

Marital Bliss, Desolation and Mystic Ecstasy in, "The English Teacher"



Commerce

KEYWORDS :

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R.K. Narayan's work attained new seriousness with 'The English Teacher' which is based on his own marriage and the early death of his wife. The novel celebrates fulfilled union, psychically extended after the wife's death and a period of desolation in between. It deals with spirituality in its own way. In the novel the spirit of Susila becomes an embodiment of divine power which brings about a total transformation in the character of Krishna.

The English Teacher portrays the anguish of the husband after the untimely death of his wife and his experience of the spirit world in his quest for contact with her. Narayan always wrote about the world he knew and lived in and all his works are narrative of life. He drew from his own experience and that is what makes his novels so convincing. In 'The English Teacher' it is the world in which this world and the next interact through separation and union. The novel embodies an ideal love which established union even after death, through spiritual communion.

This autobiographical novel can be divided into two parts of equal length. The first three chapters deal with the marital bliss experienced by Krishna and Susila until she dies of typhoid, and the remaining chapters portray the story of Krishna's conquest of death by his attempts to come to terms with the death of his wife.

The novel begins with the activities in the life of Krishna who is an English teacher in the Albert Mission college, talking up a stock of his daily life, "Got up at eight every day, read for the fiftieth time Milton, Carlyle and Shakespeare.... rushed out of the hostel". Back in the hostel he received a letter from his wife.

"I smelt my Wife's letter before opening it.... The fragrance of a mild jasmine smell surrounded her and all her possessions ever since I had known her".

His wife Susila and daughter Leela come to stay with him. The story of their happiness for married life is "a prose lyric on which Narayan has lavished his best gifts as a writer".

Krishna's house becomes a heaven with the arrival of his dear wife Susila. In the portrayal of Susila, Narayan has presented the ideal type of a Hindu wife steeped in the cultural traditions of the country. In the evening when Krishna returned from the college he always found Susila in the garden. He says,

"It was not in my wife's nature to be demonstrative, but I knew she waited for me.... The mother and daughter looked particularly radiant in the evening with their hair dressed and be flowered faces elegantly powdered".

Susila listened eagerly to all the things he told her about his college work and life. She kept the family budget intact and handed over the grocery list to Krishna with strict instructions, "Don't alter anything in it".

The first half of the novel is "a charming prose idyll centered around 'The Angel in the House..... When youth and love preside over the little middle class home of Krishna". But a chance happening brings a sudden unexpected turn of events. The smallest cause leading to a devastating effect. Susila falls a victim of typhoid in the course of her attempts to select a good house. When Krishna comes to know about the world typhoid he says, "My wife's little room was converted into a sick world". There is a sudden change, the worst happens, and the end comes at last.

The description of the happiness of their married life," The excruciating agony during the weeks of Susila's illness, the last journey to the cremation ground is one of the most moving and flawless pieces of writing in the modern English fiction. Not a word is wasted and not a word rings false. In the English teacher, we find that Malgudi becomes a tragic place.

At the cremation ground Krishna reflects, "This is a sort of cloak-room a place where you leave your body behind."

The second half of the novel takes us to unfamiliar regions. The psychic communication with Susila through automatic writing may sound fantastic but it is altogether uncommon wither in Indian or in western countries. The occult communion with the spirit of his wife Susila brings the redemption of love. A stranger informs Krishna that Susila wishes to express herself through a medium.

"Through him she is happy to communicate. She wants her husband to know that she is quite happy in another region and wants him also to eradicate the grief in his mind. We are nearer each other that you understand. And I'm always watching him and the child".

In the second half of the novel Susila's spirit is as strong as a character of Susila, or even stronger than her. Her spirit becomes the central character of the novel. Even while remaining in the background, she weaves a great influence on the life of Krishna and shaping the events. Finally Krishna resigns from the college. At the farewell functions he says,

"I'm seeking a great inner peace. I find I can't attain it unless I withdraw from the adult world and adult work into the world of children. And there..... is a vast storehouse of peace and harmony".

Susila helps Krishna in his psychic development and restores his peace of mind. We can see the psychological changes in him. He is able to see the flaw in the educational system.

The novel ends at a "purgatorial dispensation of suffering". Krishna established connection with the spirit of his dead wife and resolves to devote the rest of his life to a children's school.

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