

Manifestation of Max Weber's Theory of Power in R.K. Narayan's The Dark Room

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Abstract

Max Weber is a well-known Sociologist whose theories have impacted different fields of knowledge in the modern era. Weber is one of the few writers who recognize the nature of power in social relations. Weber's definition of power in society has become an interesting area of study for many researchers. The present paper aims at discovering the power relations in R.K.Narayan's The Dark Room in the light of Weber's social theory of power. When it comes to the perception of power, the concepts of power and domination are closely related. Weber views power as authority and coercion. According to Weber, authoritative power is the act of exercising power which is seen as legitimate because those who are subject to power do so with consent. Coercive power exists when an individual or group has to use force to get what they want – that means you force someone to do something against their wishes. In traditional domination, the basis of power is age-old traditions, long standing beliefs and practices of a society. There is no society without power and no one can live outside the relations of power. This research paper concentrates on the interplay of power between the major characters and the minor characters and how the notion of the traditional power or authority is established through the actions and words of the characters in the novel. This paper also traces how some characters of the novel tries to free themselves from the implementation of traditional authority or power. Since power is inseparable from our lives, it is necessary that it must be analysed. Weber has transformed and almost brought a revolution in the sphere of English Studies by writing on the subjects of power, discourse and knowledge giving it distinct shapes that when contemporary trend in language and literature is to be established, one has to depend on Weber.

Keywords

Sociologist, Power, authority, tradition, society, dominance

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1. Introduction

Max Weber is a famous Sociologist whose theories have impacted different fields of knowledge in the modern era. Max Weber is one of the few writers who recognize the nature of power in social relations. This paper shows how certain characters in the novel exhibit power relations with each other. This paper strives to study how Max Weber's traditional power theory operates through the various strong characters of this novel.

Max Weber is a Sociologist who has hugely influenced the understanding of many concepts, such as discourse, power and knowledge in everyday life. Max Weber identifies power as either authoritative or coercive. Authoritative power is exercising power which is seen as legitimate. Traditional authority is the power that is rooted in traditional or long-standing beliefs and practices of a society. It exists and is assigned to particular individuals because of that society's customs and traditions. Traditional authority is the idea that we accept the authority of a person based on tradition. In traditional domination, the basis of power is age-old traditions.

2. Max Weber's Social Power Theory in The Dark Room

Most of the novels of R. K. Narayan are revolves around the middle class educated section of the society and city-bred women are rarely a part of his canvas. The setting of most of his novels is an unreal town called Malgudi, which is semi-urban and the people in this town are seen as educated, cultured and innocent. In this novel, R.K. Narayan pictures the traditional Indian society that existed during the pre-independence era. Narayan strongly believed that man tries to bring his fantasies realistic in life. Women of the society got accustomed to the traditional dominance of men in the society and they follow this hierarchy system without realizing the fact that they are losing their rights and freedom by obeying the norms blindly. Family and society has a great role in making women believe that they are supposed to abide by the rules set by the men in the society. The authoritative behaviour of men towards women is not something new to them. Women were always treated as voiceless secondary citizens meant just to do the household chores with grace and humility and adorn the house with her magnanimity and charm.

The Dark Room pictures the silent sufferings of a meek and gentle woman who struggles to come to terms with the

ruthless behaviour of her husband. *The Dark Room* is the story of a woman named Savitri, having three children and her authoritative and arrogant husband Ramani, who never cared for the feelings of others. In the beginning of the novel, we find that Savitri does not have the slightest power to do anything at home even after fifteen years of married life.

"How impotent she was, she thought; she had not the slightest power to do anything at home and that after fifteen years of married life." (5)

Savithri's husband Ramani is a sort of shady aristocrat who is dominant, selfish and disloyal to his dedicated wife. He reprimands and abuses Savitri for no reason but to satisfy his worthless patriarchal impulses. He is disburbed by disbelief and is very dominating in his attitude. Due to his sulky and impudent brashness, a dreadful despondency always prowled in the house. Even after spending fifteen years together under the roof with his wife, he treats her lesser than a maid. He even rebukes his children for insignificant silly things. He kept himself away from showing love or affection to the members of his family.

The Dark Room also speaks about the loveless behaviour shown by Ramani towards his family in order to retain his patriarchal dominant macho figure. He feels that an affectionate behaviour may weaken his authority and traditional power in the family and rules his house according to his whims and fancies. His mere presence in the house creates a kind of terrific atmosphere and his behaviour towards his wife and children may become eccentric any time.

Ramani's rules of discipline in his family for his children cross the limit of fatherly love and changes into cruel conditions. He converts his home into a sort of military base where his words become the law. He never shows any feelings to anyone at home except the feeling of anger. He is afraid to show his vulnerability to all which according to him might be taken as his weakness that his family may use to dominate him. He maintains an image of a very strict father and an affectionless husband.

All the decisions in the family are decided by Ramani even those pertaining to the dishes which should be made at home every day. Every morning when Ramani is about to leave for office, he stands at the street door and calls out to Savitri in an indirect manner which is an indication that she should come out of the house to see off his patriarchal husband. Ramani is a dual personality who wants to have a submissive wife cum maid to run his house perfectly and at the same time desires his wife to satisfy his romantic urges.

