

CHAPTER - III

'ROMANTIC LOVE'

CHAPTER- III : I :

In this chapter Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma and The Painter of Signs are considered as representative of the futility of 'romantic love' in the Indian context. Both the heroes of these two novels, Sriram and Raman, are infatuated with Bharati and Daisy respectively. At the same time, Bharati and Daisy are devoted to social services, in the case of Bharati it is Mahatma Gandhi and his movement, and, in the case of Daisy, it is family planning programme. Both work with missionary zeal. This is the reason why love is opposed to social service or social course in these novels, and the heroes' love for their respective beloveds remains unfulfilled and thus romantic. These two novels amply illustrate the fact that romantic love is bound to be fruitless in the traditional, Indian context.

## II

Waiting for the Mahatma, published in 1955, received mixed responses from native as well as foreign critics. William Walsh welcomes it and includes it among Narayan's triumphs.<sup>1</sup> Lakshmi Holmstrom regards it as a failure, as she says, "In this novel, Narayan was attempting to show the epic order, represented by Gandhi and his associates impinging on the normal order of life in Malgudi, with Sriram as the uneasy link between these two levels. But the novel is not wholly a success."<sup>2</sup> M.K.Naik also treats it as a failure in the following words; " Waiting for the Mahatma is a failure because no novelist can treat a narrative in which vital political issues are thematically at the centre ... This is something like trying to write a play on the Hamlet theme, making the second Gravedigger the hero of the drama."<sup>3</sup> Charles A. Wagner describes the novel in the following words; " Here you will find not only an engrossing story but a portrait of Gandhi so rich and real no biography we have seen can touch it. It is the story of a disciple, his loves and fears, his serene inanity. But above all, the residue of understanding and truth with respect to India and Gandhi lend substance here of highest caliber."<sup>4</sup> Percy Wood appreciates it in the following words : " Waiting for the Mahatma is not a sloppy, sentimental effort to fictionalize Gandhi's greatness but rather a calm and exact picture of that remarkable man as

he appeared to and with his disciples,"<sup>5</sup> Professor Narasimhaiah comments that Narayan had "made a muddle" of "the Gandhian principle" in this book.<sup>6</sup>

In brief, the hero of the novel Sriram, a drifter, lives with his grandmother in Kabir Street, Malgudi. His father's pension is the only means of his livelihood. When Gandhi comes to Malgudi on a tour of South India, Sriram falls in love with Bharati, one of Gandhi's disciples. Sriram decides to join Gandhi's camp. When Gandhi returns to the North, Sriram leaves his grandmother and stays in Koppal village with Bharati where he is told to spin and read the Scriptures. They write to the Mahatma asking for permission to marry; but by now the Mahatma being busy with his 'Quit India' movement, asks them to give themselves up to be imprisoned. Bharati obeys that order and acts accordingly. Sriram stays in his hideout, a ruined temple - Shrine; and comes in contact with Jagdish, a terrorist and follower of Subhas Chandra Bose. Eventually he is arrested. After his release he joins Bharati once again. By that time Bharati is working in the riot - stricken area of Noakhali and is looking after refugee Children. Finally, the Mahatma blesses them and gives them permission to marry; he is assassinated immediately afterwards.

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This is not a political novel as it appears to be from the title. R.K.Narayan is not concerned with projecting the image of Gandhi as far as this novel is concerned. But he tells us the story of a young man who happens to fall in love with one of Gandhiji's followers. Sriram falls in love with Bharati, one of Gandhiji's followers, in the same impetuous and irrational manner as Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts. Sriram accidentally meets Bharati when she is collecting money for the Harijan Fund in the streets of Malgudi. He drops an eight anna silver coin into the slot. The girl smiles at him in return and this very moment he feels a very strong attraction towards the girl. As Chandran, in The Bachelor of Arts, falls in love with Malathi at once when he 'sees' her on the sands of Sarayu, Sriram also falls in love with Bharati in the same way. Chandran's love for Malathi is a kind of fashionable love on the background of college-going young people in India; Sriram's love for Bharati is also a kind of fashionable and fanciful love. Here the background of the love-affair is a different one. It is the national political movement. 'Seeing' and 'falling' in love immediately is a common factor between these two love-affairs. Another similar factor between these two love-affairs is the love moving around the idea of marriage. As Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts is impatient to get Malathi as his wife in marriage, Sriram also hopes that his love should be translated into marriage. He is an earthly lover. And like an average Indian youth

he desires his beloved to be his wife. He strongly wills to make his love successful by going through the holy ritual of traditional marriage procedure. According to him marriage alone will make his love successful and permanent and his dear Bharathi will be his 'forever. Another important fact is that in The Bachelor of Arts ' the matching of the horoscopes' matters much and finally they do not match and thus the dream of Chandran is shattered to pieces whereas in Waiting for the Mahatma what matters much is the Mahatma's ' sanction' and 'blessings' for the marriage of Sriram and Bharati.

