

R. K. NARAYAN'S THE DARK ROOM :
A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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This dissertation entitled **R.K. NARAYAN'S THE DARK ROOM : A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS** submitted by Prakash Kumar Thakur, Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Languages, New Delhi, in fulfilment of eight credits out of the total requirement of twenty four credits, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is his original work according to the best of my knowledge and has not been submitted so far, in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any university. This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the debt I owe to many who have helped me in their own way to complete this dissertation. I must start by expressing my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr.S.K.Sareen but for whose unstinted support and encouragement this dissertation would not have seen the light of the day. I must thank Mrs.Sareen and Sonu for their hospitality. I am profoundly grateful to Prof.H.S.Gill who introduced me to this totally new and fascinating area of research. I wish to express my sense of appreciation and thanks to all the teaching as well as non-teaching staff members of the Center of Linguistics and English, J.N.U. I thank all my friends for their constant encouragement and support. I express my gratitude to Mr.Muruganathan for typing this dissertation. Above all, I thank my parents for always standing by me.

Prakash Kumar Thakur

Prakash Kumar Thakur

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Structuralism and Semiotics and its Impact on Literature : A Conceptual Overview

The world we inhabit is super-abundantly provided with structures. Structures are ubiquitous. They are to be found in nature as in culture, in every art and every science. They may be of many kinds such as genetic, anatomical, perceptual, social, psychological, literary, architectural, musical etc. Everything that is not by its nature indivisible can be shown to have a structure, to be a complex whole capable of analysis into its constituent elements. These constituent elements are themselves related to one another.

But structuralism, unlike structures, is a local phenomenon which has taken roots in small number of disciplines. It has been most influential in linguistics and up to a point in social anthropology, in history, in literary studies, in psychoanalysis, in certain branches of philosophy. However, two aspects to structuralism should be taken note of. First, it is a particular set of ideas applicable in a great many different disciplines and the second, it is a fairly assertive intellectual movement aiming to

persuade those of other allegiances that its methods are the soundest and most inspiring in the study of language, history, literature and so on.

As an academic fashion, structuralism flourished most widely in the 1960s and '70s. In the 1980s its earlier zest and attractiveness have somewhat faded. New developments have taken place in the name of post-structuralism. But this does not at all mean that structuralism is dead. Nor does post-structuralism seek to remove or deny structuralism so much as to purge it of certain failures to live up to its own fundamental insights.

The connection of structuralism with its apparent origin in France was so close that structuralism itself has often been referred to as French structuralism, even though most of the ideas it has promoted come from Ferdinand de Saussure, who was a Swiss; Roman Jakobson, Mikhail Bakhtin and N. Troubetskoy, who were Russian; Louis Hjelmslev, who was a Danish; C.S. Pierce, Edward Sapir and Noam Chomsky, who were American. But structuralism became established as a new way of thought, thanks to the real or assumed adherence to it of prominent, gifted Parisian thinkers such as Claude Levi-Strauss, an anthropologist ; Michel

Foucault, a historian of ideas; Roland Barthes, a literary critic; Louis Althusser, a political scientist; and Jacques Lacan, a psycho-analyst. Although these five thinkers at no time constituted a school but their ideas unquestionably overlap and came to mark an epoch in contemporary thought. It is important to note that beneath the superficial variety or diversity of structuralism's many forms there is an underlying unity, for example, literary and anthropological structuralism have a method and certain crucial principles in common. A formal unity is what has to be demonstrated. This being so, it is easy to see that structuralism is well placed to help bring about the removal of the boundaries between academic disciplines. It is very much of its age in reinforcing the present healthy trend towards interdisciplinary study. Structuralism provides an opportunity to unify, as never before, our seriously fragmented understanding of the world around us. Thus, structuralism can be seen as a reaction to "modernist" ^ealination and despair. It is an integrative, holistic way of looking at the world, including man.

It follows that structuralism is fundamentally a way of thinking about the world which is

predominantly concerned with the perception and description of structures. The new perception involved the realization that despite appearances to the contrary the world does not consist of independently existing objects, whose concrete features can be perceived clearly and individually. In fact, every perceiver's method of perceiving can be shown to contain an inherent bias which affects what is perceived to a significant degree. A wholly objective perception of individual entities is therefore not possible : any observer is bound to create something of what he observes. Accordingly, the relationship between observer and observed achieves a kind of primacy. It becomes the only thing that can be observed. It becomes the stuff of reality itself. In consequence, the true nature of things may be said to lie not in things themselves, but in the relationship which we construct, and then perceive, between them.

This new concept, that the world is made up of relationships rather than things, constitutes the first principle of that way of thinking which can properly be called 'structuralist'. At its simplest, it claims that the nature of every element in any given situation has no significance by itself, and in

fact is determined by its relationship to all the other elements involved in that situation. In short, the full significance of any entity or experience cannot be perceived unless and until it is integrated into the structure of which it forms a part. This will finally involve what Frederic Jameson has described as "an explicit search for the permanent structures of the mind itself, the organizational categories and forms through which the mind is able to experience the world, or to organize a meaning in what is essentially in itself meaningless".¹

One of the major developments of structuralism is a related but distinct discipline called semiology (or Semeiology, or Semiotics) which is the general study of signifying systems. Human language is one system of signification, the most elaborate that we have. Human beings communicate by body language, by styles of clothing, and in many other ways besides speech and writing. The notion of a 'Science of Signs' has become one of the most fruitful concepts deriving from the general structuralist enterprise of the last three decades and not easily distinguishable from it. The terms semiology and semiotics are both used to refer to this science. The only difference is that someone

declaring himself to be a semiotician is declaring an affiliation with the North American tradition (Pierce) of sign-study, whereas, the person who presents himself as a semiologist is declaring an affiliation with the tradition descending from Saussure (European tradition). "The field of semiotics is of course enormous, ranging from the study of the communicative behaviour of animals (zoosemiotics) to the analysis of such signifying systems as human bodily communication (Kinesics) olfactory signs, aesthetic theory and rhetoric".² By and large, its boundaries are coterminous with those of structuralism: the interests of the two are not fundamentally separate and in the long run, both might be included in the third discipline called, simply, communication.

The basic conceptual tools of structural analysis were developed by Saussure. His Course, reconstructed from the notes of devoted students was first published in 1915 and quickly became a major influence in modern linguistic studies. Saussure begins by defining language itself. His definition is unusual in that it distinguishes three levels of linguistic activity : langue, langue and parole. Language is linguistic potential, langue is a

language-system and parole is individual utterance. For Saussure, the central object of linguistic study must be the language-system. Language-systems are conventional because they are social products. In speaking English, for instance, we have an infinite number of potential utterances at our command, but these are based on a finite number of words and grammatical relationships. And these words and relationships are aspects of a single system.

In language, of course, no utterance is intelligible to a speaker who lacks the language-system that governs its meaning. The implications of this for literature are striking. No literary utterance, no work of literature, can be meaningful if we lack a sense of the literary system into which it fits. This is why Roman Jakobson insists that the proper object of literary study is 'literariness' and Northrop Frye argues that we must teach literature, not as a collection of autonomous 'works' but as an order of 'words'. After establishing the need to emphasize the language-system, Saussure proceeded to devise conceptual tools for the description of that system and its elements. First he defined the basic element of linguistic structures: the sign. A sign is not simply the name for a thing but a complex

whole which links a sound-image and a concept. Refining his terminology, Saussure then called the two aspects of the sign, the significant (signifier) and the signifié (signified). The relationship between the signifying sound and the signified concept is arbitrary.

From this arbitrariness many things follow. What it means is that in all signs the sound-image is in no way dictated by the concept. The concept "tree" may be signified by dozens of quite different sound-images in different languages. In fact, if the sign were not arbitrary, we would all speak the same language, no other language being possible. The connection between the sound and concept is arbitrary with respect to nature, of course, but not to culture. We who grow up in English must call a table a table, if we wish to be understood. And in fact, the study of signs and sign-systems can lead to a deeper knowledge of human beings and the systems in which they live. Saussure says :

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable;...Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them.³

Perhaps the most influential idea of Saussure's is his distinction between the synchronic and

diachronic approaches to the study of language and his emphasis on the synchronic at the expense of the diachronic. It is the synchronic linguistics which can provide an adequate treatment of any given language-system as a whole. We can quote here Emile Benveniste's statement as a representative view of structuralism in linguistics :

Granting that language is system, it is then a matter of analysing its structure. Each system, being formed of units that mutually affect one another, is distinguished from the other systems by the internal arrangements of these units, an arrangement which constitutes its structure. Certain combinations are frequent, others fairly rare and still others, while theoretically possible, are never realized. To envisage a language to be revealed and described is to adopt the "structuralist" point of view⁴.

The terminological complex of sign, signifier and signified is perhaps Saussure's most influential gift to structuralism. The Saussurean sign is an abstract object, it is not to be confused with whatever it is the sign of, with something in the world. This something is known as referent. This linguistic sign is arbitrary which means that its form is not determined by the thing it is the sign of or referent. The proof of this is the enormous

variety of signs to be found in different languages for the same referent.

The notion of a sign's value leads to the more embracing notion of a language as a system of differences. No sign is sufficient unto itself ; it is what is linguistically by virtue of what it is not. If it is an entity at all, then it is a negative entity, differential in its nature as well as in its function. The signs of a language thus become subject to the so-called 'play of differences', a concept popular among post-structuralists.

Saussure's recognition that the signs of a language have a 'value' as well as a 'signification' brings in for the first time the semiotic function of language. Signs are forms because they determine one another, as fellow members of the one integral system. It is their place within the system which decides what Saussure calls their 'value', which he is careful to distinguish from their 'signification'. This latter term he reserves for the actual application of a sign to the world, in an act of reference. It is a relation between language and reality. The 'value' of a sign, on the other hand, is an internal relation depending on that sign's

multiple relations with other signs of the language. Semiotics concerns itself with signs such as those of which a language consists in so far as these belong to a system: with how they mean rather than with what they mean.

All signs form a relation between the two planes of expression and content, but not all signs form it alike. It necessitates the typology of signs according to the nature of the relation between expression and content. C.S. Peirce's typology found greatest favour among the semioticians. He divides signs into three classes: 'symbols', 'indices' and 'icons'. In the 'symbol' the relationship between expression (signifier) and content (signified) is arbitrary. It requires the active presence of the interpretant to make the signifying connection. In the 'index' the relationship is concrete, actual and usually of a sequential, casual kind. In the 'icon', the relationship manifests a similarity or fitness of resemblance proposed by the sign. There is thus a picture-element in an icon. The relation of expression to content is one of physical similarity. It is important to note that the triad involves not mutually exclusive kinds of sign, but three modes of a relationship between signifier and signified which

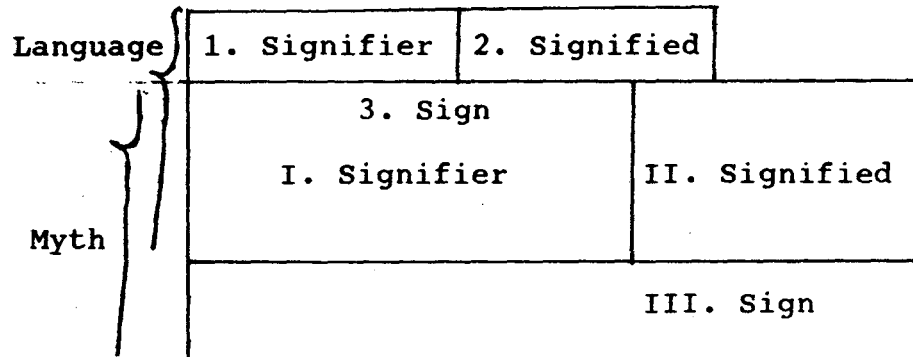
co-exist in the form of a hierarchy in which one of them will inevitably have dominance over the other two.

Saussure himself developed one other distinction which is crucial and has important applications for literary study. This is between the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations among signs. The syntagmatic element of language has to do with the positioning of sign in any particular utterance. In a given sentence, for example, the meaning of a single word is determined partly by its position in the sentence and its relation to the other words and grammatical units of that sentence. This is the word's syntagmatic (linear, diachronic) aspect, often conceptualized as a horizontal axis along which the sentence is spread out in its necessary order. The meaning of a single word in a sentence is also determined by its relation to some groups of words not in the actual sentence but present in a paradigmatic (or vertical, synchronic) relationship to the actual word. A word is thus defined partly by all the words which might have filled its place but have been replaced by it. These displaced words may be conceived as belonging to several paradigmatic sets:

other words with same grammatical function, other words with related meanings (synonyms and antonyms), other words with similar sound patterns - these are three obvious paradigmatic sets. Our actual selection of a word in a sentence involves something like a rapid scanning of paradigmatic possibilities until we find one that will play the appropriate role in the syntax we are constructing.

One of Saussure's most powerful interpreters in the matter of semiotics has been Roland Barthes. In his essay 'Myth Today'⁵ he puts the case that any semiotic analysis must postulate a relationship between the two terms 'signifier' and 'signified' which is not one of 'equality' but of 'equivalence'. In respect to language this structural relationship between sound-image (signifier) and concept (signified) constitutes what Saussure calls the linguistic sign. However, the process of signification does not end there. Barthes moves on to consider the ways in which 'myth' signifies in society. In the case of myth, we find again the tripartite signifying operation. However, myth is peculiar in that it invariably functions as a second-order semiotic chain which exists before it. That which had the status of 'sign' in the first system

becomes a mere signifier in the second. Thus, myth operates by taking a previously established sign (which is full of signification) and draining it until it becomes an 'empty' signifier. This can be shown in the diagram :



Barthes goes on to propose that this third term in myth (which in language we would call the 'sign') should be called the 'signification' that, the first term (signifier) should be called the form, and the second (the signified) should be called the concept. Thus, wherein the first order of signification, that of language, the relation of signifier to signified generates the sign, in the second order of signification, that of myth, the relation of form to concept generates the signification.

The fruitfulness of this notion can be seen when Barthes applies it to the process of signification which we traditionally term 'denotation' and 'connotation'. 'Denotation' we normally take to mean

the use of language to mean what it says, while 'connotation' the use of language to mean something other than what is said. In Barthes' view, connotation represents the same kind of 'gearing up' from denotation, as myth does from ordinary signification. Thus, connotation takes place when the sign resulting from a previous signifier - signified relationship becomes the signifier of a further one. The first system is then the plane of denotation and the second system the plane of connotation. Thus, literature, too, is a second-order signifying system.

The structuralist motto devised by Roland Barthes is that textually and to different degrees, 'everything signifies'. This means that everything in a text is a sign, or is connotative. The text itself might generate infinitely many other texts. The most remarkable demonstration of what this implies is the book called *S/Z* which Barthes devoted to a novella by Balzac. As a semiotician of the text, Barthes invents for the purpose of analysing Sarrasine five 'codes' which will enable him to correlate both grammatically and semantically, a certain number of elements of the story. The five codes are:

- i. the Hermeneutic code
- ii. The Semic code
- iii. The Symbolic code
- iv. The Action code
- v. The Referential code

The thrust of Barthes' structuralism is towards the inconclusive: he warns against foreclosing on the process of semiosis and the common assumption that literary texts are susceptible of only a single interpretation or directed to conveying only ~~a~~ single, 'final' meaning.

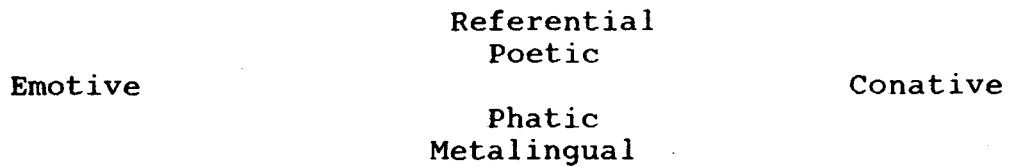
Another conceptual tool bequeathed to literary analysis by linguistics was added to the Saussurean developments by Roman Jakobson. As a formalist, one of his major interests lies of course in the attempt to give an account of the poetic function of languages. To this end he postulates two general linguistic notions which help to focus on the particular character of language: the notion of polarities, and the notion of equivalence. Metaphor, to apply Saussure's concepts is generally 'associative' in character and exploits language's 'vertical' relations, where metonymy is generally 'syntagmatic' in character and exploits language's 'horizontal' relations.

Jakobson sees metaphor and metonymy as the characteristic modes of binarily opposed polarities

which between them underpin the two-fold process of selection and combination by which linguistic signs are formed: "The given utterance (message) is a combination of constituent parts (sentences, words, phonemes, etc.) selected from the repository of all possible constituent parts (the code)"⁷.

Thus messages are constructed by a combination of a 'horizontal' movement, which combines words together, and a 'vertical' movement, which selects the particular word from the available inventory of the language. The combinative (or syntagmatic) process manifests itself in contiguity and its mode is metonymic. The selective (or associative) process manifests itself in similarity and its mode is metaphoric. Jakobson says, "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination"⁸. Jakobson's 'polarities' seem to take us to the heart of the act of signification itself.

Jakobson's work on the nature of the communicative act and on the functions of the language supplies the theoretical basis for the final link between formalism and structuralism in respect to literature. Very briefly, Jakobson draws attention to the six constituent factors that make up



This means that if the communication is orientated towards context, then the referential function dominates; if the communication is orientated towards the addresser of the message, then the emotive function dominates; if towards the receiver then the conative (or vocative, or imperative) function dominates; if towards the contact, then the phatic function dominates; if towards the code, then the metalingual function dominates; finally if towards the message for its own sake, then the poetic or aesthetic function can be said to be dominant. The notion that literary works are ultimately about language, that their medium is their message, is one of the most fruitful of structuralist ideas and we have already noticed its theoretical foundation in the work of Jakobson.

Formalism and Structuralism, both start from an 'immanent' view of the meaning of literary works. That is, they attempt to exclude from consideration whatever is external to the text they are studying. There can be no pure 'immanence' in criticism or interpretation. But this does not stop the principle

being a valuable one. It is valuable because it warns us against reverting in textual interpretation to the psychological and sociological modes of old. The 'immanent' reading of a work seeks to exclude as far as possible information about the author or about the society and the age in which he or she lived and wrote, unless of course it is contained in the text. The meanings of the text are to be determined within the text itself, by the correlation of its parts. What an immanent criticism asks is not that we should disqualify all external interpretation of a text for ever and ever but that we should see it as secondary. Literary facts are literary before they are psychological, historical and so on.

Any literary understanding can reasonably be seen as structure-dependent: the structures of literature determine not what we understand when we read but how we understand it. The particular meanings we derive from our reading are the 'events', our 'competence' is the system on which those events depend.

One of the most interesting arguments concerning the semiotics of writing has been offered by Jacques Derrida, who proposes a 'science' of the written sign, called grammatology. Derrida's work can

therefore be linked with that of Barthes as indicative of the kind of stress semiotics places on the distinctive and newly extended character of writings. Once a 'science of signs' has demonstrated that the sign-system of writing does not act simply as a transparent window onto an established 'reality', it can be identified as a sign-system in its own right, with its own properties and its own distinct character.

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that there are a number of recent developments in and around linguistics which deserve to be better known to literary critics, for they point to original ways of reading and analysis. If Chomsky's transformational grammar provides an interpretation of the traditional notion of 'style' as a relationship between meaning and expression, then on the other hand, Halliday's 'Functional' approach encourages us to think about why a language-user chooses one sentence-structure rather than an alternative one. Halliday provides some valuable terminology for our answers to such questions. Fowler, too, in his book Linguistics and the Novel, has recommended the adoption of what might be called a 'structural' attitude in discussing a novel. He assumes a prose

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object whose nature can be specified in terms of elements and their inter-relationships.

Methodology

My approach to literary study through semiotics, is based on the simple description of an act of communication popularized by Roman Jakobson. He distinguishes six elements present in any act of communication : author, context, text, medium, codes and reader.

If we take the reading of a literary text as a complete act of communication, each school of criticism tends to privilege one of the elements at the expense of others in its attitude towards the reading process. For instance the author-oriented criticism privileges the role of the author in the text and seeks to recover the authorial intention as the key to a text's meaning. At the other extreme we have a critical school that emphasizes the reader and privileges the reader's response to the text. It holds that readers make meaning and should have the right to make any meaning that their own psychic needs require of a particular text.

But in literary interpretation there must be some middle ground between the anarchy of reader-emphasis and the authoritarianism of author-emphasis.