One day when their son Babu falls sick, Savitri meekly pleads Ramani that the boy has fever and so he cannot go to school. But Ramani shouts at her to mind her own business. Savitri cannot take decisions regarding her children. According to Ramani, it is not women's business. The male cook in Ramani's house too agree with Ramani's ideology that it is not women's business to decide family matters and he shares his views on this with the servant, "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." (41) The children are afraid to talk loudly when their father is at home and heaves a sigh of relief the moment Ramani steps out of the house. Another character Mari, Ponni's husband shares a similar view regarding how women should be kept under control by the men of the family. He says, "This was what came of allowing too much liberty to women; they ought to be kept under proper control and then all would be well" (125). An old priest uses derogatory language against Ponni to her husband Mari and says "If she doesn't let you rest, thrash her. That is the way to keep women sane. In these days, you fellows are impotent mugs and let your women ride you about" (129).

The men in the novel make best use of their traditional hierarchical power against women by constantly showering them with abuses and taunts. For example, the word restless rat is used for Gangu, temple chariot for Gangu for her bulky size. Ramani uses abusive words for Savitri like 'ungrateful woman' and 'thankless wretch'. Babu, the son of Ramani and Savitri, remarks that being girls Kamla and Sumati, his sisters are silly creatures and they cannot understand Hollywood movies. Moreover, Babu considers himself superior to Kamla and Sumati since he is a male figure of the family. Ramani scolds Babu when he weeps like a girl. Ramani also advises him that men should not cry as it is a trait that is most often shown by women.

Savitri also exerts power over her cook and servant just like how Ramani exhibits traditional hierarchical power on Savitri. The way in which Savitri operates traditional power on her cook is very much evident when she scolds the cook for being late to prepare tiffin for the evening. Savitri tells Ranga, "If you can't be back at two o'clock, you can tell me. I will do this tiffin business by myself. I do so many things already one more will make no difference. You can come at your leisure and do whatever is left undone." (8)

Even the children also exhibit power over the servants when they commit silly and careless mistakes in the household. The children also have the belief that they are the masters and they hold traditional power and authority over their servants even though they are younger to the servants as far as age is concerned. One day when the servant Ranga breaks the trunk of a toy elephant, Savitri's daughter Kamala says, "Make him buy a new one, Mother. Don't give him his pay", shows the power that is exerted on servant Ranga by little Kamala.

Savitri rants at her servants whenever she feels that they are lacking in subservience. She keeps away certain ingredients and food items from the reach of the cook. She restricts his liberty in cooking by not allowing him to add too much of oil or ghee to certain dishes and also locks certain ingredients in order to prevent him from using it without her knowledge. Some food stuffs are solely under her custody which actually restrains the cook from having it when he is hungry. Added to it, she has nasty ward for them for every little cause and when necessary does not desist even from overtaxing them. If the dishes prepared on a specific day do not match with

the interest or mood of Ramani, Savitri puts the blame on the cook for having it prepared that way.

The Dark Room in the house is a room that is mainly meant for storing the odds and ends of the house. The main character of the novel Savitri considers herself to be the junk of the house, which is considered worthless by the man of the house. As far as she is concerned, the darkness of the dark room lingers over her personal life where she sees no light at the other end of the tunnel. Her self-worth is wounded when she goes through the continuous harassment and traumatic experiences at home from her husband Ramani. According to Harrex, the dark room symbolizes "the emotional and domestic claustrophobia which can result from a circumscribed marital orthodoxy."

Savitri has not received anything from her husband except continuous criticisms and insults. Ramani treats more or less the same kind of treatment to his children also. Ramani's behaviour is so overbearing and contemptuous that the whole family goes through a kind of suffocation during his presence at home. His constant verbal and emotional torture leads Savitri to disheartenment and disinterest in family life. In addition to that, Ramani gets into a relationship with his office secretary, Shantabai, a new employee in his office who has deserted her husband and has joined as an insurance agent in his office. After knowing about Ramani's relationship with Shantabai, Savitri forewarns him about the consequences. But Ramani pays no attention to her words with the confidence that as the ultimate male authority of the family, he has the freedom to choose his way and as a submissive wife who is dependent on her husband, Savitri has no right to question him.

What makes Shantabai's role noteworthy in the novel is the author's intention to unravel the hypocrisy of Savitri's husband Ramani. At home, Ramani maintains a distance with Savitri. But when he is interacting with Shanta Bai, he tends to present a sweet version of himself in order to impress the lady.

She walks out of the house when her husband disregards her voice to stop his relationship with Shantabai. In contradiction to the Savitri of ancient legend, R.K. Narayan's Savitri leaves her house empty-handed keeping aside the ornaments gifted to her by her father because she feels exhausted to bear with the patriarchal dominance. Savitri says "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." Savitri's mental anguish after leaving her home is evident in her internal monologue which shows her uneasiness in going against the dominant male figure in the family.

The women in the family are very much financially dependent on men and it is evident from the words of Savitri, "If I take the train and go to my parents, I shall be living on my husband's earnings. What can I do myself? Unfit to earn a handful of rice except begging." Even though Savitri shows existential maturity to walk away from her husband in times

of trouble, she was forced to return to Ramani since she was financially dependent on him.

3. Conclusion

R.K. Narayan's novels reflect the absurdities and incongruities of the middle class Indian family in fictional form. He has used fiction as an art form to reveal to the masses the evils inherent in the society. Through the various characters of the novel, we are able to know more about how the traditional power theory works in an Indian household right from the head of the family to the children in the family. Moreover, Savitri's decision to return to her house to stay with her husband Ramani and children makes it clear that it is not easy for an Indian woman to free herself from the familial bonds and ties even if her life in the house appears to be unsatisfying and meaningless to her. The societal conditioning makes women like Savitri think that they would not be able to exist without the support of a male figure in the family whether it is father, husband or brother. The novel ends with the message that the respectful and divine husband and wife relationship which is the dream of every Indian woman remains unfulfilled for Savitri till the end of the novel where she willingly chooses to continue her solitary life in the dark room which shuts her away from the rejuvenating light of life.

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