



CONCEPT OF FAMILY IN R. K. NARAYAN'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Family occupies an important place in Narayan's fiction. Whatever be the theme of his novels, almost all of them portray, as side issues, one or the other aspect of family life like son and parents relationship, father-son relationship, husband-wife relationship and kinship bond etc. The joint family system which survived through centuries is at last breaking up, under the pressure of modernism, the sense of kinship is still strong in Indian milieu. With intense sensibility and characteristic genius Narayan portrays this aspect of family life.

Key Words : R. K. Narayan, family, operative sensibility.

INTRODUCTION

One of the important aspects of Narayan's novels is the place of family in them. Barring a few demoniac characters like Vasu, all Narayan characters are essentially rooted in the family. Rightly does William Walsh observe :

"The family is the immediate context in which his [Narayan's] sensibility operates, and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which family relationships are treated ----."

Narayan himself told Ved Mehta :

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“To be a good writer anywhere you must have roots ---- both in religion and in family. I have these things ----”

Though the traditional joint family is breaking up all over India under the stress and strain exercised by what we may call the forces of modernism, the sense of kinship is still strong in Indian social milieu. *The Dark Room* and *The Financial Expert* for example, treat of the themes of one or the other aspect of family life.

Besides main themes, almost all his novels deal, as side issues, with one or the other forms of family relationships. For example, son and parents relationship is treated in *The Bachelor of Arts*. Chandran believes that he is independent as he has come of age; but when it comes to his dealings with his father, he holds him in differential awe, slips in through the back door after his visit to a late film as he knows his father does not approve of it. This father-son relationship stand out in bold relief once again when Chandran seeks his father's advice on how to prepare modern history for his final B.A. Father's advice irritate Chandran, but he does not argue with him.

Chandran falls in love with Malathi. He knows his father would certainly cast him off ‘if he tried to marry out of caste.’ On learning that the girl is of his caste, Chandran goes to his father to tell him about his intention, ‘but his courage failed him at the last moment ----.’ His parents are prepared to consider the proposal ‘if it came from the other side’ and if the marriage is religiously and socially feasible. They have to respect the time-honoured practice. But the horoscope does not match, and the customary marriage comes to a catastrophe. The girl is married off to someone else.

If the course of the novel is traced further, the picture of indulgent yet conservative parents stands out in bold relief. The indulgent father and the conservative mother help him settle down in life and find a girl to be his wife.

In *The English Teacher* Narayan treats of yet another aspect of family life viz., the courtship between husband and wife within the established social convention. The novel is, what we may loosely call, for want of a better expression, a love story. The western type of romantic love does not receive social recognition in India where tradition glorifies wedded love and lays stress on finding it within the married life.

With clear and sure strokes of a master brush Narayan traces the Krishanan-Sushila relationship in scenes and situations conforming to our ideals of material love-undemonstrative in the open.



In *The Financial Expert* the relationship between Maragayya and his brother highlights the kinship-bond in Indian families. Though this kinship tradition is now withering away under the impact of modern individualism, it is still strong in Indian milieu. Margayya is locked in a 'curious ambivalent relationship' with his brother who has started living separately consequent upon the division of ancestral house. But the kinship bond is too strong to be snapped so easily.

On important occasions they share in the weal and woe, laughter and tears of each other. When Balu is put to school, the schooling ceremony is observed, and Maragayya, forgetting his embittered relationship, invites his brother's family for 'after all, he [Margayya's brother] is his own uncle, his own blood, my brother. Unless he blesses the child, of what worth are all the other blessings he may get?' He grew sentimental at the thought of his elder brother. 'Don't you (his wife) know that he brought me up ---- But for his loving care ----'. He rambled on thus ---- There are times when we should set aside all our usual prejudices and notions ---- we must not let down ties of blood; Maragayya said pompously.

When a letter comes telling that Balu is dead, Maragayya's brother's family turns up and takes charge of the situation. Again at the time of the collapse of the financial edifice of Maragayya, his brother's family is there to help him again. Maragayya sends for his elder brother ---- 'ever a man for a crisis' ---- who does whatever is possible in the circumstances.

CONCLUSION :

The kinship bond, though withering away at the onslaught of irresistible holocaust of modernism and individualism, is still a cementing force in India; though the bond may not be discernible to foreign eyes, it is deep rooted, and, lies as it does beneath the encrusted individual life, comes up the surface in crisis, and Narayan, with a sure eye for this aspect weaves it into the matrix of his novels.

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