Chapter Seven

Summation

She [woman] realized her position now . . . . She was an individual with pride and with a soul, and she wasn’t going to submit to everything hereafter.

R.K. Narayan

If woman realizes her potentiality and manipulates it in the right direction, no backward forces can withstand her.

Akilon

The works of two contemporary writers written in two different languages can be described, in the words of Weisstein, as “politically unified and linguistically divided” (14). Though R.K. Narayan and Akilon have dealt with the most turbulent period of Indian history and witnessed the aftermath of Independence, they did not have any direct contact with each other during their lifetime. Still their novels have turned out to be comparable mainly on account of their affinities in thematic commonness, dealing with the day-to-day problems of the middle class and delving deep into the emotional and intellectual spheres of womanhood. An attempt has been made in the present study to carry out a comprehensive study of the women characters of Narayan and Akilon, in terms of their binary relationship, mostly along the lines suggested by Remak: “A comparative
literature study does not have to be comparative on every page nor even in every chapter but the overall intent, emphasis and execution must be comparative” (13). The present study, thus, is a new venture in the field of comparative literature and it throws much light on the psyche of Indian woman and opens up a new vista in the socio-cultural fabric of the nation.

The multifaceted genius of Narayan and Akilon is restricted to the scope of this investigation focusing solely on their women characters describing their actions and reactions in different roles and in different situations with a view to establishing meaningful attitudinal, perceptual and ideological similarities and differences between the women characters of Narayan and Akilon.

At a time when the country was still viewed through a colonial filter, and when writers like E.M. Forster and Paul Scott shaped the world’s perception of India, it is a tribute to Narayan’s genius that he could write in a deceptively simple prose about a deceptively simple place called Malgudi and still win a place in the hearts of readers everywhere. If the true test of a writer’s work is the span across which his work holds, then Narayan’s place in the pantheon is secure. Narayan, India’s greatest writer in English of the 20th century was also a literary pioneer, a man who quietly and unselfconsciously trod new ground and unfolded new possibilities. And
through the magical art of R.K. Narayan, the Malgudi's creator, each individual, especially the women enters a new world, shares its hopes, delusions, sad-comic elements and strategies which she has come across in diverse walks of life.

Malgudi's "nowhere status" – even if its setting and idiom are unmistakably South Indian – was to prove central to Narayan's literary magic. It freed him to weave into his fictional world the diversities of his own background. In Malgudi, his invented small town, with its contrasting qualities of fluidity and rootedness, Narayan could draw upon mythology and folklore while fashioning a thoroughly 20th century prose style of his own - simple, pellucid and devoid pretentiousness. Through his intended small town, he found it possible to dissolve barriers of strangeness making the rhythms and intricacies of Indian life accessible to people of other cultures, revealing the universal in the particular.

But at the same time this is not to say that his culture-oriented outlook transcends regional limitations and reaches a common arena of consciousness as it relates to the domain of the female mind. Narayan's acute awareness of human problems, especially those of women and his dedicated but non committal approach to women and society lend a new dimension to his treatment of the women characters in his novels. On the
other hand, the practical minded Akilon, while dealing with themes of varying kinds, exhibits a capacity to think freely without social bias or prejudice.

Akilon’s may be an ‘ideal thinking’ with deep personal impressions as is often reflected in the creations of his women characters and he remains a social reformer voicing his views with conviction unlike Narayan who objectively represents the panoramic view of his world of women with a fine sense of humour subtle irony bordering at times on the ridicule.

The impact of Western and Tamil writers on R.K. Narayan and Akilon, specially in the creation of women characters, cannot be brushed aside because the artist consciously or unconsciously reacts to the environments which influence him. Narayan, being an Indo-Anglian writer, was more exposed to Western thoughts and Akilon, being a spirited Tamilian, was to a very large extent influenced by his predecessor Kalki.

An artist’s work is often related to his personal life. What he has seen and lived through, the events in which he has taken part and the lives, and characters or individuals with whom he has shared experiences serve as source materials for his creative work. Indeed, “The novel is one bright book of life” (Lawrence 133). And what is remarkable in the treatment of women characters in the novels of both R.K. Narayan and Akilon is that their
intense personal experiences in the ‘company of their intimate women’ find a faithful artistic transmutation in the portrayal of their women characters. When Susila (ET) dies, the light of Krishna’s life is gone. But the spiritual revelation of Susila offers mental consolation and sustains Krishna’s life. Susila is an incarnation of Rajam, the wife of Narayan in real life. The death\(^1\) of his young wife Rajam from typhoid was the greatest challenge faced by Narayan in real life. Her death plunged him into an all-encompassing darkness. His eventual return to a semblance of moral life and to creative literary pursuits were an arduous, complex and courageous struggle as truly reflected in the life of Susila and Krishna (ET).