Actually when Gandhiji, in the course of his lecture, claps his hands and wants everyone to keep time and join him in Raghupati Raghava Rajaram, the chant leaves him cold. During this chant the thoughts of Bharati linger in the mind of Sriram. All the time Gandhiji speaks of loving one's enemy Sriram is thinking of loving Bharati. Bharati too has a soft corner for him; she has a place for him in her heart. But she is not impatient in love like Sriram. She is self - controlled, silent - minded girl. She is wholly devoted to Mahatma Gandhi. She cannot do anything without his permission. The Mahatma is her ideal man. He is her prime thought. She is so much bound to him by devotion that even in her personal life she will not do anything unless and until it is sanctioned and approved by <sup>the</sup> Mahatma. Obeying every order from the Mahatma is regarded by her as service to the great man. She is ready to do anything at the

Mahatma's bidding even at the cost of her life. When she speaks of 'Bapu's ' sanction' for their marriage, Sriram asks her,

" How will you get it"?

" I shall write to him tomorrow"

" If he doesn't sanction it"?

" You will marry someone else!"<sup>7</sup>

So it is clear that she is ready to give up her personal pleasures if they are not sanctioned by her revered Mahatma. There is no doubt that she definitely loves Sriram but her emotion is extremely controlled and her love for Sriram acquires a subordinate place in her mind as she is completely devoted to the Mahatma.

In other words, Bharati's devotion to traditional and Gandhian way of life is confronted with Sriram's devotion and longing for Bharati. There is an ironical humour in the treatment of this love - affair. At any rate, the affair promises to end in marriage with the blessings of the Mahatma. Since there is no seriousness in the treatment of the central theme, one gets an impression of the failure of the novel.

Another reason is that Mahatma Gandhi is too great a figure, an epic character to be accommodated to serve the purpose of a love story and treat it light/-heartedly. Sriram's love for Bharati is no doubt true and sincere which transforms him into a patriot. To that extent, this pre-marriage love is acceptable.

Construction?

But since Narayan's strategy to blend the epic with the trivial is foredoomed, the theme of pre - marital love cannot be taken very seriously.



## III

R.K. Narayan's eleventh novel, The painter of Signs was published in 1976. Bruce King welcomes it in the following words: " Narayan's charming The Painter of Signs tells of the failed love of a rather spoiled provincial Brahmin intellectual for a Westernised, casteless, modern Indian woman who preaches birth control and who breaks all the pieties to which he still adheres despite his claim to be a rationalist."<sup>8</sup> Bhagwat S. Goyal reacts to it in the following words : " Narayan explores the theme of man's quest for identity through its protagonist, Raman, who is a painter of signs, and his bitter - sweet experience of love and disenchantment with Daisy, an ardent worker at the family planning centre in Malgudi."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, criticising it, M.K. Naik says :

" As its narrative outline indicates, The Painter of Signs is obviously a novel which is thematically a light - weight. The Vendor of Sweets at least had made some attempt ( though an unsuccessful one ) to raise ethical issues. The painter of Signs makes no such attempt and only carries vestiges of some of the motifs presented successfully in the earlier novels."<sup>10</sup>

The Painter of Signs is the story of Raman, a young sign - painter who lives with his old aunt in Malgudi. He develops a relationship with Daisy who works at the family planning centre, and who is a strong-minded young woman doing her work with

missionary zeal. Raman considers himself as a rationalist and hopes to establish 'The age of Reason' in the world. Daisy, on the other hand, is a champion of women's rights and advocates the norms of small families to solve India's population problem. In due course, Raman falls in love with her and is ~~very~~ impatient to marry her. Sometimes Daisy, as a young woman, surrenders herself temporarily to the demands of physical love but finally her missionary zeal and total commitment to her profession over-powers her physical weakness, and she ~~refuses~~ to marry Raman. Raman is thrown back to his old solid world of reality as he comes into Boardless canteen, his favourite place, at the end of the novel.

Raman's love for Daisy, in the first place, is romantic infatuation. It is clear in the incident when he goes to her place to request her to see the letters on the sign-board personally. It serves as an excuse for him because he is very eager to see her often as he is attracted towards her beauty. All the while sexual attraction towards her is there in his mind and he admits it, when he reflects about his sudden visit to her in the following words: "I' am sex obsessed, that's all to admit the plain fact. The first exposure to a sari-clad figure, and I drop everything and run after it."<sup>11</sup> There is sudden change in his mind. His earlier determination of remaining a bachelor and the thoughts regarding man-woman relationship are waived off. Narayan presents this ironically when he tells us, "He had chosen to remain a bachelor, in

spite of the several opportunities that came his way to choose a bride for himself, if not at least to flirt with ... He wished to establish that man - woman relationship was not inevitable and that there were other more important things to do in life than marrying."<sup>12</sup>

