



REBELLIOUS NATURE AS EXPOUNDED IN R.K.NARAYAN'S *THE PAINTER OF SIGNS*.

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ABSTRACT



This paper brings out the rebellious nature of two of the characters in R.K.Narayan's *The Painter of Signs*, Raman and Daisy. The rebellion is depicted through the modern youth, all set to establish the Age of Reason, and the young lady determined to regard her duty as her only passion in life. Instances are pinpointed to show Raman's rebellious nature and that of Daisy, the girl with distinctive individual desires who finds herself a total misfit and the atmosphere suffocating in the joint family. Taking the typology of rebellion as a whole, there are certain characteristic features emerging out of the study focusing on the nature of rebellion in the Narayan novel.

Keywords: *Aggressive, sex-obsessed, rebellion, morality, New Woman.*

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INTRODUCTION

The Oxford English Dictionary labels rebellion as "Open or determined defence of, or resistance to, any authority or controlling power." Albert Camus in his book *The Rebel* observes rebellion as:

The problem of rebellion only seems to assume a precise meaning within the confines of the Western thought ... In fact for the Inca and

the Hindu pariah the problem of revolt never arises, because it has been solved by tradition before they had time to raise it – the answer being that tradition is sacrosanct. (25-26)

These definitions of rebellion provide the milieu and pointers throughout the typology of rebellion in the novels of R.K.Narayan. Rebellion is a part and parcel of human consciousness. As an



intrinsic human tendency, it seems to have its roots in "Man's first Disobedience." Satan, in the guise of the talking serpent instilled the essence of rebellion into Eve's consciousness.

In fact, rebellion as such in the world of Narayan's novels is regarded more of a digression than insolence. Hence Narayan's presentment of his typical rebels may be considered as an interesting study of rebellion suggesting socio-psycho-cultural implications.

The Painter of Signs may be considered as one of Narayan's major minor novels. M.K. Naik rightly points out that *The Painter of Signs* exhibits tell-tale signs of the writer's ironic vision getting hazy. As regards the theme of rebellion, *The Painter of Signs* contributes to the over-all typological study of rebellion in Narayan's novels. The rebellion is portrayed through a modern youth, all set to establish the Age of Reason, and a young lady determined to regard her duty as her only passion in life.

The rebellion in *The Painter of Signs* is taken in the sense of divergence though it is realized in the sense of rebelliousness as well. *The Painter of Signs* introduces the family planning theme and the legend of Shantanu-Ganga (Shantanu saw a beautiful woman on the banks of the river Ganges and asked her to marry him. She agreed but with one condition: that Shantanu would not ask any questions about her actions. They married and she later gave birth. But she drowned the child. Shantanu couldn't ask why because of his promise not to ask else she would leave. One by one, seven children were drowned. Shantanu, devastated, could not restrain himself and asked her why she was killing the children when she was about to drown the eighth child. She explained that she was in fact the goddess Ganga, and that the infants she had drowned were demi-gods who had been cursed into being born as humans. She had been freeing them from their curse. Since Ganga revealed the truth to Shantanu, she could not free the last demi-god. So she left the baby in Shantanu's care and went back to the river. The baby was named Devarata, and eventually came to be known as the mighty warrior Bhishma) in the *Mahabharata*, both of which have a thematic relevance. With the portrayal of the New Woman, the wheel, displaying

the faces of the Indian womanhood, turns a full circle in the novel.

INSTANCES OF RAMAN'S REBELLIOUS NATURE

Raman, the protagonist in *The Painter of Signs*, is presented through his ordinarily realized but aggressively balanced world. There are three major factors decidedly responsible for the youth's balanced and rather happy state of mind:

(a) His occupation: the painting of signboard keeps him reasonably busy and contented. The job has a thematic relevance too. It is through the painting of signboards that he meets his lady-love. Ironically, however, Raman finds himself writing family planning messages without any interest not to speak of any passion.

(b) Raman's 'Boardless' fellow lunchers represent the world which enables him to experience the realistic existence. The 'Boardless' also has a thematic relevance. At the end of the novel, as Raman returns to it, the 'Boardless' symbolizes the sanity and solidity in life.

(c) Raman's aunt: Basically, she represents the cultural ethos and Raman's confined world.