The new criticism clearly repudiated both the relevance of the author's intention to the interpretation of a text and the reader's freedom to make any kind of interpretive gesture that seemed congenial. In New Critical thought the text was as isolated as possible from the other features of communication, and every text was as isolated as possible from every other text. Both the strength and the weaknesses of New Critical interpretation stem from this extreme focus on the work as a uniquely meaningful object.

On a superficial examination the Russian Formalists appear to have shared many critical assumptions with the New Critics. They, too, emphasized texts and insisted that any worldly context or persuasive purpose could not be of major importance in a poetic text. Their views are fairly compressed into Jakobson's notion that a poetic text is one which emphasizes its own textual form.

The Formalists differed from the New Critics, however, in their extreme interest in devices and conventions of poetic structure. They always sought the poetic in poetry and the prosaic in prose, so that even their studies of individual texts always came to turn on a point of poetic principle that could be applied to other texts in the same genre.

Thus their interpretive strategies tended to move from an emphasis on texts to an emphasis on the codes that govern the production of texts.

The formalist and structuralist emphasis on codes has led to the development of a semiotic approach to literary study. Semiotic approach to literature rejects authoritarian hermeneutics through its critique of the notion of author. For semiotic critic, an author is neither a god contemplating his creation nor even a fully unified individuality freely making aesthetic choices. The producers of literary texts are themselves creatures of cultures, who have attained a human subjectivity through language. What they provide as literary text is achieved by their acceptance of the constraint of generic or discursive norms. Thus an author is not a perfect ego but a mixture of public and private, conscious and unconscious elements, insufficiently unified for use as an interpretive base.

Readers, of course, are similarly constructed : divided psyches traversed by codes. Leaving the reader "free" to interpret is an impossibility. The "free" reader is simply at the mercy of the cultural codes that constitute each person as a reader.

"Every literary discourse whatever its genre

may be appears as a certain unit of existentialist significance. Its composition necessarily follows a system of psychic transformation from one state of human situation to another. The function of literary critique thus is to unfold the basic layers of the structure of a given literary creation in such a way that each underlying current leads to a better comprehension of the emerging patterns of significance".¹¹ There are three fundamental levels of literary structuration. The first level is metonymic, the second is metaphoric and the third is that of mediation.

Thus, as a first step in exploring the mystery of the text its metonymic order is discussed. This is also referred to as syntagmatic analysis. This aims at a careful reading of the text. Every text has a certain sequence i.e., syntactic manifestation. Studying this syntactic organisation of a text is a realistic way of analysis relying on verisimilitude. This is based on the analogy of the actual first reading of the text. There is no escaping the text. The reader has to go by the order prescribed by the author. By following the text in a linear motion, an attempt is made to study the problematics in progression. Thus the syntagmatic analysis is an

attempt to decode the text and study the existential predicament at a metonymic level.

The second step i.e, the semantic study of the discourse requires a more comprehensive and coherent study of the text. Here the critic investigates the metaphoric order of the text. Though a literary discourse has a syntactic sequence, the constituting process of this discourse, however, is not syntactic only. Rather this metonymic constitution is actually based on metaphoric or paradigmatic choices. The critic, to comprehend the discourse, has to follow the metaphorically constituted metonymy, expressed in the syntactic order. He thus not only unravels the discourse but also looks for the immanent relations purely at the semantic level which combine signifiers in a non-sequential order. As the signifiers are identified they are studied in relation to the other signifiers according to the dictates of the discourse. Thus we find that the metonymic relations are manifest. This is the organisation of form whereas the metaphoric relations are latent which emerge at the level of content.

After syntagmatic and semantic studies we come to pragmatics. This is the third level of comprehension where an effort is made to trace the

relation of a text to other texts that form part of its environment. Every literary discourse is a link in the historical chain and must be understood in its proper ideological background. This third level of literary analysis is also referred to as intertextuality - the way a text resonates with other texts that make up its own genre, or even with other texts outside its genre, including giant texts from the past like The Mahabharata, The Ramayana and The Bible.

There is one other special feature of a literary text which affects the critic's task. In many instances a literary text has accumulated a number of satellite texts over time: critical commentaries, reviews etc. And these affect the nature of the text as an object, since if we are to explain how it means what it does, and how it comes to be valued as it is, we need to encompass in our explanations what other people have thought it meant and what values other people have said they found in it.

The text we have selected for the semiotic analysis is R.K. Narayan's third novel The Dark Room (1938). It presents the trials, tribulations and torments of a traditional Hindu wife, who,

nevertheless finds courage to walk out on her tyrannical husband, though it turns out to be a temporary affair, when she finds that she cannot put up with her husband's supremacy vouchsafed by tradition and socio-economic realities of a male-dominated, materialistic society. But to her chagrin she finds that in the existing social structure she cannot fend for herself alone. Her maternal instincts coupled with her inability to cope with a difficult world, make her turn back to her husband's home. A sad realization has come to her, namely, that she has no 'right' to call anything her 'own' in her husband's house, because everything bears the stamp of her husband's money. She feels that her own will and desires have no meaning outside the parameters of her husband's will and authority.

We have chosen this novel for our analysis because it has not been given the critical attention it deserves, though it reveals Narayan's realistic and firm grasp of the middle class life with its monotony and boredom. Savitri's life as portrayed in the novel represents the ennui and melancholy of a drab and discordant married life.

Beginning with a brief summary of three main sequences of the narrative, a detailed syntagmatic

division of the signifying ensembles of the narrative has been presented in Chapter II. Following the Cartesian method, the whole discourse has been divided into as many parts as is necessary to comprehend the basic units of signification. Signifying ensembles have been further divided into subensembles with, whenever necessary, classifications into microensembles. The minimum unit of signification is an "idea" as conceived in the Cartesian and Port-Royal tradition. As the significatory role often covers several minor statements, the notions of "comprehension" and "extension" have been referred to again and again.

Chapter III presents the narrative discourse as a series of semiotic conceptualisations in a criss-cross of the strands of signification. This gives us an overall view of the unity of the discourse and demonstrates how the various interlinking strands are perceived in the context of the discourse as a single comprehensive unit of signification.

In Chapter IV we show how this particular text, The Dark Room functions in a complex and vigorous interrelation with other antecedent texts and the generic prototype they comprise. This Chapter also highlights the similarities which exist in some of the other works by the same author.

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CHAPTER II

Presentation of the Text : A Study in Syntagmatics

As we read the text carefully the kernel semantics is identified and the proposition is described in extension. Later the semiotic proposition in "comprehension" reveals the proper understanding of the situation. In structural analysis, both semiotics, the study of form or the manifest level, and semiology, the study of content or immanent level are not contradictory but complementary. No discourse is possible without a well defined form or a system of syntagmatic unfolding of a semiotic linkage. An utterance in a text is interwoven with semantic codes. Each code emits a meaning. Taking significant signs as tools of interpretation an effort has been made in this chapter to unravel the basic existential issues. We have divided the whole discourse in three main sequences (notated as I, II and III)

The First(I) Ramani and his wife with their three children are a well-to-do middle class family, Ramani the agent of an Insurance company and she a typical Brahmin house-wife. This means that she is entirely

at the command of her husband, utterly dependent on him for food, clothing and shelter and trained by religion and tradition to look upon him as her God and King. Ramani rules his household like a dictator. Savitri has become used to being bullied personally, but finds it difficult to put up with the harsh treatment accorded to their son Babu in the name of discipline. Matters come to a head when a young widow, Shanta Bai is taken as a probationer in the Insurance Company and Ramani starts an affair with her.

The Second (II) Savitri walks out of the house revolting against the haughtiness and arrogance of her husband. As a devoted wife she tolerates all humiliations but when her husband, Ramani, plays in the hands of some other woman she cannot bear it anymore. She resolves to be self-dependent and not to live on anything not earned by herself.

The Third (III) Savitri makes a retreat to the life of dependence, subjugation and humiliation thinking that a woman's right place is with her husband only.

Now we shall delineate the outlines of the syntagmatics of the whole discourse.

I. The First Sequence

The first sequence of the discourse has been divided into ten main units of signification, referred to as signifying ensembles 1, 2, 3, 4... First, we give an introduction of each signifying unit as to how it is constituted of its smaller subunits viz. subensembles and microensembles as presented in the text. Then we shall analyse it semiotically.

I. 1. Ramani, a bullying husband and Savitri, a submissive wife

It is school-time and Babu tries to avoid his school on the pretext of illness. This makes his mother, Savitri, anxious. She puts him to bed. Then comes his father, Ramani, who gets infuriated to find Babu still in bed. Ignoring Babu's excuse he forces him to go to school. When Savitri tries to defend Babu, Ramani tells her not to interfere in the matter of training the children and suggests her to mind her kitchen business only. After Babu leaves for his school she again tries to plead for Babu's illness. But he ignores it by asking about vegetables and other preparations and expresses his usual displeasure over the repetition of food items. He

blames here for being negligent in her kitchen duties.

He is in the habit of rebuking everybody in the house on some pretext or the other. No one is spared. Neither servants, nor the children, Babu. Sumati and Kamala. However, Savitri always gets a lion's share of his wrath because Ramani finds her responsible for every wrong in the house. That's why when he starts off for his office calm and stillness falls on the house. Some times Savitri feels that had she asserted a little more from the beginning of her married life like other modern girls matters would have been quite different.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

The first unit of signification is divided into four images or subensembles viz., 1 A, 1 B, 1 C and 1 D. For the purpose of detailed analysis these subensembles have further been subdivided into microensembles as discussed below.

I. 1 A: The first subensemble, 1 A with which the discourse begins has three microensembles beginning with 1 A a, an idea in "comprehension", which describes the wife-husband's tense relations due to

the clash of interests over their son, Babu. His mother Savitri shows too much concern for him which his father Ramani thinks to be an unnecessary interference in children's training, a male prerogative. The next microensembles 1 A b and 1 A c are images in "extension" which extend the ideas portrayed in the microensemble 1 A a. The microensemble 1 a b describes the arrogant nature of Ramani who ignores even his wife's reasonable request and plea. Rather he humiliates her by asking her to be mindful of kitchen business only. The microensemble 1 A c describes the modest nature of Savitri who despite all these humiliations tries to make her husband happy.

I. 1 B: The second subensemble 1 B is a single unit subensemble, complete in itself, which describes the general behaviour of Ramani, as to how he is in the look out for chiding someone in the family if things are not according to his liking. Every item of his dress infuriated him and incited him to comment except for the ones which received his personal attention.

I. 1C: The third subensemble of the first signifying

unit has been divided into four microensembles beginning with 1 C a, an idea in "comprehension". It describes the changes in the atmosphere of the house after Ramani leaves for his office everyday. A calm falls on the house. Even the servants would feel free to ask their mistress about the validity of Ramani's wrath and criticism of everything at house. The next microensemble, 1 C b gives a description of how intelligently Savitri used to assuage the hurt feelings of the servants at the same time not letting Ramani down. The microensemble 1 C c portrays the general plight of a cook in his master's house where he has to live in a state of protracted hunger, being the last to eat. Existentially this microensemble 1 C c is not directly related to the next microensemble, for the next microensemble 1 C d continues the indignation of the cook against his Master Ramani as presented in 1 C b. Hence the microensemble 1 C c can be treated as an "infix" a strand not directly related to its preceding or succeeding microensemble but a strand to be integrated later.

I.1D: This last subensemble, 1 D has three microensembles viz... 1 D a, 1 D b and 1 D c. The

microensemble 1 d a, an idea in "comprehension" describes the predicament of savitri who finds herself helpless and an anathema to the eyes of her husband even after fifteen years of their married life. This reminds her of modern women like Gangu who tactfully keep their husbands under their control. The microensemble 1 D b describes how savitri kept herself involved in domestic affairs. But this does not comfort her of this monotonous life., made more torturous by ramanni's constant chiding. Some times she would think:

Was there nothing else for one to do than attained to this miserable business of the stomach from morning till night ?¹

This is delineated in the microensemble 1 D c

Analysis of the problematics

Savitri : Affection, devotion, subjugation,
Intelligence, Individuality

As we go through the first unit of signification metonymically we find constantly shifting images of Savitri, the protagonist, as a signifier. We examine these below. In the very subensemble, 1 A, Savitri is the embodiment of motherly affection. When her fifteen year old son Babu tells her about his illness, it never crosses her mind that he may be making some pretext to avoid school. Instead she

gets nervous and even defends him before his father, Ramani. Consequently she has to face humiliation at the hands of her husband who tells her :

Go and do any work you like in the kittchen, but leave the training of a grown-up boy to me. It is none of woman's business.(p-5)

Savitri signifies tolerance and devotion as seen in the microensemble 1 A c. Even after being humiliated she, as a devoted wife, tries to cool down her husband's temper without letting others know that her sentiments have been hurt. The subensemble 1 C presents Savitri as the signifier of intelligence. She is adept in tackling household problems. We find her in the microensemble 1 C b tackling the servant's sensitivity to his master's criticism very efficiently. She tries to assuage the servant's hurt feelings without letting her husband down. This is evident in the servant's query :

Are the preparations very bad today, Madam?(p-7)

She replies:

We ought not to have repeated the brinjals today. (p-7)

The very use of the word 'we' in the above statement of Savitri assuages the sevant's hurt feelings as he finds his mistress sharing his responsibility. But that is not all. In the subensemble, 1 D we find in

Savitri an echo of asserting her individuality in the lines where she feels:

She ought to have asserted herself a little more at the beginning of her married life and then all would have been well. There were girls now-a-days who took charge of their husbands the moment they were married. (p-8)

Ramani: authority, arrogance, modernity.

Now we shall discuss the changing images of Ramani, as a signifier, presented through the first unit of signification.

In the microensemble 1 A a we find Ramani imposing his authority where he ignores his wife's plea and forces Babu to go to school. He uses harsh words and tells her not to interfere in these matters. This arrogant image of Ramani keeps on appearing time and again. In the microensemble 1 A b, his arrogance comes to play when he ignores Savitri's plea very contemptuously as if he is not listening to her.

Ramani also signifies fastidiousness. He is always in the habit of finding fault with others, sometimes complaining about the vegetables, sometimes about the delay in attending to him. In the

microensemble 1 A b, he is found complaining about vegetables to Savitri and goes to the extent of saying :

If the cook cann't cook properly do the work yourself. what have you to do better than that?
(p-6)

There is no respite for Savitri. In no way she could avoid his wrath. If she kept mum over his complaints, Ramani would say :

Saving of your energy by being silent! Saving it up for what purpose? When a man asked you something you could do worse than honour him with a reply. (p-6)

and if she tried to answer his complaints he would furiously tell her to be shut up as words won't mend a wrong.

The microensemble 1 C a, and the subensemble 1 B tell us about Ramani that he is a man of high taste and status. He wears a silk suit and tie for his office. He has a car. The mention of Byron's collection and Britannica Encyclopaedia is indicative of his modern outlook.

Cook : Helplessness, self-respect :

In the microensemble 1 C a, we find the cook symbolising self-respect where he takes the daily criticism by his master very seriously. He is

sensitive because he constantly tries to come upto his master's expectations. But it makes no difference for Ramani. The cook signifies helplessness in the microensemble 1 C c. A cook has to bear the criticism and wrath of his master which is made more painful by his protracted hunger and being the last to eat.

Kitchen : confinement, boredom

Throughout the first unit of signification we find the kitchen as a signifier which signifies confinement and constraint for a cook and a house wife. Their life sentence round it. Here in the case of cook and Savitri. This makes Savitri utter these words in the microensemble 1 D c :

Was there nothing else for one to do than attend to this miserable business of the stomach from morning till night ? (p-11)

I. 2. Ramani's fluctuating moods

Every evening the hooting sound of Ramani's car-horn indicated his mood. If it was hoarse, it indicated a bad mood. If it was of a milder type then either he would be coming with some unexpected guest or he would be in fine mood to go to cinema and play boisterous love with Savitri. Today the milder

hooting of the car is of latter type.

Introduction to the Syntagmatics

The second unit of signification has been divided into two subensembles viz., 2 A and 2 B which have further been subdivided into microensemble for the purpose of detailed syntagmatic analysis.

I. 2 A : This first subensemble has three microensembles viz., 2 A a, 2 A b and 2 A c. The first 2 A a, is an idea in "comprehension" which describes the impact the whole house experiences with the arrival of Ramani from his office. It describes how everybody in the family, particularly Savitri tries not to invite his wrath. The next microensemble 2 A b describes Savitri's intelligent way of entertaining unexpected guests just to please Ramani. He could never tolerate any poor treatment to the guests. At the same time, he would never give prior information to his wife of any guests. The last microensemble 2 A c indicates the good mood of Ramani which is very rare. Today the hooting sound of the car is of milder type. He takes liberty with his wife, plays jokes with children and asks them all

about how they spent their day. Savitri now understands that he will start some boisterous love-making even before the children.

I. 2 B : This second subensemble has also been divided into three microensembles viz., 2 B a, 2 B b and 2 B c. The microensemble 2 B a, is a comprehensive idea expressing Ramani's sense of victory over foiling his son's prank and making Savitri feel demoralized for defending Babu's illness. The next microensemble 2 B b describes how intelligently Savitri avoided his boisterous love-making even before children by diverting his attention to his office affairs which he is never tired to talk about. The next microensemble 2 B c is also an image in "extension" which describes the jolly and jovial mood of Ramani.

Analysis of the Problematics

Ramani : Domination, bosting, modernity

Throughout the second unit of signification, we get the idea that Ramani as a signifier signifies domination. Almost his every activity conveys this image. By the kind of horn he used on return from office the family members had the idea of his mood and they tried to be careful. It was also an indication that he wanted everybody at his beck and

call. But it had a special meaning to Savitri that she should see to it that everything in the house was according to his taste and wishes. This dominating image of his is further portrayed in microensemble 2 A b where it is conveyed to us that Ramani thought it disgraceful to give prior information to his wife about a guest. But he won't tolerate any poor show of hospitality to his guest. His full of conceit which is clear from the lines where he tells Savitri:

You have a lot to learn yet. You are still a child, perhaps a precocious child, but a child all the same. (p.14)

But this is only one side of the coin. In the microensembles 2 B a and 2 B b we have a very different image of Ramani. Here he is jovial unhappy. This sends a wave of relief to his children, wife and servants. He asks everybody their welfare and play jokes with the children. He makes fun of his wife for observing the Indian customs of not having dinner before he had eaten. It gives us the idea of his being modern in outlook.

Savitri : Tradition, intelligence

Though Ramani takes Savitri to be a stupid lady, she has a special knack of entertaining sudden guests with the existing supply of food only. Her intelli-

gence comes to full play in the microensemble 2 B b where she diverts her husband's attention very easily to avoid embarrassment before children due to boisterous love-making.

Savitri as a signifier signifies the ethos of an Indian wife. In the microensemble 2 A a we find that she, like a devoted wife, takes care of Ramani's comfort right from the time she hears the sound of his car. She does not take meal before her husband has taken it. It reflects the traditional ethos she is associated with. She is shy of being loved by her husband before others.

Children : Affection, fulfilment

Children signify fulfilment and affection for their parents. Here also we have an echo of this image. For Ramani and Savitri, the children, Babu, Sumati and Kamala are a source of enjoyment, fulfilment and affection, though their ways of interacting with the children are quite different. Ramani wants to be strict with them to see them prosper but at times he shares lighter moments with them. But for Savitri only showering of love can make them great in their practical life.

I. 3. Savitri and her friends

Savitri has two close friends, Gangu and Janamma in South Extension where she resides. But both Gangu and Janamma have antipathy for each other and each criticizes the other in her absence. In Savitri they have a common friend. Gangu is the wife of a school teacher who never interferes with her and believes himself to be a champion of women's emancipation. She is ambitious and has a sense of humour. She wanted to be a film-star, a musician or a woman-leader but lacks all the qualities for these roles. Savitri finds her fascinating.

Janamma, though wife of a public prosecutor, is simple, shy and elderly. Savitri has high regards for her. Between these two implacable Gangu and Janamma, Savitri maintains a subtle balance. Only once does she find herself in a very difficult situation when both of them come to meet her at the same time.

Introduction to the sytagmatics

I. 3 A : It has only one subensemble i.e, 3 A which has been subdivided into two microensembles 3 A a and 3 A b. The first microensemble, 3 A a, an image in "comprehension" tells us about the friends of Savitri

and their nature. The next microensembles 3 A b extends this idea further describing how Savitri balances her friendship between the two friends who are at loggerheads.