In the same way the portrayal of Uma (PV) has its roots in Akilon’s contact with Swarnalatha\(^2\) who inspired him to become a writer. Uma shows that a woman can shape the destiny of a man’s life, just as Swarnalatha enkindled the flame of creativity in Akilon. It is Uma’s influence that makes Thanikachalam a successful writer. Thus both Narayan and Akilon in their works faithfully portray the women at least in respect of the women characters who are reflections of women who come across in their real lives.

\(^1\) Narayan’s wife Rajam died in 1939, when he was hardly 33 years old.

\(^2\) Akilon, even in the early part of his literary career developed an ‘artistic companionships - a spiritually transcendant relationship - with Swarnalatha, an ardent admirer of his writings, well outside the conjugal bond. Thus invariably in all his novels the protagonist is within the orbit of a woman who is not his wedded partner in life.
Thus their novels turn out to be fictionalized autobiographies in so far as they deal with the women characters.

The familial and socio-cultural factors have immensely contributed to the almost life-like creations of the women characters in the novels of both R.K. Narayan and Akilon. Both of them, rather consciously, subscribe to the view that there is a rightful place for women in shaping human culture in the domestic as well as national arena. Both of them believe in a harmonious human relationship, between man and woman. Some of their novels show how peaceful it is for man to be in amity with women and how bothersome it could be for him to indulge in deeds that provoke woman, the Sakthi behind creation.

The women of Narayan and Akilon reveal themselves as unique embodiment of moral virtues and emancipatory ideas. This binary opposite, the very quintessence of one’s way of life, has made the women characters of both Narayan and Akilon at once traditional and orthodox on the one hand and modern and radical on the other. Thus, in short, the present study may also be looked upon as a modest attempt to project Indian womanhood in the international arena with their progressive ideals which would not in the least violate the cherished values of man – woman relationship and socio-familial morality.
The thematic development of the novels of both R.K. Narayan and Akilon, in respect of the women characters the man–woman relationship, primarily centre around and rest on the pivot of the conjugal cosmos, socio-cultural ethos, spiritual visions and womanist values. Irreconcilable conflict between life partners shatters the conjugal cosmos leading to domestic chaos. The main cause of conjugal conflict between Savitri (DR) and her husband Ramani is male domination and conjugal orthodoxy. Indian familial system rather unquestioningly vouches for the domination of man. But it is unbearable for Savitri when she is treated by her husband as if she has no right in bringing up her son. When she learns that her husband has fallen on evil ways, entering into an illicit affair with another woman it becomes unbearable. She who moans and sulks in the darkness, decides to quit her husband’s house.

Akilon’s Vatsala (Pen), on the other hand, misconceives that she is neglected by her husband and refuses to go with him to his native village. The male ego in Sandhanam (Vatsala’s husband) does not permit him to stay in her bungalow any longer. He feels it is an insult to enjoy the luxuries at the doorstep of his father-in-law. As a result there is breach of harmony between the husband and wife. However, when the cloud of misunderstanding vanishes, the conjugal cosmos is restored.
The incompatibility between partners lead to conjugal collapse and eventually to utter conjugal chaos. Marco’s inability to understand the genuine and just demands of his wife, and Sankari’s (PM) miscalculations and misconception of the male ego lead to conjugal collapse. Her too much of faith in Gurumoorthy clouds her wisdom and drives her to lose herself.¹ Though she reorganizes her life, her collapse is irretrievable. Anandi (CP) and Manickom, Sundari (CP) and Annamalai are also couples who encounter the harsh realities of conjugal collapse. Both the couples are driven towards collapse due to ill-matched marriage. Presenting Susila (ET) and Subatra (Pep) as ideal wives with all virtues like patience, understanding, mastery of situation and interest in caring husbands, Narayan and Akilon surpass all past masters in painting conjugal harmony. Through the exchange of mutual adorations and shared anxieties these women characters reveal marital bliss.

Both Narayan and Akilon have dealt with the habits and customs, faith and formalities followed by women in day-to-day life and the problems they face in family as well as in society. Woman’s role in domestic matter and social affairs is the very corner-stone on which the structure of the familial-society combine is built. The orthodox socio-familial structures

¹ She attains the 'holy motherhood' outside wedlock.
demand that marriages are arranged by parents and that woman does not have the right to choose her life partner. It is usually arranged on the basis of the status of the family and the ‘matching of the horoscope’ in the backdrop of the customary procedure of ‘bride-seeing’. Caste and dowry generally decide the fate of woman marriage. “Marriages are, of course, made in heaven but they are a business in our part of the universe” (AWN 46). Love marriages seldom occur in the novels of Narayan, while love marriages do happen in Akilon’s novels.