Raman is introduced with two characteristic notions in his character. They are his overall outlook to life, and his fortitude to establish the Age of Reason in the world. He declares: "I'm a rationalist, and I don't do anything unless I see some logic in it". (15) Interestingly, Raman's rebellion is realized through the topsy-turvy of these two notions and ironically, he is caught carrying out the exact opposite of his cherished ideals.

Raman's meeting with the youthful Daisy, the Family Planning Officer, begins yet another love story, which is different from the earlier love stories in the Malgudi novels. In the first place he falls head over heels in love with Daisy which is plainly a physical attraction. Daisy on her part remains unemotional, cold and an absolutely unresponsive image of sex. Ironically, Raman confesses to himself that he has become sex-obsessed as far as Daisy is concerned and tries hopelessly to warp the beautiful image of the young lady by using cheap Hong Kong goggles. And yet the passion radiating Daisy charms him beyond measure and he goes blind to read reason and finds his emotional mercury touching a mad degree.



Raman's first rebellion can be taken as a matter of accident. He finds himself inadvertently abandoned on the wayside with the most desirable company of the tempting but eluding Daisy. The cart man mistaking them as husband and wife leaves them alone. The cool air, the starry night and the desire embodied Daisy beside him drives the zealous lover with the fantasizing notions of seduction: "he debated within himself whether to dash up, seize her, and behave like Rudolph Valentino in *The Sheik* ... Woman liked an aggressive lover so said the novelist". (74) On an urge Raman plunges into the cart expecting Daisy there. But, sensing the blind lover's mad act, Daisy spoils his intention by leaving the cart and climbing the tamarind tree.

Raman's rebellion may be taken as a clear divergence from the codes of the religious and social norms. Notably, Daisy, who escaped from the prowling tiger he climbing the tamarind tree, quotes the proverb: "When you are married to the devil, you must be prepared to climb the tamarind tree" (77). Symbolically, the fall is prevented because the tamarind tree has played the protective spirit. The irony beneath the event is that Daisy, who keeps herself away from Raman, was in fact destined to remain away from him forever.

The fall in *The Painter of Signs*, marks Raman's second rebellion. As the seducer expresses his desire in no uncertain gestures, Daisy says: "If you must stay, please bring your bicycle in. I don't want it to be seen on my veranda at this hour". (113) As Raman and Daisy yield to the temptation of the flesh, it is possible to imagine the sense of horror and shame felt by the spirit of place. Malgudi has the essentially traditional society. A.N.Kaul says: "Romantic or passionate love has no place in it. Any deviation from it, and impulse or act that denies its centrality is a prime aberration in Narayan. This is especially true of women." (55)

Raman's next rebellion involves his own aunt symbolizing traditional morality. The traditionally nurtured Hindu old lady could never reconcile to the idea of having a daughter-in-law with a Christian name. As Raman shows his determination to bring the bride home the aunt leaves for Benares as a pilgrim. Raman's deviation may be seen in his disowning the tradition and asserting his permissive

attitude. Raman's aunt leaving for Benares, is implicit that the novelist has a deep influence of the cultural tradition.

Raman's last rebellion may also be envisaged symbolically. In a thrilling anticipation of the bird's arrival, Raman clears out all the family gods and locks them up in a cupboard to make more room for Daisy. The Gods seem to have taken their revenge, obviously for the deviant's ill-treatment as Daisy never comes to Raman's house. The clearance is proved useless.

REBELLIOUS NATURE OF DAISY

Narayan's New Woman, Daisy, underlines a distinct rebellion. Narayan's symbolic purpose in naming his heroine Daisy is to note that she is an odd person in Malgudi. The traditionally conceived names like Ambika in *The Vendor of Sweets*, Meenakshi in *The Financial Expert*, Susila in *The English Teacher* and Malathi in *The Bachelor of Arts* signify the quiet and balanced life mostly 'freed from distorting illusions and hysterics.' Names like Rosie in *The Guide*, Grace in *The Vendor of Sweets* and Daisy in *The Painter of Signs* suggest that they live a life which is digressed from traditional values.