Analysis of the problematics

Savitri : Shrewdness, tolerance, unbecoming of woman

Savitri as a signifier signifies shrewdness in the sense that she keeps a fine balance between her friendship with Gangu and Janamma who are very critical of each other. And that's why both of them find in Savitri a real friend. It is really unbecoming of a woman to listen to others' criticism and forget them then and there and also not to play one against the other. And Savitri represents this kind of woman. She enjoys the company of Gangu who is garrulous but fascinating. But she respects Janamma who is elderly and whenever in need she asks for her wise counsel. This signifies Savitri's knack for facing day-to-day problems.

I.4 Savitri at her husband's command

One day Savitri is in Janamma's house. Kamala comes running and asks her mother to come home at once as Ramani wants her. She becomes worried as to what has happened to Ramani. But she finds nothing serious there except that she has to bear the brunt of his usual wrath for not being at home. He forcibly asks her to accompany him to the movie. Ramani feels pride in taking his wife to the theatre because her beautiful and attractive figure enhances his sense of possession. Talk of children at such times irritates Ramani as when Savitri expresses regret at not having brought Babu for the movie. He tells her not to be bothering about children. On return Savitri narrates the scenes of the movie 'kuchela', a story from legendary Krishna's life, to Babu, but he expresses his dislike for Tamil films. He mentions some English movies which according to him are far superior to Indian movies.

Introduction to the Syntagmatics

This fourth unit of signification has been divided into three subensembles 4 A, 4 B and 4 C. These have further been subdivided for the purpose of analysis as discussed below.

1. 4 A: The first subensemble, 4 A has four microensembles beginning with 4 A a which describes how much Savitri is scared of her husband. She becomes apprehensive when told by her daughter that her father wants to see her immediately. The next microensemble 4 A b gives description of Ramani's anguish over her absence from the house, and his forcing her to accompany him to the cinema. The next microensembles 4 A c and 4 A d extend this imposing nature of Ramani where he tries to see each of his desires fulfilled. His prejudiced behaviour about women is also reflected here.

1. 4 B: The second subensemble of the fourth unit of signification has two microensembles viz 4 B a and 4 B b. The first one describes Ramani's sense of pride possessing a beautiful wife like Savitri. It enhances his pride when people at public places throw looks at Savitri as a way of compliment. The next microensemble 4 B b reflects that this possessiveness does not stop him from chiding her even in the cinema hall when she wishes that they should have brought Babu with them for the movie.

I. 4 C: This last subensemble has three microensembles 4 C a, 4 C b and 4 C c. The first one

describes Ramani's expectations from his wife. He wants her to be uncomplaining and patient like the heroine of the movie 'kuchela'. The next microensemble indicates the religiosity and innocence of Savitri who folds her palms to pray when such scenes occur. The last microensemble 4 C c expresses the motherly concern of Savitri for her children. Even after coming late at night after the film she sees for herself whether the children have taken their meals and milk. She wants the children to see the movie. She has a sense of guilt at going to a movie without the children.

Analysis of the Problematics

Ramani: Fear, Force, Prejudice

Throughout the fourth unit of signification we find Ramani signifying fear, force and prejudice. He signifies fear in the microensemble 4 A a, where Savitri is seen to be very anxious when she comes to know that she is at once wanted by her husband. This is heightened by Savitri's throat going dry to see Ramani angry. He rebukes her for not being at home when he is back from office. He says :

A fellow comes home from the office, dog-tired, and he has only the doors and windows to receive him. (p-19)

This reflects his haughty nature. This is further echoed in the microensemble 4 A c where he warns his little daughter Kamala of thrashing if she repeated her request to be taken to cinema along with them. Further this authoritarian behaviour comes to full play in the microensemble 4 B b where he shuts Savitri up when she whispers to him that Babu should have been brought with them. In the microensemble 4 A c Ramani forces her to accompany her to the movie despite her will and tells her that he has not come all the way to be told 'some other day'. He orders her to dress quickly. As if that is not enough he shouts at her to be ready before he finishes the count of sixty.

His prejudiced nature is exemplified in the microensemble 4 A d where he is found to be highly critical of women for always taking too much time in getting ready. He also expresses his strong disapproval about their dressing-habits. He exclaims:

Women are exasperating. Only a fool would have anything to do with them. Hours and hours for dressing! Why can't they put on some decent clothes and look presentable at home instead starting their make-up just when you are in a hurry to be off? Stacks of costly saris, 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-21).

Ramani's other side of personality is revealed in the microensemble 4 B a. He feels pride in having a beautiful wife like Savitri, a fact he seems to be oblivious of and realizes only in public places when people throw looks at her as a way of compliment to her beauty. This is not all. He expects everybody around him to work or behave as he desires. But his expectations from Savitri are too great. He wants her to emulate the ideals of the heroine of the movie 'kuchela' a figure symbolizing patience and an uncomplaining nature despite the fact that she alone has to earn for the whole family.

Savitri : Anxiety, Timidity

We find a constant shifting images of Savitri as a signifier in this fourth unit of signification. She stands for anxiety in the microensembles 4 A a and 4 B a. In the microensemble 4 A a she becomes nervous to know of her husband's early arrival at home from his office. She fears that he might be taken ill. Furthermore, even while watching the movie in the hall she is unable to ward off her attention from her children.

She is also the embodiment of timidity as is apparent from the microensemble 4 A c. All her courage and

concern for children evaporates like camphor when she is before her husband. We never find her protesting against the harsh words used by Ramani for her and for the children she silently bears them all.

Besides, she stands as the signifier of having concern for women's cause which is clear from the microensemble 4 C a where she feels pity on the hard life of the heroine of the movie 'kuchela' who has to earn for a family of twenty-seven children and husband. Her husband is too busy with his prayers and meditation to earn for his family.

Children : They represent different things for Ramani and Savitri.

As presented in this unit of signification children have different connotations for each of them. For Ramani they are obstacles in the way of entertainment. That's why he says in the microensemble 4 A b that it is bad for children to be taken out every time their elders go out. Further, in the microensemble 4 B b he disapproves of Savitri's talking about her children while watching the movie. But for Savitri, the children stand as a constant means of pleasure and fulfilment.

Kamala : Protest

In the microensemble 4 A c we find Kamala

rejecting too much of parental control. When her father refuses to take her to the movie she registers her protest by stamping her feet and crying.

`Kuchela' : Faith, Sacrifice

`Kuchela', in the microemsemble 4 B a is a film based on the legendary story from Lord Krishna's life. This gives the message of sacrifice, prayers and meditations. The wife of `Kuchela' who uncomplainingly earns for the whole family, symbolises sacrifice. Her husband is too busy in his spiritual things to earn for his family.

Babu : Western influence

In this unit Babu represents modernity. When her mother praises the child artist, who acted Krishna in the movie `Kuchela' and asks him to watch it, he expresses his dislike for Indian films and mentions some English movies which according to him are far superior to the Indian ones. This reflects the impact of Western education which dissociates the children of today from their own roots.

I. 5 Coming of Navaratri Festival

Now comes the month of September and the beginning of Navaratri festival which involves everyone

from every family in some way or the other. In every home there is an exhibition of old and new toys and dolls with fine electric decoration. Everyone tries to excel over his neighbours in this show. For Savitri's household too this is time for gaiety, fun and enthusiasm. Even the servants take liberty to amuse the children and play jokes. Savitri, too, becomes nostalgic and remembers her childhood. Babu feels elevated because of being responsible for the grand electrical arrangements with the help of his friend, Chandra, who is senior to him and has a genius for electric works. But the whole thing takes a different turn and the house is plunged into darkness the moment the switch is pressed. Babu is in utter despair. He feels humiliated and apprehends his father's wrath. All his effort to set the things right goes in vain and he has to bear the brunt of his father's wrath who mercilessly beats him. Savitri protests to his harsh beating and uttering inauspicious words at this festivel occasion but Ramani hardly pays any heed to it. This helplessness makes her retire to a dark room to lie prostrate there as a way of protest. Even her children's effort to coax her fails to relieve her and she remains sulking there.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

This unit of signification has been divided into three subensembles viz. 5 A, 5 B and 5 C. These have further been broken into smaller units as presented below.

I. 5 A : The first subensemble 5 A has three microensembles beginning with 5 A a, an idea in "comprehension", which describes the onset of Navaratri Festival and how people of all ages and strata of society get emotionally involved in this religious fervour. Every house is agog with activities. The next microensemble 5 A b extends this atmosphere of fun and frolic by making Savitri remember her childhood. The last microensemble 5 A c describes the preparation for the exhibition of dolls and toys for the Navaratri occasion.

I. 5 B : The second subensemble, 5 B has also three microensembles. The first 5 B a describes the children's participation in preparing for the show of dolls and toys. Everyone has taken some responsibility according to his/her choice. Babu is responsible for electric decorations. In a couple of hours a gorgeous setting is ready for the dolls. This microensemble also portrays each one boasting of his own contribution to this festive occasion.

The second microensemble 5 B b conveys the deep sentiment of the children involved in this display of dolls and toys. They wish everything on display would remain there forever. For them it is always terribly dull when the decorations are torn down and the dolls are returned to the casks. The last microensemble of this subensemble i.e., 5 B c presents us with Babu taking some more electric decorations to win everyone's praise. But despite his great effort everything goes against him when the switch is pressed. The whole house is plunged into darkness making Babu very much demoralized and helpless.

I. 5 C : This last subensemble of the fifth unit of signification has been divided into three microensemble viz. 5 C a, 5 C b and 5 C c. The first one described how Babu is trying to set the things right before his father comes back. In the microensemble 5 C b we find him in the electric office where men on duty make fun of this poor boy and tell him that they are responsible only for the pole-fuse. The last microensemble 5 C c describes the scene at home after the arrival of Ramani. His temper runs high to see the house in the darkness and rebukes Savitri for not setting the things right so far. He

beats Babu when he knows that it is he who has invited all these troubles. When Savitri tries to protect Babu just because of this being a festive occasion and she does not want anybody to be sorry and sad. But as usual Ramani does not heed to her protest. This helplessness makes her retire to a dark room to lie prostrate there for sulking.

Analysis of the Problematics

Navaratri : Religiosity, Competition, Fun and Frolic

Throughout this unit we find Navaratri as an important signifier. First it signifies religiosity of the people for a period of nine days. They are busy in prayer and meeting one another. This also signifies competition among people. They are all busy in trying to make their show of dolls and toys on the occasion superior to that of others. This imparts a sense of responsibility in children who participate in it in a big way. This festive occasion is also symbolic of an opportunity when people forget their everyday-problems, try to have a break from their monotonous lives, mix with one another and have their pleasures. The barrier of age and class is forgotten. Even the servants lose no opportunity sharing lighter movements with their masters. This

is evident in the lines where Savitri chides her servant Ranga for breaking an elephant's trunk and asks him as to what is left of an elephant when its trunk is gone. To this he replies humourously :

It looks a buffalo now. Why not have it in the show as a buffalo madam? (p-27)

If this festival provides an opportunity to be happy and gay it also makes one peep into his past days. Savitri remembers her childhood when she used to celebrate the occasion with her parents and brothers and sisters. They are all now separated. Ranga, the servant, too recalls his wife and son.

Babu : Maturity

Though a boy of fifteen years he displays a sense of great maturity. He takes the charge of electric decorations and this sense of maturity is further echoed in the microensemble 5 C a. Here he feels demoralized when the light goes off because of some wrong connection he has made and goes to the electric office to have it set right. His sense of maturity comes to full play in the microensemble 5 C c where he protests to his father in no, uncertain words, "Don't beat me, father". (p-35)

Ramani : Impetuosity

Ramani has been portrayed as a man of rash behaviour and of impetuous character throughout this unit of signification. He often lambast at anybody without verifying things. It is evident in the microensemble 5 C c where he finds no light in the house at his return from office and shouts violently, "Is everybody in this house dead?" (p-33).

Nobody knows when what things would make him furious or what things happy. His impetuous nature is amply reflected in the microensemble 5 C c. First he becomes infuriated to know that Babu has gone alone to the electric office to lodge a complaint and says, " Babu, Babu, a vey big man to go". (p-33) And further when he is told that Ranga has gone with Babu, this too enrages him :

Why should everybody go to the electric office ?
Is Babu to be protected like a girl ? (p-33)

Thus it is obvious that for Ramani it matters little whether there is a proper reason to be angry or not, He has to assert his domination any how, that is all.

Savitri : Protest

In this unit we find in Savitri a metamorphosis taking place. From a submissive and devoted wife who bore everything, we now find in her a sense of indivi-

duality. This consciousness makes her react angrily to Ramani's shouting. She retorts:

What a thing to say on a day like this, and at this hour ! I have seen very few who will swear and curse at auspicious times as you do.(p-33)

Furthermore in the microensemble 5 C c we see her protesting at Ramani's beating of Babu. Her retiring to the dark room to lie there prostrate is also symbolic of her protest to the rude and atrocious behaviour of Ramani.

I. 6 Savitri's sulking and the atmosphere in the house

The servants in Savitri's house face great difficulty because of the tension between wife and husband. They do not have proper directions to run the household affairs. They have their own opinion about the family crisis. The maid-servant accuses Ramani but the cook holds Savitri guilty of all these troubles.

Savitri herself is very sorry to have been in such a low spirit on this festive Navaratri occasion. The children are also sad and worried. But for Ramani it makes no difference. Instead of coaxing her he utters such words as to hurt her sentiments further. In the end, it is the children who call Janamma, Savitri's good friend to make her come out

of the dark room.

Introduction to the Syntagmatics

The sixth unit of signification has three subensembles viz 6A, 6 B and 6C which have further been subdivided into microensembles for the detailed analysis as presented below.

I. 6 A : This first subunit has three microensembles. The first microensemble 6 A a is the description of the servants' reaction to the tension between the wife and the husband . The maid-servant supports Savitri of being responsible for the present crisis. the next microensembles 6 A b and 6 A c extend the ideas portayed in 6 A a.

I. 6 B : The second subensemble of this sixth unit of signification describes the feelings of the children and the husanbd due to Savitri's confinement in the dark room and her sulking there. The microensemble 6 B a presents Kamla's state of mind and her initiatives to coax her mother. The next microensemble 6 B b describes Babu's thinking. Babu blames himself for bringing the situation to this pass and resolves never to cry in his lfie. Babu also tries to persuade his mother to come out of the dark room.

The last microensemble 6 B c presents Ramani as the least concerned for Savitri in this situation. Instead of persuading her he hurts her further by his bitter comments.

I. 6 C : This subunit consists of the efforts made by Sumati and Kamala to bring their mother out from the dark room. They display a great sense of maturity and responsibility. This has two microensembles viz 6 C a and 6 C b. 6 C a is a description of the intelligent discussion between Sumati and Kamala to help solve the crisis. While 6 C b describes how the children approach Janamma who persuades Savitri to come out of the dark room.

Analysis of the Problematics

Dark room : Savitri's helplessness

After protesting to her husband's harsh beating of Babu for no fault of his, Savitri withdraws to the dark room where she lies prostrate sulking. This dark room is symbolic of Savitri's helplessness. For her there seems to be no way out of this situation. Despite her great tolerance capacity and compromising nature she has not been able to win her husband's confidence and she has to lead a life of dishonour and disgrace in her own household.

His prejudiced opinion is well depicted in the lines where he says;

Only once has my wife tried to interfere and then I nearly broke her bones. She has learned to leave me alone now. Women must be taught their place.(p-37)

Maid-servant : Women-sympathizer

If the male characters stand for the exploitation of women, there is one however, the maid-servant of Savitri, who strongly stands for the cause of woman-kind and defend's Saviri by uttering:

What do you know of the fire in a mother's belly when her child is suffering? (p-37)

The use of the phrase "fire in a mother's belly" is symbolic of sacrifice and troubles a mother has to bear for her children.

Children : Wit, responsibility, innocence.

It is at the time of such crisis in the family as in Savitri's household that children get an opportunity to use their potential to ease the tense atmosphere. This is vividly portrayed in this unit of signification. The children, Sumati and Kamala believe that if their mother can be made to answer some questions, she could then be persuaded to come out of the dark room. This is a witty and innocent effort on the part of the children. Further in the

microensemble 6 C a when Sumati proposes to call Janamma, her mother's friend, to convince her mother, Kamala very intelligently asks her ;

But don't you think that family secrets should not be allowed out of the house? (p-41)

Ramani : Indifference

Ramani as usual signifies indifference and haughtiness, particularly to his wife Savitri. When Savitri cries out protesting against Ramani's beating of Babu he tells that he is sick of this sentimental show. It matters little even if Savitri is sulking. His calm indifference is evident from his humming a little song, whistling loudly and talking to his daughters.

Janamma : Tradition

In the sixth unit of signification we find in Janamma a protagonist of tradition who feels that it is no duty of a wife to interfere in her husband's activities. She upholds the traditional stereotype of a devoted wife who bears every treatment meted out to her as the consequence of her fate. She defends Ramani's anger by saying :

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 sometime unreasonable.

After all, they are better trainers of children than we can be. If they sometimes appear harsh, you may rest assured they will suffer for it later. (p-42)

I. 7 Appointment of lady probationers in Ramani's company

Ramani is the officer-in-charge of Malgudi town branch of the Englandia Insurance Company. According to a new plan this company is to appoint some women probationers to give a boost to its insurance business. Every staff of the Malgudi branch has his own views about this new scheme. If it is very exciting for Pereira, the office Manager, it is ridiculous for Kantaiengar, another staff member. On the day of interview for the appointment of lady probationers Ramani is disappointed to find no charming lady except the last one. She is Shanta Bai. Though married at a very early age she has left her husband, a drunkard and gambler. Her charming look and gestures have a magical effect on Ramani and he gives her this job.

Introduction to the Syntagmatics

This unit of signification has four subensembles viz. 7 A, 7 B, 7 C and 7 D which have further been broken into smaller units as discussed below.

I. 7 A : This subensemble has three microensembles beginning with 7 A a which describes the novel scheme of the Englandia Insurance Company to appoint some lady probationers to enhance its insurance business. The next microensembles 7 A b and 7 A c extend the idea presented through the first microensemble.

I. 7 B : It too consists of three smaller subunits. The first microensemble 7 B a describes how Ramani is charmed at the beauty of the last candidate, Shanta Bai, for the post of lady probationer. The next microensembles 7 B b and 7 B c describe Ramani's going out of his official limitations to see her through in the job.

I. 7 C : It also has three microensembles viz 7 C a, 7 C b and 7 C c. This subensemble is the description of Ramani's extraordinary concern for Shanta Bai. He takes interest even in her personal life. This Ramani-Shanta Bai affair leads to many wild speculations among his office staff.

I. 7 D : This last subensemble has four microensembles. It begins with the head office confirming Shanta Bai's appointment. But to Ramani's surprise, she is not happy with the pay there. The next microensembles describe how he convinces her to remain

in the job and not to reject the present offer. He assures her of all help.

Appointment of lady probationers : Increasing awareness

The decision of the Insurance Company in 1936 to appoint some lady probationers to enhance its business is symbolic of a change taking place in society i.e., women's coming out of their traditional role of looking after only home and hearth. A large number of respondents for these jobs is indicative of increasing awareness among women-folk. The company providing these opportunity is symbolic of the system responding positively to the changed value-system.

Shanta Bai : liberated woman, alienation

As presented in the seventh unit of signification, Shanta Bai as a signifier signifies a liberated woman who will not accept to lead a life as an appendage to her husband. She is an educated woman and feels no compunction in defying inhuman social practice of child-marriage. She disowns her husband when he does not mend his gambling and drinking habits. She represents alienation in the sense that she is very sceptic of the present social system. She says :

It is all nonsense to say that women's salvation lies in education. It doesn't improve their lot a bit; it leaves them as badly unemployed as men (p-46).

Her outlook, gestures and manners represent the modern values she upholds. She possesses all the qualities which Ramani desired to see in his wife. She is shrewd and outspoken and feels no hesitation in resenting Ramani for his unwarranted curiosity about her private life.

Ramani : Professional knack, inner-conflict

In this unit of signification we have a different image of Ramani. He is found to have a professional knack in dealing with official duties. This knack is first reflected in the microensemble 7 B c where he is found to be talking to ^{the} probationer in the orthodox style of a senior :

..an Insurance carrier is not at all an easy one. It is one of the most exacting professions in the world. (p-47)

Further, in the microensemble 7 D a, Ramani places the confirmation-letter of her appointment before Shanta Bai, but he tries to look casual and unconcerned. He goes through some papers while she reads it. This reflects his being diplomatic while in office.