But later on his sexual attraction towards Daisy overpowers him and his mind is completely occupied by the thoughts of Daisy. They come together during Daisy's campaign in rural areas and their contact is widened. They come closer to each other. Raman is attracted towards her more and more. All the while he thinks of marrying her but he is unable to judge her mind. His urge for marrying her is expressed when he bends before a village - Goddess praying, " May Daisy be mine without further delay. I can't live without her,"<sup>13</sup> An accident to the cart by which they travel on their return journey finds them alone at night on the road. On this occasion Raman is very aggressive in his advances. After the accident, when they are again in the cart he tells her that she reminds him of Queen victoria when he finds that there is no response from Daisy to this address she only says, " What are you trying ? Joking, teasing or worrying me?"<sup>14</sup>

After this she asks the cart driver to stop the cart. She gets down and tells the cart driver to take Raman where he wants to go. Seeing this quarrel between them, the cartman

misunderstands them and takes them as wedded couple and comments that as they are bound in weddlock, they cannot get away from each other. Raman takes the advantage of this and like a dominating husband he lifts her up in his arms and puts her back into the cart. " With that he gripped Daisy by the shoulder, propelled her to the cart, and commanded, 'Get in, get in now. Come on you are creating a scene for no reason whatever. You are only hysterical'<sup>15</sup>

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# Raman's intense desire to marry her can be compared with .  
Sriram's longing for Bharati in waiting for the Mahatma. As  
Sriram longs to marry Bharati but Bharati's devotion to Gandhian  
way of life is so strong that she is ready to sacrifice anything  
for Gandhiji's mission. Bharati's devotion for Mahatma Gandhi  
becomes an obstacle for Sriram's desire to marry her. In the  
same way, in this novel, Daisy's missionary zeal for family  
planning programme and birth control comes in the way of Raman's  
intense desire to marry her.

9 When Daisy angrily rejects his advances, Raman is back  
to Malgudi and for sometime he worries about what he has done,  
but slowly, once again he settles in his old routine life.  
After some days, Daisy calls on him. Once again their relationship  
regains its earlier pattern. In a way she encourages him as  
she has a soft corner for him in her heart. It is clear in the  
incident when they sit on the granite steps on the bank of the

river. He says,

" I like you, I feel lost without you,"

" Better than getting lost along with me,"

She mumbled on, 'I love you,'"

' I like you' are words which can hardly be real. You have learnt them from novels and Hollywood films perhaps. When a man says ' I love you' and the woman repeats ' I love you' it sounds mechanical and unconvincing perhaps credible in Western society, but sounds silly in ours people really in love would be struck dumb, I imagine."<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Daisy knows that the phrase like ' I love you' or calling one's beloved as ' Queen Victoria' is blind imitation of the Western ways of wooing and so it is out of place in the Indian situation. She also knows that this is a movie-type and fashionable kind of love. Hence it is not convincing and acceptable in traditional Hindu life.

After this conversation about love, Raman is bold in his advances and takes her hand in his hand. She does not reject him and thus encourages him further. On this occasion Daisy reveals her past life to him. She tells him how she damaged her family reputation due to her modern way of thinking

particularly due to her unseemly behaviour during the occasion when she was being 'inspected' by prospective bridegroom.

In due course, Daisy promises to marry him but Raman's old aunt, who has looked after him all this while, disapproves of the marriage and goes away on a pilgrimage. But afterwards Daisy changes her mind and shuns the thought of marrying him. Finally, she tells Raman, "Married life is not for me. I have thought it over. It frightens me. I am not cut out for the life you imagine, I can't live except alone. It won't work ... I want to forget my moments of weakness, and you must forget me that's all,"<sup>17</sup>

This resolution of Daisy comes as a result of her devotion to her social work. For Daisy the question of commitment to the cause for which she is working is extremely important and for the sake of her devotion to it she refuses to marry Raman. Narayan seems to suggest that she is taking a risk in marrying Raman because, only a traditional or conventional marriage promises to be successful. Whereas anything out of tradition like their love marriage, has no guarantee of fulfilment. For Raman her resolution comes as shock because his dream of marriage is shattered and finally he goes to his favourite place 'The Boardless' canteen which is according to him the only, "solid real world of sublime souls who minded their own business" Raman is thus back to his normal routine life

after going through the thrilling experience with Daisy which takes place only to restore him to his original normal routine life. The Painter of Signs is yet another novel which indicates Narayan's belief that love outside wedlock and based upon physical infatuation is bound to be unsuccessful and fruitless.

It is quite clear from the foregone discussion that Bharati and Daisy find satisfaction and fulfilment more in public work than in romantic infatuation. In other words, Narayan seems to emphasize that pre - marital love cannot be taken seriously.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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