to you. Don't talk to me. You can go
where you please or do what you please" (p.151). But when he sees his wife Rosie
becomes a famous dancer, he comes back to her whom once he had despised. His
indifference towards Rosie gives reason to Raju to love and sympathize with her. But
Raju himself begins to exploit Rosie and commercializes her art. Raju believes, "I had a
monopoly of her and nobody had anything to do with her....I resented anyone's wanting
to make a direct approach to her. She was my property" (p.189). Further, "I liked to keep
her in a citadel" (p.193). Raju becomes a spendthrift and wastes all Rosie's hard-earned
money.

Raman tries to seduce Daisy but fails and feels no guilt or shame like Ramani,
Marco and Mr Sampath. He says, "He had done nothing to feel guilty about - the normal
drive of a force which kept the whole world spinning. Nothing to be ashamed of, nothing
to be apologetic about. If he had not tried to make use of an opportunity in the normal
manner, he would have been considered a worthless sort in some circles" (p.98). He tries
to master over Daisy but fails.

Finally these two heroines stand all alone in life. It seems that they pursue their
own ends single-mindedly and end up being quite content with their lives but unhappily
married or single they are left all alone in this whole universe. They challenge or disrupt
many established socio-cultural norms like personal identity, sexual mores, family
arrangement, childbearing customs, educational patterns, religious ideology, political and
economic structures for full participation in public life and for independence. The picture
of these two heroines that emerges even by subverting the myth is dismal one. They are
certainly not the positive model for independent women because Narayan seems to convey that these heroines reject aesthetic ideal of womanhood and thus can not be ‘decent’ women from ‘decent’ families and they also possess duplicitous arts that allow them both to seduce and steal male generative energy and therefore, at the end of the novel, they are forced out of Malgudi to live in isolation like terrible sorceress-goddesses. Narayan explains subtly that this is the destiny of a woman who transgresses male power.

While for Raju and Raman separation from the clutches of heroines gives a sort of relief. Raju realizes: “[n]either Marco nor I had any place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she herself had underestimated all along” (p.223). Raman throws the key and says: “’[t]o hell with it’ ‘an act which somehow produced the great satisfaction of having his own way at last” (p.183).

Raju’s mother and Raman’s aunt are the traditional models for Indian women. Raju’s mother is a simple, suffering and sincere woman while his father possesses traits of a typical Indian man: “[h]e was a man of uncertain temper and one could not guess how he would react to interruptions, and so my mother coached me to go up, watch his mood, and gently remind him of food and home” (p.19). Raju’s mother waits for her husband till late hours and bears all the atrocities of her husband in the name of being a ‘pativrata’ wife. She does not like Rosie and calls her a snake-woman. She often tells anecdotes about husbands to Rosie like Janamma in The Dark Room: “good husbands, mad husbands, reasonable husbands, unreasonable ones, savage ones, slightly dangerous ones, moody ones, and so on and so forth; but it was always the wife, by her doggedness, perseverance, and patience, that brought him round. She quoted numerous mythological stories of Savitri, Seetha, and all the well-known heroines” (p.155).
Raman's aunt is a widow and barren. Her character is also depicted within the Indian traditional patriarchal set up. She brings Raman up. She works all day long and goes to the temple in the evening to tell stories from Hindu mythology. Raman feels, "a stab of sympathy for her. Morning till night, planning something for his delectation - for years, unwavering attention to his needs" (p.27). Raman never acknowledges his Aunt's contribution: "Aunt had no better occupation but gathering fodder for him night and day and keeping them in proper condition" (p.164).

Narayan does not change at all. He never progresses significantly over the years. Right from the beginning he, in his own way, is guarded about his claims for the independence of women and men. For Narayan, it is a fact that women do appear to be victims of an oppressive system and men are victims of man's image of man: hard cold, rational and analytical. His major concern is to warn men to mend their ways towards women because women can be a threat to their mastery as it is evident in the novels The Guide and The Painter of Signs and therefore, he at no point encourages women to challenge all social or cultural norms and practices as the solution to male hegemony. He is fearful about the change of subjectivity and always craves to work towards a level of communication in male-female relationship that is built upon mutual respect, trust and individual self-worth.
Notes

12 Ashtiani, Tarbiat-I nisvan, p.69 (Amin, *The Liberation of Women*, p. 72)
17 Cited in Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante*, 1875, p. 60.