In this unit we find him caught in a conflict between tradition and modernity. He likes Shanta

Bai's dress-habit, her behaviour and her modern outlook. This reflects his conception of a woman as a wife. But as a wife he has Savitri who is submissive and traditional in outlook. Perhaps that's why we find him always in antagonism with his wife. This conflict leads him to hold a double standard for evaluating woman's role. He opines in the microensemble 7 D c that it is all nonsense to keep men and women in separate water-tight compartments and that women are as good as men and must be treated accordingly. But this is quite contrary to the views he has about his wife, Savitri.

I. 8 Ramani coming closer to Shanta Bai

Every evening Ramani goes to a club to play billiard and bridge. But today while passing by his office after the games he feels an urge to see Shanta Bai and makes an excuse to visit the office to see whether the watchman is on duty or not. He is still undecided and hesitatingly knocks her door. He thinks that she will take his visit at this odd hour to be a bit unconventional. But to his surprise, she receives him very warmly. Ramani is thrilled. He takes great interest in listening to her past story and her philosophy of life which she keeps on repea-

ting after every ten minutes. It becomes a daily routine for Ramani to visit Shanta Bai in the evening and stay there till late night. Initially he feels sense of guilt but soon he overcomes it. If ever asked by Savitri the reason for being late, he would either chide her or ignore her queries.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

This eighth unit of signification has been divided into three subensembles viz. 8 A, 8 B and 8 C which have further been subdivided into smaller subunits as presented below.

1. 8 A : The first subensemble has two microensembles 8 A a and 8 A b. These microensembles describe the dilemmic situation of Ramani who on the one hand wants to have very intimate relation with Shanta Bai but on the other does not wish it to be known to others fearing loss of social prestige.

I. 8 B : This subensemble consists of four microensembles beginning with 8 B a, an idea in "comprehension" which describes how Ramani overcomes his inhibition in paying an uncalled for visit to Shanta Bai at the odd hour. The next microensembles 8 B b, 8 B c and 8 B d describe how soon they become informal and intimate in their talk with Ramani taking immense

interest in her philosophy of life.

I. 8 C : The last subensemble of the eighth signifying unit, consisting of two microensembles viz. 8 C a and 8 C b begins with the portrayal of Ramani's feeling guilty of transgressing marital limits. But the second microensemble gives description of his shedding this feeling of guilt and rationalizing it as a man's prerogative to have some extramarital relations.

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Analysis of _^problematics

Ramani : dilemma, diplomacy

In this signifying unit we find Ramani symbolic of the conflict between tradition and modernity. He is influenced by the modern ideas and outlook which attract him towards Shanta Bai. He is fascinated with this young probationer at his office and wants to have very intimate relations with her. But at the same time he is tradition-bound and fears loss of social prestige. This puts him in a dilemmic situation. He feels inhibition to pay a visti to Mrs. Shanta Bai but soon he overcomes it. But his dilemma is revealed again in the microensemble 8 C a, When he comes home in the night after staying with Shanta Bai he feels guilt complex and tries to make as

little noise as possible as not to awake anybody in the house.

He also signifies diplomacy in this unit of signification in the sense that he knows how to win a lady's heart. When Shanta Bai offers a chair to sit on, Ramani says he cannot sit when a lady is standing. To reassure her of his great concern for her he tells Shanta Bai :

I have just remembered to tell you : if you have found me a little different in the office, please don't be hurt.(p-55)

He even goes to the extent of telling her to treat him as her brother and that in the office he does not want anyone to notice any difference. His behaviour with Shanta Bai indicates his infatuation for her and his making efforts to seduce her.

Mrs. Shanta Bai : hedonism, shrewdness,disappointment

Here in the eighth signifying unit Shanta Bai is representative of a lady possessing modern values and whose philosophy of life is hedonistic. She believes in enjoying the present which is evident in the microensemble 8 B c where she makes her philosophy of life clear to Ramani :

Living Today and Letting Tomorrow Take Care of Itself, or Honour Being the One Important Possession.(p-56)

She is shrewd and knows how to respond to her boss. In the microensemble 8 B a when Ramani expresses his sorrow to have come to her at that odd time, she replies to him very intelligently:

Oh, I love unconventional things, otherwise I shouldn't be here, but nursing children and cooking for a husband. (p-54)

because she knows that her career lies in the hands of Ramani. But one thing which comes to our mind is that she is not all that happy as she claims to be. Her repeating her philosophy of life after every ten minutes in the microensemble 8 B c is symbolic of her disappointment, the disappointment of a lady who is in constant search for justice and peace of mind in this male-dominated world.

I.9 Ramani's infatuation for Shanta Bai

Ramani is so much concerned about Shanta Bai that mere idea of her being removed from job because of the non-fulfilment of a certain job-condition torments him. He goes out of official limits to make her meet this condition. Now Ramani spent most of his evening time with Shanta Bai, sometimes even the whole night. Sometimes he would face peculiar situation because of her fluctuating moods. One moment she would be all happy, the next would steadily work

herself up to a breakdown. Ramani's activities make Savitri suspicious of some foul play which is further confirmed by Gangu. But Savitri is too innocent to take them seriously and thinks that people are envious of her husband's personality.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

This ninth unit of signification has been divided into five subensembles viz. 9 A, 9 B, 9 C, 9 D and 9 E which have further been subdivided into smaller units as presented below.

I. 9 A : The first subensemble has only two microensembles. The first 9 A a described Ramani's concern for Shanta Bai. He is disturbed to know that she might lose her job if she fails to fulfil her job-condition. The next microensemble is the description of Ramani's relieving her of some work to help achieve her the prescribed insurance target.

I. 9 B: This subensemble has no subunit and is complete in itself. This is a comprehensive idea about his daily visit to Shanta Bai. This can be treated as an "infix", for this subensemble is neither directly related to next subensemble nor is this the continuation of the previous one.

I. 9 C : It has three microensembles. The first 9 C a presents us with the description of Ramani's acting as a soothing lover when Shanta Bai is in bad mood. The next microensembles describe the fluctuating mood of Shanta Bai.

I. 9 D : The fourth subensemble has been subdivided into four microensemble beginning with 9 D a which describes the scene at Ramani's home on his return in the morning. His being away from the house whole night moves Savitri angry and she vents her aggression at the milkman, the cook, the maid-servant and the children. This is portrayed in the microensemble 9 D b. The next microensemble 9 D c informs us of the change in Savitri's mood. She soon feels pity for her husband and curses herself to be suspicious of his character. And the last microensemble describes Savitri asking her husband as to when he will return from his office. This again infuriates him.

I. 9 E : This last subensemble has three microensembles viz. 9 E a, 9 E b and 9 E c. The 9 E a describes the visit of Gangu to Savitri's house. As is her habit, she tables of one and all in the town. She tells Savitri that she saw Ramani in the movie with a lady some two days ago. In the microensemble

9 E b we see Savitri very disturbed but as a devoted wife she wants all further talk about her husband to cease now. The last microensemble 9 E c is the description of Savitri's introspective mood. Like any woman she grows apprehensive about the new lady coming in Ramani's life. She feels she must be good-looking that's why Ramani is charmd by her.

Analysis of the problematics

Ramani : infatuation, arrogance

Here in this unit of signification Ramani signifies infatuation. His infatuation for Shanta Bai is so great that the very thought of her being removed from the job torments him too much and he personally sees to it that she fulfilled her job condition. Now it has become his daily habit to visit Shanta Bai while coming back from the club and spending evenings and sometimes even nights with her. Further we find him to be a perfect soothing lover when Shanta Bai, is in bad mood, something he has never done in his own married life. At times he is even insulted by Shanta Bai, as in the microensemble 9 C a, but, this does not demoralize him. Further in the microensemble 9 C b Shanta Bai proposes to him to come for a movie to which he shows hesitation. But when she says that perhaps he does not wish to be seen in

public with her, he readily agrees to accompany her and asserts with much bravado that he cares not a straw of public opinion. These all confirm his infatuation for Shanta Bai. But be that as it may, Ramani's conscience has not cleared him. He still feels some sort of compunction. That's why we find him in the microensemble 9 C b making delay so that he might make an unobtrusive entry into the picture hall and take his seat inconspicuously.

His arrogant behaviour also comes to play in this signifying unit. When in the microensemble 9 D a, he comes home in the morning after spending the night out and is asked by Savitri the cause of this extraordinary delay he loses his temper and says :

Can't you wait ? Do you want me to stand at the street-door and shout my explanation? (p-62)

Further when Savitri tries to cool him down by taking about Babu and a letter from her sister from Rangoon, his indifference is quite humiliating. Next when Savitri asks him the time of his return from office he says that he is not as old as Babu and that he can't answer these idiotic questions. Ramani has no respect for his wife's sentiments. Perhaps he is oblivious of the fact that an affectionate reply or smile to the wife's queries could boost her to bear

the pangs and hardships of domestic life, a housewife has to face.

Shanta Bai : domineering type, Coquette

In this unit Shanta Bai is seen to be in complete command of the situation. She is a domineering type of lady which makes Ramani only a plaything in her hands. At times she is disgusted to receive special favours from Ramani and tells him that she knows her fate and will not shirk it and that she won't have him do anything special for herself. Sometimes she would talk briskly and the very next moment would be highly philosophical. She symbolizes a schizophrenic type of personality because she intends to be something different from what her existential situation forces her to be. And this helplessness is revealed by the constant shift in her moods. She dreams of owning a Baby Austin and dismisses films like 'The Ramayan' as sheer mythological non-sense. She combines her feminine independence with a shrewd opportunism that characteristically belongs to the New Civilization. Ramani's physical interest in Shanta Bai grows into an adulterous affair, and Shanta Bai inflames it with her coquettish sophistication :

She compressed her lips and jerked her head in the perfect Garbo manner : the temperamental heroine and the impending doom. (p-59)

Savitri : loyalty, helplessness, protest

Savitri is the embodiment of loyalty. It is apparent when the milkman asks her about Ramani's late coming from his office, she evades the questions very intelligently. Even though she has apprehension of some foul play in Ramani's behaviour, she does not want to let others know about these things. That's why when Gangu says she has seen Ramani with some other lady in the cinema-hall, Savitri wants all further talk about her husband to cease. Her loyalty and faith in her husband is evident in the microensemble 9 D c where she despises herself to have doubted Ramani's character and curses Gangu to have poisoned her mind against her husband.

Ramani's nights out in Shanta Bai's company cause disquieting thoughts in Savitri's mind but she "decided that it would be better to suffer in silence than venture a question ".(p-63). When Gangu tells her about Ramani's infidelity, she only sulks in self-pity:

Perhaps I am old and ugly. How can I help it ?
I have borne children and slaved for the house.
(p-68)

She pathetically prepares herself to win him back by
reviving her charm. How pathetically <sup>she longs that he may come
and love</sup> her as
boisterously as he loved her in the first week of
their marriage...." (p-71).

We also find a change in Savitri's behaviour. She is not the woman to be cowed down all the time. Her protest to Ramani's arrogant and haughty behaviour which occurred first in the microensemble 5 C c reappears here in the microensemble 9 D c. She vents her protest by shouting at the milkman, the cook and even at her children.

I. 10 Savitri : The rebellion

Savitri is with her children. She corrects Sumati and Kamala when they say that they hate their father because he always scolds her, she convinces them that he scolds her only when she does something wrong. While alone her attention always goes to the new lady Shanta Bai. Poor Savitri can only ask what is wrong with herself and try to make up for the

ravages of daily drudgery by extra care to her personal appearance. She dresses herself up, and waits patiently for the erring husband. But it is only the next evening that Ramani returns home. He takes his dinner and goes to bed. This time Savitri fails to control her anger and shouts at Ramani:

"This sort of thing has to stop, understand?" (p-73)

He understands the seriousness of the situation and tries to pacify her by showing^e love on her. Both Ramani and Savitri have had a heated exchange of words and Ramani tries to assault her. Finally she walks out of the house all alone at midnight itself.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

This last signifying unit of the first sequence has been divided into three subensembles viz. 10 A, 10 B and 10 C. They have further been subdivided into still smaller units as presented below.

I. 10 A : The first subensemble has only two microensembles beginning with 10 A a which describes Savitri's agony. Whenever alone her mind reverts to

her husband's having an affair with Shanta Bai but she is optimistic and feels that if she looked well and dressed properly she might once again be able to win his heart back. The second microensemble 10 A b presents Babu's hatred for the institution of marriage.

I. 10 B : This second subensemble has three microensembles. The first 10 B a, presents Savitri in an introspective mood analysing things in a reasoned way, sometimes finding herself at fault. The next microensemble 10 B b describes her long wait for her husband. But he does not come back that night. In the next microensemble 10 B c we see her engrossed in her children. She gets utmost relief to hear from Babu that he would always be at his mother's side.

I. 10 C : The last subensemble has been divided into four microensembles viz. 10 C a, 10 C b, 10 C c and 10 C d. The first microensemble 10 C a, an idea in "comprehension" describes Savitri's revolt against her husband. The revolt which was so far dormant and confined within her conscious self has become manifest in this microensemble. Even Ramani is

surprised and tries to pacify her. But her anger does not calm down. And in the next two microensembles we have very strong and heated arguments between the husband and wife. First time we find Savitri replying to her husband face-to-face and that too in a befitting manner. The last microensemble 10 C d describes Savitri's walking out of the house all alone at midnight itself.

Analysis of the Problematics

Savitri : dejection, revolt

In this signifying unit we find Savitri being utterly dejected by the constant humiliations by her husband. But she never forgets her role as a caring mother. She tries her best not to make her children's psyche strained by the tension between the husband and the wife. When the children sense some foul play in their father's frequent late home coming after his office they ask their mother about it. She again tries to hide the matter by saying that their father has too much work to do at his office. Her dejection makes her ask her son Babu as to what he will do when he becomes a big man. At Babu's reply, that he won't leave the office and will stay there

night and day, she gets tormented and bursts out :

Very well, but what about me ? Shall I have to be at home all alone while you are away ? You had forgotten me. Everybody forgets me. (p-72)

But it is not that she is not aware of her obligations to her husband. At times she tries to judge her own behaviour through her husband's eyes and tries to come up to his expectations. She recalls the instances which remind her of his great considerations for her feelings though he might appear rough from outside. She even curses herself to have annoyed Ramani by asking silly questions like whether he will return home or not. She is aware of a wife's responsibility to behave according to the wishes of her husband, to help him come out of the ennui of the daily life and feel fresh. But this is very difficult if a wife does not get the minimum of encouragement and love from her counterpart as in the case of Savitri.

The most important thing about Savitri in this unit of signification is that she has completely transformed from a submissive and docile woman to a strong rebellion one in an open revolt against unjust

and imperious behaviour of her husband, Ramani. She tells him in clear terms that he cannot have herself and Shanta Bai at the same time. When he tries to pacify her by taking her to his bed she says furiously :

Don't touch me! you are dirty, you are impure. Even if I burn my skin I can't cleanse myself of the impurity of your touch. (p-75)

She seems to be airing a women's protest in general against this male-dominated oppressive society. This becomes evident when Ramani asks her to take her things and get out immediately. She says wittingly :

Things? 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-75)

Earlier also in the microensemble 10 C a we find Savitri hitting out against men's attitude towards women :

For you we are playthings when you feel like hugging, and slaves at other times. Don't think that you can fondle us when you like and kick us when you choose. (p-73)

Thus Savitri is symbolic of a woman fighting for the cause of woman-kind.

Ramani : rudeness, indifference, diplomacy

Ramani as signifier signifies rudeness and indifference throughout this signifying ensemble. He being disliked by his own family members is obvious from the fact that with his arrival the whole house wears a gloomy silence in order to avoid his uncalled for wrath. His rudeness and indifference are fully demonstrated when on Savitri's protest over his affair with Shanta Bai he says :

I don't want you to dictate to me. Don't be a silly fool. (p-74)

Further, in the microensemble 10 C c when Savitri's protest becomes more prominent he clenches his teeth and raises his hands so as to strike her and tells her to get away. Again in the same microensemble when children begin crying to find the duel-like scene between their parents, Ramani shouts furiously :

Now keep quiet. Here, Kamala, if I hear your voice I will peel the skin off your back. Babu, Sumati, lie down and shut your eyes, and shut your mouths, sleep at once! (p-75)

This is not all. He is adept in easing out the tense situation diplomatically. This we find in the microensemble 10 C a, where Ramani knowing the terrific force of Savitri's protest tries to take her hands, draws her nearer and calls her 'pet'. He

takes her hard words as a joke and laughs them off.

He further says:

Now, now be a good girl, don't lie down, my pet.
(p-74)

And this trick of Ramani works. Savitri feels that all her troubles have ceased. This is typical of a traditional Indian woman whose all grievances evaporate like camphor at one or two endearing words from her husband.

Children : Sensibility

The children of Savitri and Ramani are an important signifier which signifies sensitivity. In the very first microensemble of this signifying unit this is obvious. When the children come from school they see the swollen eyes of their mother and ask her whether their father has scolded her. Next, in the microensemble 10 A b they compliment their mother on her make-up. This shows their sensibility and sensitivity. Further, Kamala asks Savitri as to why father comes late from his office. Even a fifteen-year old Babu is so sensitive that he cannot bear the wife-husband feud and decides not to marry in his life and assures his mother that he will always be with her. Finally, in the microensemble 10 C c, when

they see their father dragging their mother they find it difficult to control themselves and cry. This sensitivity of the children is known to Savitri perhaps that's why she tries not to let them know of her own agony about the Ramani-Shanta Bai affair.

II. The Second Sequence

The second sequence of the discourse has been divided into nine main units of signification denoted as 1,2,3,... We analyze these in the manner of the first sequence above.

II. 1. Helpless Savitri decides to commit suicide

After walking out of the house, Savitri keeps on walking all the night. She is so preoccupied with her past reminiscences, good and bad, that it never occurs to her mind that she is alone at this odd hour of the night. She is quite surprised at her own action. She does not believe that she is the same old Savitri who used to put up with all the humiliations meted out to her by her husband. This nostalgic Savitri comes to realise that no one who does not live by herself has the right to exist. She laments the awesome life of a married woman which is no better than a prostitute and tries to end her life by drowning herself.

Introduction to the Syntagmatics

This first unit of signification of the second sequence has three smaller units i.e, subensembles denoted as 1A, 1B and 1C which have further been divided into microensembles which we shall discuss

below.

II. 1 A: This subensemble is complete in itself and has no subunits. This is a proposition in "comprehension" which describes the existential situation of the town of Malgudi and its surroundings and weather.

II. 1 B: The second subensemble has three microensembles beginning with 1 B a, a proposition in "comprehension" which describes the mental state of Savitri. She remembers her good days with her husband, even her childhood. She is rather surprised to take such an extraordinary of walking out of the house protesting against at the dictating behaviour of Ramani. She now believes that one can do anything if he/she avoids one definite thing in life i.e, 'fear'. The next two microensembles 1 B b and 1 B c are propositions in "extension" which are further descriptions of the nostalgic mood of Savitri who constantly thinks of her children, sometimes of her own early married life and sometimes of her own childhood.

II. 1 C: This last subsensemble of the first signifying ensemble has three smaller units 1 C a, 1 C b and 1 C c. The first 1 C a is an idea in

"comprehension" which describes the predicament of Savitri who finds no way out of this agony but to end her life. She laments that she did everything she could to please her husband but to no avail.

The next microensemble 1 C b describes how she feels that even if she tries to earn her own livelihood she cannot, as she has not that much of education. She realized now that women should not depend for their salvation on marriage because then there is hardly any difference between a prostitute and a married woman.

The last microensemble 1 C c continues to give description of her dilemma i.e whether to end her life or not.

Analysis of the Problematics

Savitri : dilemma, individuality, helplessness

Like in other signifying ensembles, here also Savitri is a very significant signifier. She signifies dilemma in the sense that even after she walks out on her husband she has hardly been able to ward off the thought of her children and Ramani. She at times finds herself in a moral dilemma that she ought not to have left her husband whatsoever be his treatment. She decides to end her life because she

feels she cannot support herself but the next moment the thought of the children stops her from doing so. Even when in the microensemble 1 C c she tries to drown herself the thought of Yama, punishing her with cauldron for having heated argument with Ramani and disobeying him, disturbs her.

She fails to understand why God has no pity on her when she has never missed to perform her daily pooja. This is symbolic of her devotion and innocence. She remembers her sisters who are married and happy. In the microensemble 1 B c she recalls the love-making of Ramani in their early days when Ramani used to write very loving letters praising her beauty. She also remembers his words that he would have taken his life if he had not got her (Savitri).