Woman has certain well-defined place in the family. She who is the mainstream passes on the family customs and traditions to the younger generation, the progeny as it were. The mother-in-law of Susila (ET) trains her in all household duties. The women of Narayan are highly religious and they manifest deep faith in God. Regularly offering prayer to God is an integral part of their life, their very existence. In some houses a part of the house is specially designed and set apart exclusively for performing poojas. In Susila’s (ET) house there is an alcove to worship God. In Sita’s (WN) house also there is a special room set apart for prayer and pooja.

Most of the women characters of Akilon are victims of dowry menace and oppressions of various kinds. Bhuvana (EP) and Radha (VE) are not only victims of the evils of dowry system but of casteism as well.
The woman who has fallen in love with a man is harassed both at home and in the society. The movements of Radha are strictly watched by her brother and sister-in-law at home and by Sumbamoorthy, the neighbour. Bhuvana’s (EP) as well as Bharati’s love ends in failure due to their parents’ inability to pay a fat dowry. Though the women characters are inclined to fall in love, most of the women characters, jealously guard their virtues and uphold the basic values of life.

Naturally, none of the women characters of Narayan and Akilon develop extra marital relationship except Rosie (Gu). But her act is justified on the ground that she is not treated as a ‘human being’ at all, and her human instinct is not recognized by Marco. Secondly she feels penitant and confesses her sinful act of violation of conjugal bond and seeks forgiveness. In his attempt at presenting women as a ‘blemishless being’ in all its purity and sanctity, Narayan seems to portray her as the preserver and protector of all noble virtues and the cultural heritage of the nation.

The influence of Gandhian ideals on the women characters is a major component in the novels of both R.K. Narayan and Akilon. Narayan’s Bharati (WM) and Akilon’s Bharati (EP) live the Gandhian ideals. Both the novelists pay special attention to the Gandhian influence on the women characters in all the three spheres of human existence - political, social and
spiritual. Bharati (WM) is a political fighter. She involves in freedom struggle by her active participation in the ‘Quit India Movement’. Her contribution towards social regeneration and societal transformation is also significant. She has true faith in God; ‘Ram Nam’ is her usual prayer, but she remains essentially secular in her outlook. In her orphanage she encourages children to conduct any prayer according to their religious faith. Whatever religion they followed, what really matters is one’s faith in God, who is worshipped by different names in different religions.

Akilon’s Bharati (EP), though does not involve herself in any political activities, comes nearer to Narayan’s Bharati (WM) in her social involvement and spiritual amplitude. She is inspired by Ganesan’s (her husband) spirited movement for abolishing casteism, crusade against untouchability and wishes to live as a true ‘Daughter of India’ as her name itself implies. Most of the qualities identified as Gandhian traits such as truth, ahimsa, simplicity and social awareness do well manifest in Bharati and in all her actions.

Narayan’s Daisy (PS) and Akilon’s Bhuvana (EP) and Radha (VE) are the women who come to possess Gandhian tenets of life in the social or spiritual plane. The Gandhian influence leads these women characters to transcend the man-made social barriers, status, rank and caste, and look beyond the petty, insignificant trivialities of life. They are also champions of
socio-political causes as men are. Radha possesses ‘single-mindedness to
purpose’ which Gandhiji considered essential for a person to succeed in life.
It is her adherence to this principle that strengthens her to succeed in her
struggle and marry Chandran who belongs to a different caste. Bhuvana
(VE) is spiritually enlightened by Chidambaram, the true follower of Gandhi.
She is ready to spend all her wealth for the revival of a true Gandhian family
and decides to live a simple austere life.

Parvathy (VE), Lakshmiammal (EP) and Santha (PV) and Narayan’s
Grace (VS) are Gandhian characters who excel in their mode of life in one of
the three realms of life - political, social or spiritual. Narayan’s Grace
abounds in her admiration of Indian culture, especially devotion and faith.
Though she is deserted by her lover, though she has come from an alien
country, she wishes to serve in India mainly because she finds spiritual
delight in it. Parvathy (VE) joins her husband in his boycott of foreign goods
as part of Indian Independence struggle. Santha (PuV) also appeals as a
Gandhian in consoling and helping those in trouble. Her support enables
Murugayyan to lead an honest life. What is of real interest is that all
Gandhian women characters thus, in a way, are forerunners of women’s
emancipation and remain true to their commitment till the very end.
The women of both Narayan and Akilon are portrayed as feminists pleading for their rights. As women's issues have traditionally been raised by men, the liberal and emancipatory ideals in favour of women exposed by these writers gain momentum in the post-independent era. Both writers deal with the universal problem of women. As they are men writers dealing with women, both share certain common characteristics which are brought out in their distinct individual style.