The nature of Daisy's rebellion is different from that of Raman's. The girl with distinctive individual desires found herself a total misfit and the atmosphere suffocating in the joint family. Her first rebellion, although realized on almost ludicrous lines, distinctly marks her deviation from the traditional norms. When she was told that she was to be inspected as a bride, Daisy stunned her parents with her declaration: "I told my people that I'd not allow anyone to inspect me as a bride and that I'd rather do the inspection of the groom" (102). Her essentially liberal and self-made spirit predictable all sorts of constraints, took a decision to leave the household for good. Her departure from the house, reflecting vividly the departure from the essentially sacrosanct tradition, was final and explicit.

In her selecting the apparently gruelling and obviously dull role of a family planning propagator, and fighting assiduously with the country's biggest enemy, the population explosion, Daisy may be compared with Bharati in *Waiting for the Mahatma*.

Daisy displays the most ambivalent nature in her attitude to sex. The work-obsessed and duty-



conscious woman almost defiantly discouraged her lover and ruins his impulsive seduction and even threatens him to report to the police. But eventually the tough exterior gives way and she succumbs to the desire of the flesh. In this she displays an absolutely amoral and a sort of clinical approach to man-woman relationship and seems to have taken sex as a physical necessity, discarding the socio-religious norms. This attitude may account for her premarital sex with Raman.

Daisy's approach to marriage also strikes a distinct note. In fact, marriage as such never figures in her life. But with regard to her love she agrees for the Gandharva type which gives one the liberty to snap ties at any time one feels prone. And there also she leaves a catch. She makes Raman agree to her condition. The condition gives her liberty not to have a child, and even if one comes, she would give it to an orphanage to keep herself free for her duty. Her husband should never ask her any thing related to it. She says: "The moment you ask me why or how I will leave you" (124). It is evocative of the legend of Shantanu-Ganga in the *Mahabharata*.

Her anti-children campaign may certainly be taken as laudable and admirable in the context of her profession. But Daisy shows a basic disregard for children. The narrator says,

She was not really a lover of children ... never patted a child or tried any talk. She looked at them as if to say, you had no business to arrive - you lengthen the queue that's all. (49)

Her entire attitude towards children may be interpreted, particularly in the background she operated, as Daisy's total disrespect for the Indian woman's cherished dream of attaining motherhood or matrika.

Daisy's last rebellion has also serious implications. Having promised to stay with Raman as a wife, she certainly stuns Raman declaring that due to an emergency assignment she has to leave Malgudi and is unable to fulfil the promise. The decision of the New Woman, however, may sound logical as Daisy tells Raman: "Married life is not for me ... It frightens me ... I am not cut out for the life you imagine. I can't live except alone" (139). But

Daisy's departure from Malgudi may be viewed as the deviant's nemesis. Her relationship with Raman, violating the socio-moral codes and her anti-traditional attitude reflected in her profession, may have the Karma consequence: Daisy may have a lonely existence and may lead a busy life sans marital bliss.

CONCLUSION

The rebellion in *The Painter of Signs* may again be taken as Narayan's presentment of the recurring theme of illusion and reality. For Raman, illusion seems to have been signified in the form of Daisy and his relationship with her. His flinging away the key, saying "To hell with it", (143) and his return to the solid, real world of the Boardless, (143) may be taken as his return to the world of reality. Although the rebellion is mostly realized through sex, Narayan, however, describes it comically. Raman comments on Daisy's family planning obsession as: "If she were a despotic queen of ancient days, she would have ordered the sawing off of the organs of generation" (47).

Considering the typology of rebellion in its entirety, there are certain characteristic features emerging out of the study focusing on the nature of rebellion in the Narayan novel. Generally, rebellion in Narayan's novels is taken as a deviation from the accepted norms of the socio-cultural codes. The most obvious deviation is realized as sex aberration. Sex has a purposeful existence in Malgudi. The novelist's respect for the privacy of his characters may underline his treatment of sex. When obliged to depict a sort of open sex, Narayan employs the strategy of treating sex comically.

As most of the rebels, except perhaps Daisy in *The Painter of Signs*, return to the point of beginning, they underline several implications such as the influence of the socio-cultural codes, Manu's deciding norms, the mythic images of Sita and Savitri and the idealized images of the mother and wife. It also depicts the novelist's strategy to use the *rite de passage* to symbolize the spiritual growth of his characters as they pass from illusion to reality. The typology vividly focuses on the novelist's comic ironic perception of life underlining his notion of Comedy bordering on the tragic lines and his ironic vision



telescoping the basically paradoxical and incompatible nature of life.

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