Now it is because of the fact that she has given birth to three children she has lost her physical charm and utters within herself boastfully:

Give the other one, too, three children and two mis-carriages and see what she will come to; no one except me could have retained even so much of my early looks. (p-79)

The very fact that she has left the world dominated by Ramani speaks of her boldness and the sense of individuality. In the microensemble 1 B a, she very intelligently remarks that one should not be fearful

of the consequences if one feels that what one is doing is right. She signifies helplessness in the sense that she laments the fact that she has to suffer all these problems because she is not well-educated and can't support herself. She finds no difference between a woman who depends on marriage for her salvation and a prostitute:

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. (p-80)

Sarayu : Vicissitude

The Sarayu river in the subensemble 1 A is symbolic of the vicissitude of Savitri. The river is flowing with a subdued rumble but with the change of season there will be change in its volume of water and its current, sometimes furrowing the boiling sands. Similar is the existential situation of Savitri who is normally calm and subdued but situation compels her to take to some unusual path and some very serious thoughts come out of her heart.

Fear : human psychology

Fear symbolizes human psychology which has beautifully been presented through Savitri's introspective mood in the microensemble 1 B a. It is

natural that every human being has got fear of some sort because he is not all-powerful. And it is this fear which at times forces one to accept the situation, in which one is placed, as his fate. This is revealed in Savitri's thought;

One definite thing in life is 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. (p-77)

She is particularly speaking of the fear of the middle class Indian girl and woman who have terrors on the domestic front a manifold time more oppressive than any other subjugation. These mind-forged manacles of fear are worsened by the sanction of religion and superstition which is obvious from Savitri's fearing "the cauldron of boiling oil prepared by Yama in hell for disobedient wives" (p-)

II. 2. Savitri with Mari and Ponni

In this unit of signification Mari and Ponni are introduced. Mari is a locksmith who repairs locks and umbrellas in towns and is an occasional burglar also. He is a burglar for two reasons. Firstly, he finds it is adventurous and secondly he does it to please his wife Ponni whom he loves very much even

though she keeps him under her thumb. Mari while coming back from the town finds Savitri in the unconscious state by the river-side and brings her back to Ponni. They try to make her feel comfortable by their kind words and generous hospitality. Despite Ponni's best efforts, Savitri is not convinced to accept any food and shelter given by her since she has resolved not to live on charity.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

The second signifying ensemble has six subensembles, 2 A, 2 B, 2 C, 2 D, 2 E and 2 F which have further been divided into microensembles discussed below.

II. 2 A: It has three microensembles 2 A a, 2 A b and 2 A c. The microensemble 2 A a introduces to us Mari and Ponni, their profession and their love for each other. The microensembles 2 A b and 2 A c extend the idea presented in 2 A a. These describe the hard life of Mari and Ponni.

II. 2 B: This second subensemble is having no microensemble, a proposition complete in itself which may be taken as an "infix". This tells us about the general expectations of a wife from her husband that

he should return home every day laden with money but the quite opposite is the scene for Mari who sees no scope to fulfil his wife's wish even for one day.

II. 2 C: The third subensemble 2 C has three microensembles 2 C a, 2 C b and 2 C c. The microensemble 2 C a describes the way Mari makes rounds in the streets of the town to get some lock repairing business but to no avail. 2 C b shows how he with his sweet but cunning words win the heart of the oldwoman who sells fried groundnut, coloured edibles etc. and managed to have some eatables to quench his hunger. The last microensemble describes how meticulously Mari breaks in some house while passing through the streets at night and commits burglary.

II. 2 D: The fourth subensemble has four microensembles beginning with 2 D a, a proposition in "comprehension" which describes Mari lamenting his failure not to have brought anything from the house he had broken in. He apprehends Ponni's wrath. The microensemble 2 D b is the extension of the idea presented in 2 D a. The 2 D c describes how Mari first confuses Savitri on the river-bank to be the temptress Devil, Mohini and then saves her from

drowning. In the microensemble 2 D d we find Savitri recovering from her unconsciousness.

II. 2 E : The subensemble 2 E has two microensembles 2 E a and 2 E b. The microensemble 2 E a, a proposition in "comprehension" describes the psychic state of Savitri in which all the old bitterness and pain have revived when she comes back to sense after she is saved by Mari. The microensemble 2 E b tells us how warmly Ponni receives her and tries to comfort her.

II. 2 F: The last subensemble 2 F has three microensembles 2 F a, 2 F b and 2 F c. 2 F a, a proposition in "comprehension" describes the secret of Ponni dominating over her husband and the advice she gives to Savitri to make her husband do what she wishes. The microensembles 2 F b and 2 F c describe the dominating nature of Ponni.

Analysis of the problematics

Mari : hard-life, affection

Mari is a very important signifier and stands in contrast to Ramani's character. Though he has to suffer a lot to see both his ends meet he never yields and thrashes his wife Ponni. Rather his love

for her is so great that he likes to be chided by her. He even commits burglary to please his wife. His hard-life is revealed in the microensemble 2 C a where his every effort to get some lock-repair business fails and he says to himself that he might cry till he spat blood but nobody will give him a pie. Further, in the microensemble 2 C b he is found entreating an old woman who sells eatables to provide him with a little tobacco and betel leaf:

Oh, sister, give me a little tobacco and betel leaf. God will take you to heaven for it. (p-83)

Further, he says:

Let me be smitten with leprosy if I have a pie more about me. (p-84)

Ponni : domination, woman-chauvinist

Ponni as a signifier stands in opposition to Savitri, the protagonist of the discourse. She is very dominating in every sense of the term despite her poor socio-economic condition. She never allows her husband Mari to have his own way. That's why Mari gets perturbed when he is not able to earn a good amount and fears his wife's wrath if she should see he has come home empty-handed after a full day out. She is so dominating that she has persuaded Savitri to come to her house despite the latter's

resolve not to accept anybody's charity. She is very aggressive and a female-chauvinist. This image of her keeps on appearing in this second signifying unit. In the microensemble 2 E a when she comes to know about Savitri's plight she suggests to her;

Sister, remember this keep the men under the rod, and they will be all right. Show them that you are for them they will tie you and treat you like a dog. (p-90)

In the same microensemble she shows Savitri how she commands her husband. She calls him and says:

Don't butt in when women are talking. Stay under that tree. I will call you when I want you. (p-90)

And with a sense of pride she tells her that she does not believe that any husband is unmanageable in this universe.

Savitri : nostalgia

As in other signifying ensembles, here too Savitri has not been able to overcome her nostalgic feelings about her children, her husband, her friends Gangu and Janamma. She apprehends the worse that now Ramani might have brought the other lady, Shanta Bai to home. This is evident in the microensemble 2 E a.

II. 3. Ramani running the house in Savitri's absence

Now, the onus of running the house falls on Ramani

in Savitri's absence. He personally sees to it that the children do not feel the absence of their mother. Sometimes he brings sweets for them, takes them to movies, asks them about their studies and games. He does not scold them as he used to do earlier even if he gets irritated at their behaviour. When asked by them about their mother, he tells that she has gone to Talapur, her father's place to see her sick father. He is worried and even surprised at Savitri's unprecedented step but is confident that she will be back after realising her fault.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

This signifying unit has three subunits viz., 3 A, 3 B and 3 C which have further been subdivided into microensembles as presented below.

II. 3 A: This first subensemble has three microensembles beginning with 3 A a, a proposition in "comprehension", which presents Ramani for the first time in the discourse very much shaken by Savitri's manner. He never expected Savitri to take such a step. It shows how Ramani sees women only as subordinates to their husbands. He enjoins upon them the strictest identification with their husbands. The next microensembles 3 A b and 3 A c are

propositions in "extension" which describe how Ramani finds Savitri's stand as very irresponsible and justifies his own.

II. 3 B: The subensemble 3 B has three microensembles beginning with 3 B a, a "comprehensive idea" about the change in Ramani's attitude. In Savitri's absence he takes it as his responsibility to run the domestic affairs so that the children do not feel inconvenience and ask for her. Besides, he wants to prove that no one is indispensable. The microensemble 3 B b is the further description of Ramani's running the affairs, his tackling of the children, instructing servants. In the microensemble 3 B c we find him talking to Babu who being the eldest tries to ask some irritating questions of Ramani but he controls his wrath and pacifies him.

II. 3 C: The last subensemble of this signifying unit has only two microensembles. 3 C a shows Ramani's concern for the children. He is very happy to know that the children are so manageable. The microensemble 3 C b is the continuation of his efforts to make the children feel comfortable in their mother's absence.

Analysis of the problematics

Ramani : arrogance, male-superiority, paternal love.

Throughout the third signifying ensemble Ramani signifies arrogance, as in the previous ensembles. But here there is a difference. This time his arrogance comes to play not before Savitri but in her absence. But the message is the same i.e, to make Savitri realize whenever she comes back that she is not indispensable for the family.

However, he is surprised at Savitri's extraordinary step. He never thought that she would really leave the house. But his arrogance is found in his biased thinking that women should have some freedom but that should not blind them to their primary duties of being wives and mothers as presented in the microensemble 3 A c.

He recalls his large expense spent over her for her comfort and finds her disloyal to forget all these things. His arrogant behaviour has its further display in the microensemble 3 B c while telling Babu to take tiffin to school. The latter finds it degrading and shameful to carry a packet and eat it in the school. But he has to accept his father's order with gloomy resignation. Further, in the same microensemble when Babu shows his hesitation in

accompanying his sisters and father to a movie because he has to play a cricket match he gets infuriated but controls his wrath remembering that he has to be very kind to the children.

His image of male-chauvinism has its echo in the lines where he feels;

A man had a right to a little fun now and then, provided it didn't affect his conduct at home. No doubt it took him home rather late, but that could have rectified by a little persistent persuasion on her part. (p-92)

He rationalizes his view by holding that India owes its spiritual eminence to the fact that the people here realize that a woman's primary duty is being a wife and a mother. He refers to the ancient epics and scriptures which enjoin upon woman the strictest identification with her husband. The Kernel Semantics of the situation appears in the lines where he opines that firmness is everything in life; that is the secret of success with woman. He holds the view that if women found a man squeamish they will drive him with a whip.

His show of paternal love presented through the microensembles 3 B a, 3 B b, 3 C a and 3 C b is not his natural one. This also is in response to make Savitri realize that he bothers little about her absence. This is evident from the fact that he

pockets his anger when Babu's words irritate him remembering that he has to be very kind to the children.

Babu : Self-assertion

Babu, though fifteen-year old, tries to assert his individuality. This is demonstrated in the microensemble 3 B b where at Ramani's answer to Kamala's question that her mother has gone to see her sick father, Babu's gesture seems to be asserting his doubt and Ramani asks him:

Why are you blinking? Do you want to ask anything? (p-95)

Next, in the microensemble 3 B c he accepts his father's order to take tiffin to the school with a gloomy resignation. For Babu considers himself big enough to take tiffin along with him. In the same microensemble he hesitates to go to movie because he has promised to his friends to come for cricket practice for the match. He thinks it disgraceful not to keep his words.

II. 4. Shanti Bai : A modern lady

Here Ramani is with Shanti Bai. She is in a philosophical mood and talks about Omar Khayyam and Fitzgerald about whom Ramani is ignorant. When he

wants to play love with her she expresses her unwillingness. His love for her is so intense that once when Shanta Bai talks about the repayment for his kindness he advises her never to talk of repayment because it hurts him.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

This unit has only one signifying ensemble which has been divided into three subensembles 4 A, 4 B and 4 C. The subensemble 4 A is a proposition in "comprehension" introducing the Shanta Bai's high taste of literature. It also tells us of her being moody. The subensembles 4 B and 4 C are extensions of the ideas presented in 4 A. These describe her philosophical and sentimental mood in which she does not want to waste her time simply in satisfying their physical passion.

Analysis of the problematics

Shanta Bai: lady of high taste.

Shanta Bai as a signifier is completely different from the other lady character of the discourse. Her referring to Omar Khayyam and Fitzgerald speaks of her interest in literature. And true to her taste, she sometimes longs to be alone. That is why when Ramani in the subensemble 4 B tries

to love her she takes away her hands and pleads:

"Please leave me alone. I am in no mood now.(p-99)

She is not simply interested in satisfying her physical passion. She expresses her wish to play violin and hums some tunes. She likes English movies and proposes to Ramani to accompany her to a Laurel and Hardy comic. This free and frank interaction of Shanta Bai with Ramani signifies that she is not to be worried by social criticism and norms. She does what she likes to do without any inhibition.

II. 5 Ponni's concern for Savitri

Mari and Ponni display generous hospitality towards Savitri and arrange for her some fruits but she is determined not to take anything if that is not earned by her own sweat. Then Ponni forces her husband to find some suitable job for Savitri. Mari leaves no stone unturned but to no avail. Everyone he approaches takes interest in the lady but shows his helplessness in providing her a job.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

This unit has four signifying subensembles 5 A, 5 B, 5 c and 5 D which have been subdivided into microensembles as disensed below.

II. 5 A: This subensemble has no subunits. It is complete in itself in the sense that despite Savitri's determination not to accept anybody's charity she yields to Ponni's extreaty to go to her house.

II. 5 B: The subensemble 5 B has four microensembles beginning with 5 B a, a "comprehensive idea" describing the curiosity of village people about Savitri. The next microensembles 5 B b, 5 B c and 5 B d portray the hospitality of Ponni who does all she can, to make Savitri feel comfortable. She goes and gets coconuts for her thinking that the fruit will not affect her caste-purity.

II. 5 C: It has two microensembles 5 C a and 5 C b. The first one describes how Ponni forces her husband to get some work for Savitri. When Mari suggests that she should work the bellows Ponni rebukes him for suggesting such a mean work for the high caste lady like Savitri. The microensemble 5 C b is the description of Mari's indignation over Savitri due to which he has become the target of his wife's wrath.

II. 5 D: The last subensemble of the fifth signifying unit has three microensembles 5 D a, 5 D b and 5 D c. The microensemble 5 D a describes the

reflective mood of Mari who thinks that he would not have had all these troubles had he left Savitri on the river-bank itself and had not saved her. The next microensembles describe the frantic search by Mari for some job for Savitri in the town. He tries almost every house which he thinks can be of some help. But to his distress, everybody takes interest in Savitri's story and no one offers a job for her.

Analysis of the problematics

Ponni : domineering lady

Throughout this signifying unit we find Ponni as a signifier signifying dominance. She does not only have command over her husband but also over Savitri and the village shopkeeper. In the microensemble 5 A this is evident where Savitri is compelled to allow herself to be taken to Ponni's house despite the former's determination not to accept anybody's charity. Her domination over Mari is reflected throughout the signifying unit. First in the microensemble 5 C b when Ponni wanted Mari to attend to his workshop business and he makes a delay she furiously asks him;

Do you want a halter round your neck? (p-104)

Further, when he starts off for finding some job for Savitri, she asks him;

Did you start out only to stand in the street and meditate? (p-105)

Her domineering character is further revealed in the microensemble 5 B c where she goes to the local shopkeeper, Ranganna to get some plantains and he asks for the money. She tells him;

Why should you be so suspicious? Will I run away with your money? (p-102)

This image of her makes the shopkeeper utter;

I don't know what to do with this frightful woman. (p-103)

Ponni : Caste-consciousness

We find in Ponni's psyche a sensitivity to caste based discriminations. It reflects the man-made inequities in the society. Though it is exploitative, it has strong roots in the psyche of down-troddens like Ponni who sees it as her duty not to do things which might affect Savitri's caste purify. She tells her:

Only fruits and coconut. I knew that you would not take anything else touched by me, so I have brought only fruits and coconut. (p-103)

She rebukes Mari who suggests working the bellows for Savitri:

A fine high-caste lady to touch these worm-eaten bellows! (p-104)

Sukkur Village: Innocence
Town : Apathy, indifference

We find in this signifying ensemble a contrast between the characters of town and the village-life. Sukkur village stands for humanly concern and innocence where the villagers want to know about Savitri's plight and feel sorry. Whereas the town, where Mari goes door-to-door to get some job for Savitri, stands for apathy and indifference. Almost everyone there takes interest and gets fun in her story but offers no job. This reflects the absence of fellow-feeling among the town-dwellers.

II. 6. Mari finds a job for Savitri

Despite his best efforts, Mari does not get a job for Savitri and finally he approaches an Oldman, the priest of the Maruga temple. After great entreaty the priest agrees to give her a job but only after he himself sees her and on the condition that he (Mari) repaired his old umbrellas and locks free of cost.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

This signifying unit has two subensembles, 6 A and 6 B which have their smaller microensembles as below.

II. 6 A: It has only two microensembles beginning with 6 A a , an idea in "comprehension". It describes the strong roots of caste based

discrimination in the society where the priest takes Mari to be a slave simply because his occupation is low. The microensemble 6 A b is the further extension of the ideas presented in 6 A a. Here we find the contrast between the humble nature of Mari and the aggressive nature of the priest.

II. 6. B: This second subsensemble has been subdivided into three microensembles viz. 6 B a, 6 B b and 6 B c. The microensemble 6 B a gives detail of Mari's politely arguing for Savitri's job to the priest taking every care not to infuriate him. The next microensemble 6 B b reflects the unpriest-like attitude of the priest who doubts some foul play in Savitri's plight. The last microensemble 6 B c extends this quite unpriest-like tendency of the priest who changes his opinion every now and then only to see some material benefit that Mari would repair all his old umbrellas and lacks free of cost.

Analysis of the problematics

The Priest : Exploitation, Aggression, Greed

Mari : Subjugation, Humility, Human-concern

Throughout the signifying unit we find a contrast of character, opinion and approach between the priest and Mari both representing two classes of our

society. The exploitative image of the priest becomes evident in the microensemble 6 A a when he rebukes Mari for not paying courtesy calls to him and calls him "a vile hypocrite" and "a godless creature". His aggressive nature is displayed when he suggests Mari the way to treat his wife Ponni:

If she won't let you rest, thrash her; that is the way to keep women sane. (p-109)

He is also a prototype of male-chauvinism who always doubts a woman's character if she does not obey her husband blindly. That's why he expresses his doubt about Savitri by saying;

There must be something wrong about her if she has no home and has to seek a livelihood outside; her husband must have driven her out. Why would a husband drive a wife out? (p-109)

The greedy nature of priests is made known in the microensemble 6 B c where we find him telling Mari;

I am not unwilling to have a servant, but where am I to find the money to pay her? You fellows nowadays don't bring offerings to the God ... Now-a-days you people want to worship the God free; no offerings, not even a peice of coconut. (p-110)

On the other hand we have Mari who is polite and humble, though poor. He symbolizes subjugation. He does not protest the harsh words of the priest. He tries to please him by offering him free repair of

things only to get some job for Savitri. Just to have his favour Mari promises the priest to mend his irreligious ways that is to bring offerings to the Maruga God. These things simply represent the contrast qualities in Mari with that of the priest.

II. 7. A new life opening before Savitri

Savitri is very happy to know that Mari has found some job for her. She sees a new life opening before her. She again becomes nostalgic but overcomes it by thinking that she will spend her days now in the service of God forgetting the worldly things. Next morning they go to the priest where he asks Savitri some embarrassing questions regarding her family life to which Ponni reacts bitterly defending Savitri's cause and even threatening not to leave Savitri at the priest's mercy. Ponni's words have an effect and the priest agrees to give her (Savitri) a job. But he makes it clear that she should not demand anything more than the half measure of rice and a quarter of an anna a day as has been agreed upon.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

The seventh unit of signification has four subensembles viz. 7 A, 7 B, 7 C and 7 D which have

further been subdivided into microensembles as discussed below.

II. 7 A: The first subsensemble of this signifying unit consists of three microensembles beginning with 7 A a, an image in "comprehension" in the sense that here for the first time Savitri is in her natural elements to see her dreams coming true. She has found a job and would not depend now on anybody's charity whether it be of husband or of parents. The next microensemble 7 A b, describes the nostalgic mood of Savitri thinking about her children, Babu, Sumati and Kamala but dismisses this thought by thinking that they were her husband's children because he had paid for the mid-wife and for everything. The last microensemble 7 A c describes the final request made by Ponni to Savitri to accept some food to which the latter agrees.

II. 7 B: This too has three microensembles. The first, 7 B a, gives description of the scene at the priest's place where Mari and Ponni have gone to introduce Savitri to the priest. The priest asks her to come nearer so that he could have a glance of her. Savitri feels embarrassed because it never happened before in her life. The next microensemble 7 B b presents us with Ponni reacting to the priest's

behaviour without even caring her husband's suggestion to be polite to the priest or he would refuse to give Savitri a job. The last microensemble 7 B c shows that Ponni's words have a good effect on the priest.