Presenting women as subordinate beings and 'exposing' them as the victims of male oppression is one of the strategies adopted by these writers to bring out their feminist views. Savitri’s (DR) suffering and suffocation in the hands of Ramani her husband, and her protest in the beginning through non-cooperation and observing silence is the case in point. Revealing the weakness of male characters, presenting an understanding husband and wife and equal treatment of women are some of the other strategies employed by Narayan to bring out his feminist ideals. Whenever a difficult situation arises Nagaraj (WN) leaves the problem to his wife to solve it. Like Ramani, Nagaraj is not an egoist, unwilling to grant any right to his life partner. Rather he is an understanding husband who treats his wife respectfully and never feels odd when he seeks her advice.
Akilon also follows the same feminist strategies in his portrait of women characters. Vatsala (Pen) finds it difficult to accommodate herself to her husband’s interests outside home. She begins to hate him when he denounces his ICS title. The bitter relationship is more hardened when he refuses to stay with her in her palatial bungalow. Vatsala remains adamant in her stand, until she realizes the truth behind the service-mindedness of her husband. Sankari (PM), though cheated by Gurumoorthy in her college days, faces the battle of life with undaunted courage. She performs her duty as a physician enthusiastically and proves to the world that she can stand alone without any male help.

By comparing the weakness of man with the moral strength of woman Akilon, develops his feminist strategies. Kalyani’s (Tu) husband Murugayyan, Bhuvana’s (VE) lover Sundaresan, and Manickom (CP) are portrayed as ‘weak-charactered’ men who indulge in ‘sexual-exploits’. Bhuvana wages a war against Sundaresan and succeeds in teaching him a lesson. Presenting woman as a social revolutionary without affecting her honour and feminine virtues is another feminist strategy adopted by Akilon. Though Radha loves Chandran who belongs to a different caste, though she is ill treated within the family and outside, she comes out unscathed in all ordeals.
The evolving image of the emerging new woman is augmented by the awakened conscience of female sensibility. Woman is no longer viewed as an object of sex but as a human being with tremendous potential in all walks of life. She never allows herself to be strained within the shells of social customs or crushed by male suppression. She comes forward to resist all suppression, and dares to enjoy the legitimate rights granted to her on par with the other gender. The liberated women in Narayan’s novels continue their struggle against opposing forces. The attainment of total liberation by the new woman is effected in three stages by both Narayan and Akilon.

Savitri (DR) strikes the first stage. Her protest implies that moral virtues are essential not only for women but also for men. Since Savitri is rescued and brought back home she never continues her protest, which is taken to the next stage by Rosie (Gu). Rosie is an unconventional woman who seeks her identity through her own excellence. The society is not ready to look at her sympathetically. When she is rejected by her husband, she has no other option but to choose any opportunity and follows Raju. Rosie, as a modern woman expects mutual recognition. When she fails to achieve it in her husband, she is flattered by Raju who provides shelter and patronizes her art. Though the creative urge in Rosie is recognized by Raju, he too fails to accept her autonomy and individuality. Rather he treats her as his possession. When forgery is committed by Raju, she realizes that neither Marco nor Raju
has loved her for her own sake. As an awakened woman she decides to stand on her own self.

Urbanization and material advancement have ushered into Malgudi new changes and there prevails a liberated atmosphere. The spirit of true liberation is manifested in the character of Daisy, the family planning zealot. She marks the third stage of development towards emancipation. She is the only woman character in Malgudi novels who is in full control of all the events. She is absolutely unconventional, shatters all traditional taboos and strikingly modern in her spirit of independence. As a representative of modern woman she feels suffocated in the joint family; she feels her individuality is strangulated and seeks out an independent line of existence and becomes a family planning officer.

Though Daisy is a modern woman, she is not devoid of the feelings of love. When she is proposed marriage by Raman she does not commit herself but puts forth certain questions in contrast to the old custom of ‘interrogation’ either by the bridegroom or the groom’s parents. She assigns certain conditions for marriage. When he accepts all conditions in order to marry her, she realizes that marriage is a trap to ensnare her soaring spirit. She tells Raman that she is not fit for married life. She has the strength of will to transcend her biological urges and breaks the culturally imposed
narrow-minded domesticity and comes out as a liberated woman. She appears very simple, to look at, but stronger than steel at heart. In her seriousness and efficiency she challenges the male society. Though there are a large number of female portraits in Indian English fiction, none of them is so fully liberated as Daisy is. She does not whine or whimper, sulk or rebel. She had indeed crossed the stage of sulking and rebelling and has trained herself to stand for herself. "She is radically a new role model" (Krishnaswamy 134).