II. 7 C: This third subensemble has no microensemble. It is complete in itself describing the existential situation of the the Subramanya temple, the peacock-enthroned God, the young son of Shiva.

II. 7 D: This last subensemble of the Seventh signifying unit has been divided into two smaller subunits, viz., 7 D a and 7 D b. The microensemble 7 D a, further portrays Ponni's concern for Savitri who at every point objects to the priest's ways and suggests him to use kind words. The next microensemble describes the work assigned by the priest for Savitri. She is supposed to keep the whole temple clean and to do a bit of gardening too.

Analysis of the problematics

The Priest : Authority, scepticism

Again in this signifying unit we find the priest symbolizing authority. First, in the microensemble 7 B a , he feels no hesitation to tell a lady to exhibit herself so that he could see her well. He

even boasts of his quality of knowing a person at once glance only. Despite Ponni's request that there are some wounds which must not be prodded, the priest asks Savitri embarrassing questions like why she has run away from her house. Every now and then he gets infuriated:

Do you want me to keep telling you, 'Come on, Come on', at every step? I go round thinking you are following me, and talking, and you are still here! (p-116)

His sceptic nature is revealed when he refuses to believe Savitri's chastity. For him there must be some foul play if a woman runs away from her husband's home. This reflects the stereotype thinking of this male-dominated society.

Ponni : Revolt, fight against injustice

In Ponni we find a spirit who keeps on fighting against injustice and exploitation despite all odds. This continued struggle against oppression comes to full play throughout the seventh signifying unit. First in the microensemble 7 B b she objects to the priest's asking Savitri about her personal life. She tells him;

Why should you ask these questions? There are wounds which must not be prodded. (p-113)

Her boldness is depicted in the lines when she justifies her harsh words to the priest by saying:

God has not blessed me with an artful tongue. I utter what I have in my soul. (p-114)

She refuses to be cowed down by the priest. She does not care her husband's suggestion that her harsh words would cost Savitri her job. She rather rebukes her husband:

Go away and mind your own business, do you understand? We can look after ourselves quite well without you. (p-116)

She feels no compunction in saying the truth face to face. When the priest hesitates to give Savitri a job she says fearlessly;

You promise one thing and do another. You are not fortunate enough to have a lady like this in your temple, that is all. (p-114)

Savitri : Ambition

In this signifying unit Savitri as a signifier signifies ambition and hope, an ambition to be self-dependent. A woman in our society throughout her life is dependent on someone either on her father, or on her brother or on her husband or on her son. That's why when Savitri is informed by Ponni that her husband has found a job for her she feels as if a new life is opening before her. Though she is a high-caste lady and economically rich, she wishes to

accept any kind of job to take the yoke of charity and dependence off her shoulders. She strongly refuses any offer either by the priest or by Ponni which she thinks is not earned by her own sweat.

II. 8 Savitri's motherly concern overpowers her and she realizes the limitations of a woman

After showing her the works Savitri is supposed to perform, the priest shows her a dark room where she may take shelter. The next day Savitri very happily performs her work and gets her rice and paise as her remuneration. She cooks it and enjoys it better than ever before in her life because it is earned by her own sweat. This gives her immense satisfaction. But when the night descends she feels home-sick and is afraid of the engulfing darkness and is so tormented that she decides to go back to her husband and children.

Introduction to the Syntagmatics

This unit consists of four subensembles, viz., 8 A, 8 B, 8 C, and 8 D. These, with a view to analyzing, have further been subdivided into microensembles as given below.

II. 8 A: This first subensemble has three microensembles which begins with 8 A a describing Savitri's hatred of any kind of charity bestowed upon

her by anyone. The next microensemble 8 A b gives detail of the priest showing Savitri the work she is expected to perform and Ponni's objecting to it on the ground that it is the work of four persons. The last microensemble 8 A c again presents Savitri reacting to Ponni's request to accept some buttermilk.

II. 8 B: The second subensemble of the eighth signifying unit has only two microensembles, beginning with 8 B a which describes the blissful mood of Savitri which she experiences today after earning the meal on her own. Though it is poor diet she has never experienced such happiness before. The next microensemble 8 B b describes adjusting to the priest's frequent harsh words either by overhearing them or sometimes by replying to him.

II. 8 C: This too has only two microensembles starting with 8 C a which gives description of the people's mentality. The news of Savitri's coming to the temple has spread like a wild-fire. And people have started coming to the temple with offerings more with a purpose of having a look of this mysterious lady than to offer prayer. And naturally this has resulted in the increase of offerings which makes the

priest a little kind to Savitri as presented through 8 C b.

II. 8 D: The last subensemble has three microensembles viz. 8 D a, 8 D b and 8 D c. The microensemble 8 D a presents Savitri again in her nostalgic mood. While off from her day's work she is afraid of the increasing darkness. She is alone in the dark room, besides the temple. She realizes that a woman is like a bamboo pole which does not stand without a support. The next microensemble 8 D b extends this idea of Savitri's home-sickness. She remembers her children and husband and curses herself to come to such a pass. In the last microensemble we find her deciding to go back to her husband's place which she realizes is the real home for a lady.



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Analysis of the Problematics

Charity : dependence, obstacle in progress

Though charity is a benevolent activity it has some implied negative aspects. It stands in the way of motivating people to be self-dependent. And the trend today is that everybody wants to be powerful to give charity to others. This is a paradox. Rather everyone should try for an egalitarian society where there is no need of charity. It is for this reason

Savitri detests whenever she feels someone showing sympathy and offering charity rather than making her self-dependent. It is aptly depicted in the lines where Savitri retorts to Ponni's request to accept some buttermilk and salt:

No, if you bring anything I will throw it into the well (p-120)

The Priest : Unpriest-like traits

In this signifying unit in the priest we have the just opposite of qualities that he should have. Instead of being soft-spoken he always speaks harsh words and calls everyone particularly those who are economically poor by bad names. As in the microensemble 8 A c when Mari requests him to open the shrine of the temple to have 'darshan' of the God Maruga he says :

I am not opening the shrine now. Come in the evening. Don't imagine that I am at the beck and call of every guttersnipe in the place. Come in the evening. (p-119)

Further, he chides Savitri when she makes a little delay in attending to her call by saying :

What is the use of having you here if you have got to be plaguing me like this ? That background and his wife and everybody comes to plead for you. I don't care for anyone here. (p-122)

The phrase 'blackguard' has been used to refer to Mari. This confirms the unpriest like qualities of

the priest. His opinion changes frequently just to see some material benefits. When he finds that due to the presence of Savitri people have started visiting the temple in large number thus increasing the income of the priest he becomes happy and calls her "good woman" and even asks her to spend the nights with the womenfolk in his house.

Savitri : conflict

In the eighth unit of signification Savitri symbolizes conflict, First, she becomes very happy to be able to support herself. When she gets her rice and starts cooking she is very much thrilled and feels:

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-120)

It has been rather hard to swallow simple rice without adding even salt, but it was worth it because it enhanced one's sense of victory. But this is not all. When she retires to her shanty she is in the grip of fear which is increasing with the growing darkness. She becomes furious with herself at this;

What despicable creations of God we are that we cannot exist without a support. I am like a bamboo pole which cannot stand without a wall to support it...(p-123)

The futility, frustration and her own inescapable weariness make her cry and sob :

A wretched fate that wouldn't let me draw the first time. I can't go near the water again. This is defeat. I accept it. I am no good for this fight. I am a bamboo pole. (p-124)

In this conflict her ego or self-respect yields to the tradition and stereotyped role of a woman who is always dependent on some male. Her helplessness becomes more poignant when she finds even in the temple no respite from male dictatorship. She has to put up with the frequent and uncalled for wrath of the old and wizened priest.

Maruga God : Faith, collective sentiment

The Maruga God stands for faith for the common men either big or low. In one way this faith is functional in the sense that those who are lowly placed in the social hierarchy think it to be as their fate, a consequence of the past deeds. Thus it helps in maintaining the social order. On the other hand those who are well placed exploit the people in the name of God such as the priest.

Ponni : Tactfulness

First in the microensemble 8 A b we find Ponni protesting to the priest's assigning Savitri too much of work :

What do you mean by it sir ? You want her to do the work of four persons. (p-118)

Further in the microensemble 8 D c she advises Savitri to be tactful while dealing with men :

Don't look so sad. Remember, men are good creatures, but you must never give way to them. Be firm and they will behave. (p-125)

II. 9 Scene at home during Savitri's continued absence

Back home the children, Babu, Sumati and Kamala are fearful and suspicious about their mother's absence. Sometimes they overhear the servants' talking among themselves about their mother which make them more suspicious. Finally Babu musters courage to ask his father about the real whereabouts of her mother. This makes Ramani very worried. He tells him that he will send her a telegram to be back immediately but this adds to his worry as he himself is not sure about her whereabouts. He even fears to make a report in police fearing loss of social prestige.

Introduction to the Syntagmatics

The last signifying unit of the second sequence of the novel has been divided into four subensembles, viz., 9 A, 9 B, 9 C, 9 D which have further been subdivided for detailed analysis as below.

II. 9 A: The first subensemble has only two microensembles 9 A a and 9 A b. The microensemble 9

A a describes what the children feel about the continued absence of their mother. Babu being the eldest among the brother and sisters does not believe his father's words that his mother has gone to see her ailing father. He has even decided to go to the police with the help of his friend, Chandru. This makes Sumati, the youngest among them, cry. And the cook scolds Babu.

II. 9 B: This second subensemble of the ninth signifying unit has also been subdivided into two microensembles, 9 B a and 9 B b. The microensemble, 9 B a describes the feelings of the cook and the servants in the household of Ramani about the talk of the town regarding Savitri's leaving the town. The next microensemble 9 B b gives description of the children making inquiry about their mother. But the servants evade the question fearing Ramani's wrath.

II. 9 C: This third subensemble has three microensembles, viz., 9 C a, 9 C b and 9 C c. 9 C a is the description of Ramani asking his children about how they spent their day at their school. He asks even what did they eat and plan to do. The microensemble 9 C b, describes how Babu musters his courage to ask his father straightway about his mother. He even decides to report it in the police.

The last microensemble 9 C c gives description of how Babu approaches his father but bursts into tears before he could finish his curiosity about his mother. This torments Ramani too much.

II. 9 D: The last subensemble 9 D has two microensembles beginning with 9 D a which describes the dilemmic situation of Ramani who on the one hand wants to make a report in the police but on the other is afraid of public criticism. The next microensemble, 9 D c extends this indecisive situation of Ramani. At last he decides to wait for a day more before he does something else and he goes to Shanta Bai.

Analysis of the Problematics

Babu : Responsibility, revolt

Babu signifies responsibility and revolt in the ninth signifying unit, 'responsibility' in the sense that he no longer believes his father's words that his mother has gone to Talapur, his Nana's place. This he says to Kamala :

I don't believe it, because if she has....You are still children. You may believe what he says, but I don't, don't ask why. (p-126)

Further, his sense of responsibility is evident in the microensemble 9 C b, where he decides to report to

the police about his mother as the last resort if his father fails to do so. He also symbolizes revolt. First in the microensemble, 9 A a, Kamala cries at Babu's behaviour and the cook warns Babu to mind his own business otherwise he will use his magic power which may turn him to stone, he says that he is not afraid of his powers of magic. This shows that though Babu is fifteen he hardly believes in superstition. Further, this sense of opposition and revolt is aptly displayed in the microensemble 9 C c, where he, shedding all his fears, asks his father about his mother. He goes to the extent of asking whether she is alive or not. This perturbs Ramani too much and he understands the seriousness of the situation.

Servants : Superstition, fear

In this signifying unit the servants stand for belief in superstition and fear. This belief in superstition is obvious from the microensembles 9 B a and 9 B b where the cook warns Babu to behave properly otherwise he will turn him to stone with his magic power. The belief is that a person who looked into the cook's eyes at certain moments would be turned to stone. They represent fear that's why they do not disclose to the children despite their

repeated request about the rumours going on in the town about their mother, Savitri. They fear Ramani's wrath which may cost their jobs.

Ramani : dilemma, conflict

Throughout the ninth signifying unit, we find Ramani signifying dilemma. In the microensemble, 9 C a, we see him asking his children about how they spent their days at school and other things which he never used to do. This is perhaps due to the fact that he does not want them to feel their mother's absence. Next, in the microensemble, 9 C c, we find him in the serious conflict situation where the strong man in him says that she (Savitri) will not have gone far and she is bound to return when she regains sense but the weak man, so long unnoticed by himself, constantly vex him with the thought that if she does something very rash and foolish he will have to pack out of Malgudi. These thoughts shudder him. And this is further worsened by Babu's inquiry about her whether she is alive or not. Lastly, in the microensembles, 9 D a and 9 D b, this dilemmic situation is heightened. he wants to report in the police about his wife but fears public criticism and loss of prestige. He asks himself:

How does noe search for a¹³⁰ lost wife ? (p-132)

He hates Savitri for bringing him to this pass and broods:

Everything is a bother, no peace of mind in this life.(p-132)

He is not able to resolve this conflict and decides to wait a day more before he does something.

III. The Third Sequence

The third and the final sequence of the discourse has been divided into only two main units of signification denoted as 1 and 2. First we give introduction of each unit of signification as to how it is composed of subensembles and microensembles as presented in the text after that we shall discuss them semiotically.

III. 1 Savitri returns home

Savitri comes back to home. The children are very jubilant and excited. She asks them about their experience in her absence. When Ramani comes to home he is relieved to know her return but makes no response to her. Savitri on the other hand is very afraid and feels humiliated. She tries to impress him but finds herself constrained and feels nothing of the sort of enthusiasm which she used to feel earlier before her flight from the home. She always feels a guilt complex and finds everything mechanical.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

This unit of signification has two subensembles viz., 1 A and 1 B which have further been divided into microensembles as discussed below for detailed analysis.

III. 1 A: This first subensemble 1 A has three microensembles beginning with 1 A a, which describes the scene at her home when Savitri returns there. The children are happy to see their mother back at home. They boast themselves that they were not at all worried about her. The next microensemble, 1 A b, presents Ramani's reaction to her return. Though he is relieved, he makes no response to her. This makes Savitri fearful. In the last microensemble, 1 A c, Savitri is seen making Ramani's home coming smooth by telling Ranga, the servant to open garage-door and sees to it that everything is at its proper place to the taste of Ramani.

III. 1 B: This second subensemble has been subdivided into two microensembles, viz., 1 B a and 1 B b. The microensemble 1 B a, describes the predicament of Savitri who tries to interact with her husband in the way she used to before her flight but she feels that some part of her is dead. The next microensemble 1 B b, is the extension of the above idea where even Ramani's kind and affectionate words do not help her out of this predicament.

Analysis of the problematics

Savitri : predicament

In the first unit of signification we find Savitri in a predicament. She returns home to find solace in the company of her children and her husband. But first, in the microensemble 1 A a when she asks the children about how they felt in her absence they reply that they were not worried at all. This hurts Savitri as is natural for any mother. Next, in the microensemble 1 A b her husband does not wish her when he comes back she becomes afraid. These all culminate in the microensemble 1 B a, where despite Ramani's granting her the privilege to laugh and joke she finds it hard to respond properly. She reflects :

A part of me is dead. (p-135)

III. 2. Savitri's predicament

Days later once she hears a voice, "locks repaired, sirs, umbrella repaired.". She at once recognizes that it is Mari's voice and in a flash remembers the kindness and hospitality Mari and his wife Ponni had bestowed on her during she was away from home. She feels excited and wishes to call him. But the next moment she checks herself and lets him go. This makes her unhappy. Then she tells her servant to call him but soon she feels who she is and what she has that she should call him. Caught in

this dilemma she sits by the window and Mari's voice soon fades out in the distance.

Introduction to the syntagmatics

III. 2 A: This unit of signification has only one sense which has been subdivided into two microensembles, viz., 2 A a and 2 A b. The first microensemble 2 A a, describes how after many days Savitri hears the voice of Mari and feels excited. She wants to call him and give him food, water and magnificent gift and inquire about her friend Ponni. But she does not find herself worthy of it and lets him pass. The next microensemble 2 A b extends this dilemmic situation of Savitri where she again decides to call Mari and asks Ranga to call him but the next moment she forbids him.

Analysis of the problematics

Savitri : self-defeat

Savitri here signifies self-defeat. Her ego or self-respect is dead. That's why she finds herself of no worth to call Mari and reciprocates the hospitality he and his wife had showered upon her. Her return to her husband and children may thus be construed to mean a return to reality, while her endeavour to discover the meaning of her life away from the social context of her family was just a

delusion. The fact that the world outside her husband's home is equally dark and dismal and doesn't have to offer her any new opportunities of self realization makes it obvious that under the given socio-economic structure the dark room of her husband's house is, after all, preferable to the dark room of death and renunciation. What choice can be there if one is trapped between the devil and the deep sea?

REFERENCES

1

R.K. Narayan, The Dark Room (Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1978) p.11

All the quotations that followed are from the same book. Henceforth only the page numbers are indicated.

CHAPTER III

Thematic Configurations : A Study in Semantics

After a detailed semiotic analysis of the text following the metonymic order of events, we now examine the thematic configurations of the narrative discourse. We also trace the conceptual oppositions emerging from the discourse.

According to Levi-Strauss also, it is the universal characteristic of human thinking to categorize the world of our experiences into pairs of opposites. Some of these, for example, with unquestionable universality are : hot/cold, above/below, right/left. Myth, on the other hand, is concerned with more troubling ambiguities. There are contradictions between reality and the world as we wish it to be. People hate to die, but they must. They must not commit incest, but they wish to. Therefore, it is not the story itself, but the underlying structures, perceived by analysis and comparison of many versions of the same myth and then of the myths of different peoples, that leads to a better understanding of the text. The text under study presents the darker shades of life and is most of the time gloomy and pathetic. Savitri, the protagonist, is a picture of gloom, despair, helplessness and

dependence. The plot grows from a typical family situation - a docile and submissive wife and a bullying and unfaithful husband. The theme of marital disharmony is not a novel one but it acquires an unusual degree of poignancy in the Indian context. Savitri, the silent suffering wife, and Ramani, the callous adulterous husband, constitute the two poles of the ill-matched conjugal circuit with recurring sparks and blow-offs. The total breakdown is caused by the sparkling intrusion of the coquettish Shanta Bai.

As revealed from the whole discourse we find that Savitri extends her consciousness by her experience of life and eventually acquires self-knowledge and self-transcendence. She, as a being, is the self-explored. She is educated in the self and in otherness by seeing herself, her other half, her opposite, her false self, and finally her transcendental being. The action is all internal, shifting back and forth on the various planes of consciousness and manifesting a spiritualised uplifting of thought, feeling and sense. The inner mind is the focal point of the whole discourse, the battleground of three mighty conceptual oppositions which emerge as the character of Savitri evolves. The three oppositions

viz., from tolerance to revolt, from hope to despair and from the immediate consciousness to the higher level of consciousness are characteristic of Savitri's evolution in the first, the second and the third sequences of the discourse respectively. We discuss them one by one.

From tolerance to revolt

As presented in the first sequence of our discourse we find in Savitri a definite change in her attitude towards the male-dominated society, that is from tolerance to revolt. Like a typical Indian wife, Savitri has in the course of years got used to her husband's hectoring ways, his insistence on being waited on hand and foot, his fault-finding with the cooking, his bullying of the children, his free and easy way of bringing guests to the house unannounced and expecting that they be entertained in a manner worthy of the affluent host. All this is routine. But when Babu has his ears twisted and cheeks slapped over and again; when even on a festive occasion words of ill omen are uttered - "Is everybody in this house dead?" - when a temporary failure of electricity can make the master of the house behave like a caged animal clamouring for meat, it is just too much for her. And out of the helplessness for not being

able to check his rude behaviour she withdraws to a dark room as a way of protest.

A Queen when angry with her husband, the King, flung herself into the "kopagraha", the wrath house, thereby bringing His Majesty, the king, to his knees. Elegant ladies in Europe in later centuries when annoyed, retired into their boudoir. A middle class family in India cannot afford such luxuries. All it has is a dark room which requires a light even in the day time.

However, for Ramani the sulking of his wife is hardly a matter of any concern. Coaxed by her friend Janamma and relenting so that the children's happiness might not be spoiled and further evil befall by her doing anything inauspicious, Savitri comes out of the dark room. But when Ramani adds to his brutality marital unfaithfulness flaunted before all the world, Savitri revolts against the haughty and atrocious behaviour of her husband and walks out on him.