A similar evolution of the New Woman is chartered in the novels of Akilon as well. Vatsala's (Pen) protest to follow her husband marks the first stage of woman's protest. Like Savitri (DR) who returns home after a short break, Vatsala follows her husband. Still her protest to obey her husband is quite obvious and it is the initial stage of woman's march towards emancipation. Sankari (PM) carries it to the next stage. She falls a prey to the sexual desire of an inhuman devil in her blooming womanhood. The death of her father has left harsh marks in her mind. Still she is able to survive. By her own efforts she becomes a doctor and dedicates herself for the society. She remains unmarried till the end and carries out her profession wholeheartedly. In her non-dependence on any men for her future life and in her undaunted courage to face the struggles in life, she emerges as a new woman.
Anandi (CP) comes out as a full-fledged emancipated woman who marks the third stage of development of the new woman. Like Savitri, she first questions her husband and asks him to put an end to his manipulative machiavellian machination. She loaths her materialistic husband and fights with him. In the quarrel between Anandi and Manickom, her chain of wedlock falls into the hands of Manickom. Anandi takes it as an advantage and decides to live with Annamalai. She breaks the tradition and becomes the wife of her former lover.

The emancipatory women portrayed by these writers are the harbingers to Indian woman to understand their hidden potentials. It inspires them to break all blind customs and cruel fetters and emerge out as new woman with a glorious image. Narayan’s ‘New Woman’ Daisy abhors marriage and decides to live independently. Narayan does not mean that a woman should remain unmarried if she has to live happily; rather he suggests that a woman need not be forced to marry, as advocated by Gandhiji. Narayan’s treatment of the New Woman opens up a new vision of womanhood. It endows her with full right to decide about her future, including whether to marry or not.

Akilon’s portrayal of woman enjoying marital status is far more realistic than Narayan’s. Narayan’s novels often tend to present women as
passive sufferers who seldom dare to take bold steps in life as Akilon’s women do, in breaking the conventional shackle which binds their existence. Akilon presents the New Woman on the model of Nora of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, Rashmi in *This Time of Morning*, Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh*, all of them boldly step out of the prison-house of their marital bonds. When man fails to give them companionship, understanding and concern they long for in marriage, they are forced to break the bond of marriage. Even in breaking the tradition, Anandi keeps up the ‘value of wedlock’. Only when the chain is broken and only when it goes to the hands of Manickom that she decides to leave him.

The liberated women in the novels of Narayan, by dint of sheer hard work and determination, continue their struggle against opposing forces, not seeking male help either in personal life or professional career. Daisy (PS) remains unmarried and continues her service. Grace (VS) decides to get back to her homeland. Though she is deserted by Mali, she is not disappointed, but she finds a job and lives alone. Rosie (Gu) decides not to live with Raju, although she does not rejoin Marco, her husband. The liberated woman of Akilon, on the other hand, rises above situations. She continues her relentless fight against social customs and strengthens her life as well as other people’s lives. Narayan’s is an indirect crusade against society whereas Akilon’s is a direct one. Narayan opposes the too much domination of male gender over
the female gender and ridicules them by exposing their (men’s) moral weakness.

The portrayal of women characters in R.K. Narayan and Akilon holds up a vision of Indian society, which is in throes of a radical change. It is ready to accept a woman of courage and conviction who seeks independent means of survival if she remains virtuous. Akilon’s exposure of women paves the way for a new awareness between both genders. It bestows on woman, a new outlook and will-power to face the challenges of life and on men, an awareness that pulls them into the orbit of moral virtues.

Thus the treatment of women characters in Narayan and Akilon reveals up certain basic ideals common for both men and women for genuine reorientation and revaluation. A radical restatement of the moral values is important for the revitalization of the social contract of marriage so that life becomes harmonious co-existence for both man and woman. The women further expect certain attitudinal change in men, which may solve many hard hiatus prevailing in the families particularly between husband and wife. These women tend to inject a feeling of responsibility among women themselves that they should never shirk from their ‘duty’ on the excuse of employment outside home. They are optimistic that in the changing new world order, tradition and modernity will co-exist and it will give rise to new
ideals which will be cherished without violating the moral order. In short, all women characters, however resistant they might be to certain outmoded customs and systems, however dominant they might appear, still all of them are bound by certain irrevocable institutional values which reflect the cultural heritage of India.