From hope to despair :

In the second sequence of our discourse we find in Savitri's conscious being an evolutionary journey from hope to despair. One of the main themes of the discourse deals with Savitri's assertion of independence, and her failure because of her own lack of

inner resources to sustain it. The two dark rooms, presented in the discourse, are symbolic of this. The first dark room in the house, next to the store, is where Savitri withdraws in protest against Ramani's treatment of her son. Her withdrawal is a disturbance but not a serious threat to the family. The cook revels in his temporary freedom, Ramani demonstrates his "calm indifference" by whistling loudly within hearing of the dark room. It is only the children, Babu, Sumati and Kamala who are distressed. This dark room implies a limited protest. To Savitri it is emblematic of "depression of spirits", Ramani names it "crude sulking".

The second dark room of the discourse clarifies and questions Savitri's apparent achievement of that "right to live". When she finally gets employment at the Marugan temple, she is forced to live in the shanty at the corner of the temple corridor. It is "very dark, air and light being admitted only by the chinks in the joints of the iron sheets"¹ .(p-117)

We note that when Savitri leaves Ramani, she has great hope and claims that she would rather live and die "under the sky" than be obliged to any man. She achieves this very briefly that afternoon at the temple. A "sense of victory" shoots through her

being :

she falt triumphant --- she lay with her head at the threshold of the shanty gazing at the blue sky---it enhanced one's sense of victory. (p-120)

But her one night in the second dark room is a final and frightening encounter with the implications of her choice to live alone and she is defeated, slowly and painfully comes the realization:

I am like a bamboo pole, which cannot stand without a wall to support it.(p-123)

Thus we find that Savitri moves from the darkness of her house with a hope to lead a life of self-dependence and self-respect. But to her despair she finds herself trapped in the darkness of the temple. Both the house and the temple are considered as sacred social institutions, in spite of the oppression they inflict.

The contrasted use of the dark rooms/open sky brings out the predicament of women attempting to live a life of independence. This contrast is also symbolic of Savitri's moral dilemma, that is, the pull between her individualistic notion that "no one who couldn't live by herself has a right to live" (p-79) and her traditional belief, still vivid in her mind, of "the sin, of talking back to a husband and disobeying him."(p-80)

A spiritual victory

In the third and the last sequence of the discourse we note that the inevitability of Savitri's situation results in her helpless return to her home, to be bullied and bored as before. She returns, almost half-dead emotionally. It is symbolic of her resignation to fate. One may conclude that Ramani has his ultimate triumph in Savitri's surrender, but the fact is that his ego is deflated by her total apathy afterwards. Savitri's surrender may sound as an anti-climax. The significant point to note here, however, is that she does not submit to Ramani; she submits to her obligations. It may be a failure on the material plane, but spiritually she comes triumphant. There is no suddenness in her surrender; it is her being. The incidents and actions of the characters anticipate it. Ramani had been bullying and belligerent, while Savitri submissive and accommodative. She sulked and grudged but never resisted firmly. The end is a magnified sulking and a magnified submission. It is in keeping with both her character and her cultural ethos.

Thus, Savitri bears witness to the self-expression and conscious subjecting of the modern mind. She dramatizes the all-inclusive, inner change

in human nature to effect the change of collective consciousness. She shows how an individual begins with himself by changing his consciousness, purifying himself and realizing a wider meaning of life for the whole race.

Savitri's vision is shaped by a strong Indian sensibility that precludes any possibility of tragedy, because man here is safely placed in a cosmic hierarchy with relations extending not only to his fellow men but also to Nature and God, not only in time and space but also beyond time and space. In such a universe man is never driven to the 'boundary situations' so as to feel completely abandoned. The Indian world view holds that the world and the various human attachments are 'maya' and failure on the mundane level does not necessarily bring any awful sense of tragedy. For the Indian, man is finally, not alienated from but united with universe or with the source of all creation. With the cycle of cause and effect ('karma') operating from birth to rebirth, and man assured of the ultimate spiritual reunion, no final pessimism is possible. The locale of Malgudi underlies this traditional belief in the ultimate integration.

Savitri : The mother figure/The self-explored :

Woman shapes her personality by a careful cultivation of certain virtues. Her strength lies essentially in her innate capacity for compassion and sacrifice. This strength may not be a match for man's physical might. Yet her influence on man is indeed great. He seeks in her love and peace, comfort and solace. Woman finds her utmost fulfilment in motherhood and that is her greatest achievement, too. We find the embodiment of such a mother figure in Savitri. She is not simply a village girl but a loving and devoted wife and sacrificing mother. She has transcended these limited physical identities to represent the universal mother figure. She is conceived as the encompassing, enduring, devoted, sacrificing, suffering, loving and forgiving mother figure. She is the eternal mother bound by love and affection to her hearth and home. Biologically, she is the receiver giving birth to human beings. Emotionally, philosophically and spiritually too, she is the absorber who imbibes within her everything that comes her way—joy, happiness, hardship, poverty, loss, pain, suffering, pride, humiliation—nectar as well as poison. Her revolt and flight from her husband's house and the subsequent return there is

the deeper realization of motherhood. Maturity and understanding fast invade her and these help her to absorb all the clamour of life that lies in her store.

Savitri is the axis, the immovable, affirmative force around whom all the other characters in the novel revolve. She has no illusion in life and has been endowed with a tremendous capacity for tolerance. She is not ruffled into extreme emotional outburst. But deep inside, she is highly disturbed and depressed and, suffers for her loved ones. She sacrifices her possessions, her sentiments and the cherished memories attached to them to let the world know that a woman too can rise in rebellion. Her brave struggle for existence is pathetic, yet heroic. She has imbibed the spirit of acceptance and endurance. This helps her put up with the adversity that follows her flight from her husband's house. But she returns to her home and hearth realizing her greater obligations to her children, to her cultural ethos and to the wider cosmic realities. But this realisation does not relieve her of her sorrow and suffering. Only she absorbs all. She is the womb immune to all shocks. There is dignity and nobility in her grief-stricken visage. Savitri's struggle

intense, pathetic and desperate, assumes a tragic aura. To her nothing is beyond acceptance and endurance. She believes that in tolerance, endurance, and the mute suffering the human being is purged of all guilt and sin and emerges a purified being; his soul is cleansed of all earthly bondages.

Savitri and other female characters

Savitri is well placed in the discourse along with a number of minor characters. Thus by contrast we get a fairly complete picture of women in an orthodox milieu of Indian society.

She is contrasted first with her two friends Gangu and Janamma who are at poles apart in the traditional society of Lawley Extension. Janamma acts absolutely to rule:

As for me I have never opposed my husband or argued with him at any time---what he does is right. It is a wife's duty to feel so.(p-42)

Gangu on the other hand, is an eccentric whose trendy husband claims to be a champion of women's rights. Yet she is well within the demanding standards of the community. Savitri is placed somewhere between the two ; She is fascinated by Gangu but it is Janamma she obeys. Unlike Gangu, her life is ordered and arranged around her family, but unlike Janamma she

has her own forms of protest against her husband, Ramani.

All the three women, however, are traditional wives and can be contrasted with ambiguous Shanta Bai, a newcomer to Malgudi, who abandoned her husband, a gambler and drunkard, because he would not change. She has managed to pick up a B.A. degree and drifts from one job to another. Most of all she contrasts with Savitri in living from day to day on a makeshift philosophy:

Dead yesterday and unborn tomorrow--- The cup of life must be filled to the brim and drained--- Khayyam says: "Into this universe and why not 'knowing'. I am as wind along the waste.(p-99)

Ramani's nights out in Shanta Bai's company cause disquieting thoughts in Savitri's mind but she decides that it is better to suffer in silence than to venture a question. When Gangu tells her about Ramani's infidelity, she only sulks in self-pity:

Perhaps I am old and ugly. How can I help it? I have borne children and slaved for the house.(p-68)

She pathetically prepares herself to win him back by reviving her charm.

There is also a contrast between the higher caste women of Lawley Extension, Savitri in particular, and the lower caste women mentioned in

the text, thus further clarifying Savitri's predicament. When Ramani beats Babu for tampering with the lights, Savitri intervenes, but her main form of protest against her husband's violence is to withdraw. But Ranga, their servant describes a similar incident in his own home when his wife hits him with a brass vessel:

I have sworn to leave the children about even if they should be going down a well. Women are terrible.(p-37)

This reflects that Ranga's wife though a low caste woman is a very assertive kind of lady. Finally there is Ponni who is both contrasted and linked with Savitri. Ponni is also a lower caste woman who stands up to her husband, and who cannot be intimidated, leave alone oppressed by the male world. Ponni, in fact, is the only one in this text who genuinely attempts to help Savitri lead a life of independence at the same time respecting and guarding the privacy she needs.

The problem of Savitri appears to be peculiar to her alone, because there are other women in the discourse who know how to deal with men and how to keep their husbands under their thumb. There is Gangu, the wife of a school master and mother of four children, who can tell her husband not to expect any

tiffin on a particular evening and fill his stomach in a hotel. Then there is Shanta Bai who leaves the gambler and drunkard husband in search of an independent and dignified existence. Then there is Ponni, who tells Savitri, " I can't believe any husband is unmanageable in this universe..."(p-90), and advises her:

Sister, remember this. Keep the men under the rod, and they will be all right. Show them that you care for them and they will tie you and treat you like a dog.(p-90)

Thus the discourse in the ultimate analysis is not so much about a woman's futile search for emancipation as her quest for identity which is again seen in terms of a deep rooted tradition.

Male-chauvinism and the predicament of women

One of the major themes of the discourse is domestic disharmony which is developed through a series of situation. Male-chauvinism, that is widespread in our society, is the root cause of domestic disharmony. Ramani, the Office Secretary of Englandia Insurance Company is aggressive, domineering and unfeeling as a husband and father. He bullies his silent uncomplaining wife and docile hapless children and takes sadistic pleasure in their suffering. Even his rare moments of love and

affection are not genuine but attempts at exhibitionism and show-off. If he wants to have an evening out at a cinema with his wife, he would order her about in a dictatorial manner. Though she herself can be an object of proud display for her husband her own independent entity does not count.

The atmosphere of the house hinges on his mood. When he comes with a soft hooting of the Chevorlet, everybody feels relaxed:

Savitri felt relieved; the same relief ran through the children,-- Ah, father was going to be pleasant.(p-13)

Ramani continues with his tyrannies, and Savitri pockets them with feeble grudges, sometimes confining herself to the dark room. She could come out of it on the request of her friend and children, though Ramani had hardly any care for it. The bully who would bring guests into the house without notice and expect them to be fed- "we are not so down and out yet as not to afford some extra food without to issue warnings before hand"(p-12)- is hardly viewed as a bully in our society. It is the Indian tradition to honour the guest as God. The actual burden which falls on the overworked house-wife, who has to produce in a matter of minutes not only what is

edible but what will not let down the family honour, is shared by nobody--least of all by the husband who gets all the credit for playing the generous host.

Even fifteen years of married life had failed to establish a real chord of understanding between the two because Ramani is inherently incapable of responding to the sentiments of Savitri. The coarseness of his nature is refelected in his senseless and callous manner at home. The Navaratri festival brings out the beast in him. Babu's innocent plan to illuminate the doll-display unfortunately results in electric failure at home. Ramani's heartless beating of his son provokes the first spark of impotent anger in Savitri's heart which continues to glow till the end of the text.

Ramani's interest in Shanta Bai, a probationer in his office grows into an adulterous affair and Shanta Bai inflames it with her glamorous and coquettish sophistication :

She compressed her lips and jerked her hand in the perfect Garbo manner : the temperamental heroine and the impending doom.(p-59)

Savitri's instinct of motherhood does not allow her a moment of peace away from her children. Her abortive attempt at suicide and brief period of menial work at a temple only make her realize that she cannot

live away from her children. Thus we find a change taking place in Savitri's consciousness but the same does not hold true about Ramani. He remains a callous, unfeeling, hypocritical and bullying husband and father from the beginning to the end.

In Ramani we find a male-chauvinist at its worst. This "entirely self-made" man believes that "a man had a right to a little fun now and then" (p-92) but "that a woman's primary duty was being a wife and a mother" (p-93). But there is a contradiction in his own views. He is all praise for the qualities he finds in Shanta Bai - her behaviour, her dress-habit, her fluctuating moods, her high taste, her Greta Garbo manner, her individuality. They make Ramani feel:

It was all nonsense to keep men and women separate in water-tight compartments; women were as good as men and must be treated accordingly. (p-51)

But he has another set of standards to evaluate his wife's role. He does not like his wife to have such qualities. He feels:

Didn't all ancient epics and scriptures enjoin upon woman the strictest identification with her husband? (p-93)

Earlier, once he tells his wife:

If the cook can't cook properly, do the work yourself, what have you to do better than that? (p-6)

Once he opines:

Firmness was everything in life; that was the secret of success with woman. If they found a man squeamish they would drive him about with a whip. (p-93)

But the hollowness of this strutting poser is exposed by his fawning and cringing behaviour before Shanta Bai. At the root of this caddish conduct is his sexual immorality which he ineffectually tries to mask under a forbidding exterior.

Ramani represents the predicament of all those educated young men who find themselves pulled by the opposing forces of change and continuity. They cannot honestly conform to the old values but at the same time they lack the will and strength to rebel. They are caught in the dilemma of tradition and modernity.

It is not only Ramani who sees no sense in women being independent but also the other male characters in the text have the same chauvinistic attitude. For them a woman should always be guarded by her father when she is a child, by her husband when she is young and by her sons when a widow. When Savitri protests against her husband's unreasonable attitude, the servants are on the side of the lord and master of the house. The servant exclaims:

It is no business of a wife to butt in when the father is dealing with his son. It is a bad habit. Only a battered son will grow into a sound man.(p-36)

Only once, the cook boasts, did his wife try to interfere, and "then I nearly broke her bones. She has learned to leave me alone now. Women must be taught their place".(p-37)

Their chauvinistic attitude towards women is not different from that of Ramani's who once says to Savitri:

Go and do any work you like in the kitchen, but leave the training of a grown-up boy to me. It is none of a woman's business.(p-5)

Even the old and wizened priest in charge of the temple has the same opinion about women which becomes evident when he says to Mari :

If she won't let you rest, thrash her; that is the way to keep women same. In these days you fellow are mugs, and let your women ride you about.(p-109)

It appears it is only theoretically that woman is extolled as an angel - what we see in actual practice does not accord with this romantic exaltation. Most human societies are male-dominated and so woman is grudgingly given a secondary status, that is, when she is not positively subjected to inhuman tyranny.

In this male dominated callous and blind society, Savitri driven to a corner can only decide

to quit. Harsh experiences teach her that she owns nothing :

Things? 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 sons'.(p-75)

Her predicament makes her ask bitterly, "What is the difference between a prostitute and a married woman?" (p-80) and gives the answer herself:

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.(p-80)

Her realization, "I am like a bamboo pole, which cannot stand without a wall to support it".(p-13), is symbolic of the sad plight and low status of women in our society.

Such is the predicament of an average Indian woman. Even the birth of a girl-child is taken to be a liability. The sole ambition of the parents is to marry her and with this their responsibility is over. Whatever happened to her from then on was just her fate. Some girls, like Savitri's sister, were lucky and got understanding husbands. Others like her friend Gangu took the upper hand from the beginning. The great majority, however, has simply to put up first with drudgery and unrelenting taunts at the hands of their in-laws and later serfdom when the husband sets up his own house.

The middle class Indian woman's terrors on the domestic fronts are more oppressive than any political subjugation. Savitri, when she quits the house, enumerates a series of fears "from the cradle to the funeral pyre, and even beyond"- of father and teacher and everybody else in early life, of husband, children and neighbours later on - which culminate in the cauldron of boiling oil prepared by Yama (the God of Death) in hell for disobedient wives. To these mind-forged manacles of fear resulting from natural timidity, religion and superstition, are added the harsh economic realities, viz. that a middle-class Brahmin girl has learnt only to cook and if she is good-looking, with a husband still alive and of an obviously well off family, there is small chance of any household employing her even as a cook lest this should lead to rumours and complications.

Put in this situation, a woman, like Savitri, can think only of drowning herself in a river. But once rescued Savitri accepts that also as her fate. Savitri sticks bravely to her resolve not to accept charity. But she just cannot forget her children. Her mother-instinct does not let her live peacefully away from her children. The pathos of her yearning for her children is brought out with intensity in her

ineffectual attempts at rationalization:

Did the birds and animals worry about their young ones after they had learned to move?.(p-111)

While the Mari-Ponni episode relieves her tension by providing some solace, it also intensifies, in another way, the poignancy of Savitri's situation by contrast with the querulous but loving couple of Mari and Ponni.

In fact, both Savitri and Shanta Bai are victims and symbolize the predicament of women. Each losing out in her own way. Savitri can manage a minimal economic independence but emotionally she is still bound. Shanta Bai apparently enjoys her emotional independence but economically she is still not free.

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All the quotations that followed are from the same book. Henceforth only the page numbers are indicated.

CHAPTER IV

Intertextuality : A Study in Pragmatics

The literary relevance of a text can be seen through its evaluation in a pragmatic framework that is in the context of other related texts. No text is created in void. A text always echoes other texts. A discourse is placed in historical relationship with other discourses, and hence it must be understood as the product of a person or persons at a given point in a human history, in a given form of discourse, taking its meanings from the interpretive gestures of individual readers through the grammatical, semantic and cultural codes available to them. This brings out a new structure of significance. Thus, after establishing the dominant themes in the text (chap. III) we situate it in the context of other related texts.

R.K. Narayan is probably the best known and most widely read among Indian writers in English for the last fifty years or more. His output from 1935 onwards has been continuous and of a consistently high quality. And he has achieved popularity without resorting to themes like sex and violence. Every creative artist is, at heart, a visionary, and every creative vision has its root in culture, tradition

and values of life. This serves as his frame of reference to which he keeps on returning continually for sustenance and inspiration. Without it he cannot make a creative and abiding contribution. R.K. Narayan, a creative writer of fiction, draws his strength from an inexhaustible source-- Indianness. He is the most essentially and comprehensively Indian of the Indo-Anglian novelists. His view of life and his world of values are basically Indian.

Savitri, the protagonist of The Dark Room reminds us of the 'Savitri-Satyavan' legend culled from The Mahabharata. The 'Vana-Parva' legend of The Mahabharata is the original pattern from which the all imbining symbol of Savitri is carved. Myths and legends are the successful source of literary inspiration. The literary exploitation of mythology is not new. In Narayan's works too we have influence of myths and legends. He constructs a character and an event which has archetypal bearings. He concerns himself with archetypal subjects like love and sacrifice in an archetypal situation which depicts the tension between the higher and lower levels of consciousness in a person. Savitri, the protagonist in The Dark-Room, is an archetypal character, a mythic image.

In The Mahabharata, there is a reference to a tri-ratra (three nights) vow which Savitri undertakes to prepare herself for the fateful day when her husband Satyavan is to die. Knowing her fate but not tamely acquiescing in it, nor looking outside for support, she contains herself in a trance of silence, mobilises her inner strength, all the fiery purity and puissance of her soul. Sri Aurobindo, too, found in this the seed-idea which he elaborated in the seven cantos of the The Book of Yoga. In the developing action of the Mahabharata story, Savitri needs poise and purpose and power enough to stand her ground before Yama (the Death God), gently and discreetly educate him with regard to duties as Lord of Dharma and not alone as Lord of Death, and return to the earth with a revived Satyavan to continue their holy wedded life. But in Narayan's The Dark-Room, Savitri's role is more fundamental, more revolutionary, it is to annihilate her mundane desires and the darkness from her life by raising her consciousness to a higher level and effect a return to reality and to make best out of the given situation. She realizes that there is no escape from one's existential situation and hence it is better to face the reality than to withdraw from it like a coward.

The Indian mind is familiar with the idea of God in an eternal feminine aspect, and the Indian people cherish the legends of the great women of the ancient epics, Savitri and Sita. Indian women know that it is their duty to make this life an image of the life eternal, and that love's mission truly performed has a spiritual meaning. Narayan recognises woman as a symbol of Shakti, the creative power; and Savitri in The Dark Room is the prototype of that. Though on the surface her return to her husband's house seems to be her defeat, it is not really so. She does not submit to her husband. She submits to her obligations. It may be a failure on the material plane, but spiritually she comes triumphant.

The novels of R.K. Narayan are cast in the mould of a typical aesthetic pattern in which the protagonist usually sets out on a quest for identity in keeping with certain philosophico-cultural assumptions which form the basis of his socio-religious inheritance and his psycho-moral ambience. His novels highlight individuals only to show the smallness of men caught in the web of fate, which is beyond their control. The Guide and The Dark Room reveal this best amongst Narayan's novels. Raju, in The Guide, protests against the role he is forced to play, but

he is helpless in his attempts to change it. Similarly Savitri, in The Dark Room is incapable of stepping outside her destiny. The Narayan protagonist thus discovers that the world from which he wanted to run away is the only world which can offer happiness to him.

A brief review of some of his novels reveals almost a consistent thematic and structural pattern which moulds and highlights the Narayan protagonist's vision of life.

In his second novel The Bachelor of Arts he takes up the theme of a young man's (Chandran) search for a place in the society consequent upon his taking the B.A. degree. The search is complicated by the various ups and downs in his life --the havoc caused by his frustration in love for Malathi, his subsequent renunciation of society and search for meaning of life in the garb of an ascetic, his realization of the deception of it all, his return to his home and then his marriage and complete absorption in the householder's life. Thus Chandran is compelled to accept life as it is.

The next novel, the Dark Room, shows the helpless condition of the Indian woman particularly in middle class family, in which the wife's life be-

comes, much of a hell, because of the fits of anger and irritation of her whimsical and obstinate husband who finds no wrong in having an affair with some other lady. Savitri, the protagonist finds all this intolerable and walks out on her husband only to realize the limitations of a woman and make a return to reality.

In The English Teacher the protagonist Krishnan, an English teacher leads a sweet domestic life which is embittered by the sudden and tragic death of his wife. This makes him detached from this earthly life but later he adjusts to it by trying to attain spiritual communion with his dead wife through work and duty. This book reminds of the tragic and early death of Narayan's own wife.

In Mr. Sampath, the protagonist, Srinivas, is initially engaged fruitfully in the pursuit of some aspects of social reality. But gradually he finds himself drawn into a range of activities that appear to belong to the region of the unknown and the illusory. After realizing the futility this illusory world he makes a return to the world of his former activity. The novel thus ends with an acceptance of the world as it exists, because the new knowledge gained by the protagonist helps him overcome his

reservations about the actual world. The novel derives its name from Mr. Sampath, the printer of Malgudi though the real protagonist is Srinivas, the editor of "The Banner".

In The Financial Expert, Margayya is the acquired name of one Krishna, the protagonist of this novel. Margayya meaning "one who showed the way" is a financial wizard who shows "the way out to those in financial troubles".(p-1) He rises from a very humble position to a very big banking magnet. Accumulation of money by hook and by crook is his only ambition or rather obsession. Soon he becomes fabulously rich but his son Balu gets spoiled. Dr.Pal, who was once the source of his wealth, now turns against him. Very soon an alarm of his impending bankruptcy spreads like wild fire. Long crowds of his clients knock at his gate to withdraw their deposited money from his bank and in no time he is reduced to his original poverty. Margayya once again accepts his humble life as something in which he finds rest and respite from a world of harsh strife.

Thus we find that Narayan's protagonist's discover acceptance of life as a desirable goal. If they have an illusion that they can change their life and circumstances by their own efforts they are likely to

meet frustration as Margayya does in The Financial Expert.

The theme which more than any other has defined and projected Narayan's world of values is the theme of juxtaposition of tradition and modernity in its various aspects and nuances. It grows into the central comic theme of deviation in his novels. Malgudi is steeped in tradition and its inhabitants are men and women with their "roots in family and religion". They cherish a heritage of faith and values, customs and rituals, and even superstitions. Considered as a whole, they constitute "a strong framework of social convention with which the author sympathises but which he does not share"¹.

Chandran's rebellion, in The Bachelor of Arts, against the horoscope-matching elders results in a deviation from the normal and his return is symbolic of its restoration. The darker shades of moral aberrations are first noticed in The Dark Room. Ramani, temperamentally a conceit, violates the traditional family morality under the influence of modernity symbolised by the coquettish Shanta Bai with her Greta Garbo manners. The inevitable result is suffering. The unsettling impact of materialism on the traditional world of Malgudi is felt in his novels--

Mr. Sampath, The Financial Expert and The Guide. Sampath, Margayya and Raju uproot themselves from their traditional ethos to run after illusions of material success. But each of them realizes the real and abiding value of life in his own characteristic way. Margayya realizes it but only after his financial collapse. Raju, the guide, finds himself alienated as the vital links of tradition snap one after another. The moment of self-awareness comes when, after a protracted period of self-deception, Raju re-establishes his bonds with community and tradition.

The characters of Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets and of Ramani in The Dark Room project the theme of conflict between tradition and modernity even more sharply. They represent the timeless and unchanging values of the Hindu way of life, as well as its obscurantism and irrationality. The Man-Eater of Malgudi treats the theme of tradition versus modernity in its most striking form. Here Natraj's resolution of his personal crisis in relation to Vasu is distinct from Raju's or Margayya's or Jagan's or Ramani's. Vasu symbolises a total negation of the traditional values of life. The traditional Malgudi has never had such a demonic onslaught of gross materialism. "Vasu's very philosophy of life is an

opposition to the peaceful ordered universe of Malgudi".² His act of self-destruction in the last is symbolic of the triumph of good over evil and the prevalence of the cosmos over the powers of chaos.

Narayan's greatest charm lies in making Malgudi and its people and their values real for us. His characters represent a deeper kind of uniformity and continuity under diverse positions and professions-- student, teacher, printer, financial expert, housewife, working lady, businessman, painter etc. The essentials do not change though surface realities reveal the multitudinousness of life.

The centre of Narayan's world of values is the family - in its Indian setting. "The family is the immediate context in which his sensibility operates, and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which family relationships are treated--that of son and parents and brother and brother in The Bachelor of Arts, of husband and wife and father and daughter in The English Teacher, of father and son in The Financial Expert, and of grandmother and grandson in Waiting for the Mahatma".³ This list can further be extended by adding father and son and husband and wife in The Dark Room, of aunt and nephew in The Painter of Signs.

Marital fidelity, perhaps the most precious and durable of the Indian values, is the central theme in the Dark Room. Savitri, the silent suffering wife, can put up with insult and maltreatment but her husband's infidelity is the last straw. In a burst of implacable fury and self-pity, she cries, "Don't touch me ! ---you are dirty, you are impure. Even if I burn my skin I can't cleanse myself of the impurity of your touch." ⁴ The wily Sampath gets the hardest kick from life when he gets involved with Shanti Devi, the film actress., Margayya, the money-maniac, is still the deep-feeling father who cannot bear the sight of his graceful daughter-in-law, Brinda, in tears on account of his son's debauchery. In that moment of righteous fury he overcomes his fear of Dr. Pal, the instrument of sin. Marco, in The Guide, who has no interest in anything living or breathing, is still not dead enough as a husband. When he comes to know of his wife's infidelity, he disowns her completely. Rosie, though more sinned against than sinning, is still unpardonable in the Indian context.

Besides marital relationship, Narayan deals with other significant family themes like paternal love and lack of communication between generations. Margayya-Balu, Ramani-Babu and Jagan-Mali relation-

ships in The Financial Expert, The Dark Room and The vendor of Sweets respectively may be cited as the most expressive examples.

Indian society is deep down traditional and caste-ridden and this finds reflection in Narayan's works. Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts could not marry the girl he loved because the horoscopes did not tally. This problem crops up in The Financial-Expert as well. The astrologer who thinks that the horocopes of Babu and Brinda do not match is dismissed with a fee of rupee one, whereas the one who testifies that the horocopes match perfectly is rewarded with a fee of seventy-five rupees. Raju's mother in The Guide is first sympathetic towards Rosie. But she changes her attitude completely when she learns that Rosie belongs to the dancing girl class. Savitri in The Dark Room is not served with cooked food by Ponni because the latter thinks it a sin to pollute one's caste-purity. It is difficult for Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets to accept a non-Hindu girl as his daughter-in-law. Raman's aunt in The Painter of Signs decides to go on a pilgrimage when she learns that Raman is going to marry a Christian girl.

There are few writers in India or elsewhere who have succeeded in achieving so much with so little. A small group of people in middle class setting in an imaginary town in South India is all he has allowed himself in successive novels. From Swami and Friends (1935) to The Talkative Man (1986) it has been a saga of over half a century of creative writing. Malgudi has grown over the years in his novels. However, his portrayal of life is as sharp and penetrating as ever. "My focus is all on character. If his personality comes alive, the rest is easy from me",⁵ says R.K. Narayan. His little world of Malgudi is symbolically as large as life. "His characters must live, or else the book has no claim whatever on our interest. And how vividly Mr. Narayan's characters do live."⁶ Few writers since Dickens can match the effect of colourful teaming that Narayan's fictional city of Malgudi conveys.

Among women characters, Narayan generally portrays two kinds of women-typical Indian housewife and fashionable and butterfly type of woman. His heroines like Krishna's wife of The English Teacher and Savitri of The Dark Room fall in the first category. These women are docile, modest, gentle, religious and loving. Their only concern is the welfare of their

husband and children. Sometimes Narayan draws the more mature, experienced and aged varieties of these simple housewives. Shanta Bai of The Dark Room, Shanti of Mr. Sampath and Rosie of The Guide belong to the butterfly type of women. They are artful and cunning flirts, whose only vocation is to satisfy their own caprices.

Narayan's minor characters are fascinating, too, The Blacksmith -burglar, Mari and his wife, Ponni in The Dark Room; the cart boy and his companions in Swami and Friends; the common people who are the clients of Margayya in The Financial Expert; Mutthu the petty stop-keeper, the veterinary doctor and the forest officials in The Man Eater of Malgudi and those connected in film shooting with Sampath in Mr. Sampath are some of the examples.

We cannot afford to avoid the mention of Narayan's portrayal of children where he is at his best. If one were to ask him what gave him the idea of bringing the scenes from his boyhood alive before our eyes, probably his answer would be what the Headmaster states in The English Teacher :

Most of us forget that grand period. But with me it has always been there. A time at which the colours of things are different, their depths greater, their magnitude greater, a most balanced and joyous condition of life; there was

a natural state of joy over nothing in particular.⁷

In this novels, his short stories and essays, one can hear the playing, giggling, mischief-making children itching to come out of his pages. Swaminathan, a young teenager, Somu the monitor; Sankar, the most brilliant of the class; Samuel, the "pea", Rajan- the fresh arrival, in Swami and Friends; Babu, Sumati and Kamala in The Dark Room; Balu in The Financial-Expert; Raju as a child in The Guide--the list can be extended --these children win our hearts as we see ourselves nostalgically in their mischiefs. Here is Swaminathan with an open Atlas trying to grasp the political map of Europe:

It puzzled him how people managed to live in such a crooked country as Europe. He wondered what the shape of the people might be who lived in places where the outline narrowed as in a cape, and how they managed to escape being strangled by the contour of their land. And then another favourite problem began to tease him: how did those mapmakers find out what the shape of a country was? How did they find out that Europe was like a Camel's head?⁸

It is this kind of imagination which makes the adult consider the child's mind a devil's workshop. When concretized, it takes the form of fun and frolic and mischief. The fun and frolic which Swami and his companions have collectively are repeated individually by Balu in his quarrels with Margayya. In his

childhood, Raju in The Guide is no different from Balu. Thumbi in The Reluctant Guru explores the hidden corners of the house, tastes the earth and licks the rice on the dog's plate.

Occasionally, Narayan's children smart up, and in their attempt to show off their cleverness reveal either their innocence and simplicity or their stupidity. Like in The Dark Room, Babu does not believe what his father says about his mother and plans to report it in the police. The children in his works are quite intelligent but are scared of their studies. Swaminathan in Swami and Friends shows his unwillingness to go to school on Monday mornings which marks the termination of his playful activities. Likewise Babu in The Dark Room pretends of illness to avoid his school but is all fit the same evening to play cricket. Raju, in The Guide only reluctantly goes to school and whiles away his time elsewhere. When he is asked to manage a shop at the railway station. He accepts it gladly as it relieves him of his studies.

The world of children is also the world of fears - the fear of parents particularly of father, of teachers, of policemen, of ghosts and evil sprits and even of other stronger children. Swaminathan is

always afraid of his father, his school teachers, his Headmaster, even some of his friends. Sumati and Kamala in The Dark Room are afraid of their cook's eyes, believing that they could convert anyone into a stone.

The most lively part of Narayan's child characters is that they are true to their nature. One can find fault with the characters of Margayya, Ramani, or Raju, but none can raise a finger against Swami, Balu, Babu and other children.

Hence, through his novels and short stories, Narayan has created an unforgettable region, which he named as Malgudi, just as Hardy named it Wessex. A superficial look at Malgudi world gives one an impression of narrowness and circumspection. It does have an element of local or regional colour. The element is so persistent and authentic that it turns Malgudi into a central character, suggesting a sense of continuity and growth while keeping intact the old landmarks --- Lawley Extension, Kabir Street, Nallappa's Grove, Bombay Anand Bhavan, the Saryu River, Mempi Hills, Taluk Tower, The Lawley Statue, The Banner Office etc.

The peace-loving, horoscope-matching, coffee-drinking and 'lotus-eating' Malgudians are a distinct

community but they are also part of the universal human community.

A discussion of similar patterns between Narayan's other works and The Dark Room provides a better insight into the text, its author and the socio-cultural ethos. Next, we attempt to find some similar patterns outside the author's own works.

Savitri, the protagonist of The Dark Room reminds us of Ibsen's A Doll's House. It is the best known and one of the most popular of Ibsen's works. A classic expression of the theme of woman's rights, the play shocked Ibsen's contemporaries because in the end Nora Helmer, the protagonist leaves her husband and children. The oft-made comparison of the novel under study with Ibsen's A Doll's House is apt and relevant to a point. There is a remarkable similarity between the situations and reactions of Savitri and Nora Helmer. Like Savitri Nora also revolts against being treated as a doll, first by her father and then by her husband. But the Indianness of Narayan's treatment of theme is evident in the way he ends his novel. Narayan is true to the Indian life in his portrayal of Savitri who leaves her husband's home but returns to it because of an all-pervading fear of loneliness and abject misery. But

Ibsen's Nora could afford to leave her husband's house, perhaps never to return or be reconciled to a selfish person. Nora's exit is definitive and reveals Ibsen's more radical, revolutionary and idealistic attitude to life.

Narayan's fictional world is circumscribed by a traditional Indian Society where men rather than women hold a superior position. Caught between the pressures of the old and the lure of the New, a few women do venture to realize their potentialities only to face hostility and end up in failure. Narayan is quite aware of the position of women in the society. He says in My Days :

I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of woman as opposed to man, her constant oppressor. This must have been an early testament 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 in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances⁹.

Yet, we notice in The Dark Room, Narayan does not advance his theme of 'Women's Lib' to a decisive resolution, as Ibsen does in A Doll's House.

The Dark Room thus shows the helpless condition of the Indian woman. She is aware of her debased position in the domestic life, however much we may

talk of Woman's Lib. That's why Savitri quietly comes back again to her husband's house without much fuss. She has neither the courage nor the independence of spirit that Gauri, the heroine of Mulk Raj Anand's The Old Woman and the Cow, exhibits under similar circumstances. Gauri, unlike Savitri, never thinks of committing suicide, but goes out of her husband's house to adopt the profession of nursing, in a clinic and never returns home. Narayan's heroine is an average Hindu housewife who is capable of nothing bolder than sulking in a dark room. Anand's heroine, on the contrary, is more courageous.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

To read Narayan's The Dark Room again today, a half century after it was first published is still to go down on one's knees in the dust, into the heart of Indian reality and the human condition. It is the human case of women's plight and not its statistical horrors, that makes us see Savitri, the protagonist or Shanta Bai, the other female character as one of us. They become a part of us, and change something in us and our view of humanity. Despite his fine understanding of a very wide range of Western culture it is his Indianness which gives R.K. Narayan his value for India. His work traces the essential outline of social evolution of the middle class in modern India. More importantly, it is an affirmation of faith in the human being. As so there are perhaps no villains in his works except in The Man Eater of Malgudi. The oppressor and the oppressed are both victims. Even in his worst aspect, the human being bears on him some mark of the ultimate possibility of goodness. Hence, no matter what his role, he needs compassion, not anger.

The underlying theme of the novel under discussion is profoundly realistic, as are the little details about everyday life and it has been worked out in an artistically suggestive and sensitive manner. The major characters are psychologically convincing but the novel as a whole is made to derive its strength from the hostile social circumstances, bringing in its wake passion, fury, ruthlessness and the tragic return of Savitri to the bullying Ramani to accept the whole monotonous life of a housewife. It is a tragic story portraying the themes of suffering, humiliation, starvation and helplessness. Savitri has returned home after her wanderings during which she has lost even the last straw of hope to be independent and lead a life of self-respect in this callous male-dominated society.

Savitri is typically representative of Indian womanhood, an embodiment of fortitude and perseverance. She suffers calmly with the only hope that one fine morning everything will be alright but has to be content with the realization that independent existence or status to Indian woman is a far cry. Her helplessness makes her think that a woman is like a bamboo pole which does not stand without a support. She finds no difference between a

married woman and a prostitute. Savitri is an individual as well as a type, a replica of Indian womanhood. The main characters stand as symbols, as representatives of social groups. Ramani and the old priest stand for male-chauvinism. Ramani like Gangu seems to be uprooted from Indian tradition and not adjusted to the Western ideas either. He represents the duality of self, the native consciousness and the consciousness acquired from Western civilization. Shanta Bai stands for the finer traditions of the West. In Savitri we find a tradition-bound Indian woman imbued with a revolutionary zeal to change her lot herself but has to succumb to the hostile social forces. To sum up his characters emerge either as reflectors of social change or as symbols of a particular phase of Indian life. He has portrayed in his characteristic way the conflict between the forces of tradition and modernity.

The title of the novel is quite appropriate. It is symbolic of the predicament of Savitri, the protagonist for whom this world has nothing better to provide than a life of dependency and humiliations. For her the whole world is a dark room providing no thread of light. Narayan in this work seems to be the spokesman for the cause of feminism. He has made

a direct and scathing attack on the social system where women are forced to be content only as subordinates to men. Considering the period, (1938), when the novel was written this attack seems to be revolutionary and radical. The feminine principle seems central to the affirmation of life posited by R.K. Naryan's The Dark Room because variations on it run through the entire work, which lends itself to a kind of hermeneutic interpretation.

Narayan's distinctive achievement in this work lies in his lending due credibility, authenticity and seriousness to the portrayal of the theme of cross-cultural interaction in its variegated nuances and dimensions. He exposes the strengths and weaknesses of both the cultures. In extolling the philosophical and spiritual strength, he is not uncritical of their economic backwardness, their superstitious nature, their abject poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, fatalism and passive endurances; nor does he underestimate the contribution of the West, especially its missionary zeal, its scientific and rational thinking and liberal outlook. Like a true artist he is hardly concerned with solutions or ideologies. This artistic distancing, combined with compassion, makes it possible for Narayan, the artist, to see a wider

arc of reality and to combine largeness of canvas with fineness of detail.

A major effect of applying semiotic principles to literary works is to enrich them semantically. Because semiotics works by discovering correlations, it can never treat any element of a text as if it were not at least potentially able to be correlated with some other element, of plot, or character, or whatever. In this respect semiotics may legitimately claim to be more open-minded than other kinds of criticism, which tend to be partial in their reading of texts and to leave out of account whatever does not consort with their interests.

In semiotic analysis neither the author nor the reader is free to make meaning. Regardless of their lives as individuals, as author and reader they are traversed by codes that enable their communicative adventures at the cost of setting limits to the messages they can exchange. A literary text, then is not simply a set of words, but a network of codes. Whenever we make sense of an event it is because we possess a system of thought, a code, that enables us to do so. In reading a text or understanding any verbal figure the interpreter finds that a literal or mimetic reading is not adequate and that a figurative

meaning must be generated. This process of generating a figurative meaning is semiosis.

A semiotic approach, it seems to us, allows critic, teacher, student and reader more scope for thought, more freedom and more responsibility than a merely exegetical one.

However, there are some risks involved in semiotic analysis. First, that the critic's interest in collective structures - genres, discourses, codes and the like - may cause the uniqueness of the literary texts to be lost. Secondly, that by entering the domain of reading as such, the critic may fall under the weight of interpretive practice or the spell of personal response. Thirdly, critics generally succumb to the temptations of terminology. So, one should guard against these dangers and in the present work we have tried to reduce this paraphernalia to a minimum ^{while} analysing ^{text} the on the syntagmatic, semantic and pragmatic planes.

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