
Signs of Liberation in R.K. Narayan's *The Painter of Signs*

Dr. G. Usha Rani

Lecturer in English, Government College (A), Ananthapuramu, Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract:

R.K. Narayan's novels focus on a modernised and liberated Indian woman. Narayan highlights the empowered image of a woman who breaks the traditional ties and works for the nation. Daisy in *The Painter of Signs* possesses the toughness, adventurousness and courage to manage the affairs by herself. She does not need a male partner's protection in her activities. The spirit of liberation is manifested in the character of Daisy in *The Painter of Signs*. She is the 'New Woman', on whom no social inhibitions are clamped. Daisy is strikingly modern in her spirit. She is a family planning zealot. She is against her marriage. She feels that marriage is a symbol of a woman's slavery to man. When Raman reveals his intention to marry her, she agrees on two conditions. But her promise of marriage wasn't fulfilled. Her passion for individuality overpowers her temporary surrender to Raman. She is a modern and career-oriented woman. She struggles with all the problems on her own and establishes her own independent identity. Narayan portrays the changes that are taking place in society. Daisy is a rebel from a very early age. Daisy works for the population control. She plays an active role in her mission.

Keywords: Empowered, liberation, adventurousness, career-oriented, independent

Introduction:

R.K. Narayan's *The Painter of Signs* is a significant work that emphasises the idea of a new lady. Daisy is an alien to Malgudi and a modern woman. She is the most powerful character. She is a well-known lady. Daisy is a dedicated and self-aware woman. She is a young woman employed by the Malgudi Family Planning Centre. She gives the subject of family planning her whole attention. She devotes her life to the fight against population growth. Her personality is vibrant in action and presented in a strong, functional framework.

Daisy's father has a sizable landholding. Her family consists of aunts, cousins, uncles, sisters-in-law, brothers, and sisters. About fifteen children are sent to various schools in the morning from their home, which resembles a hostel. She must travel to a convent school via bus. Her early family life was a mass existence in which she lost her individuality. There is no room to have a private life because everything in the

house is regulated. At the early age of thirteen, her parents made the decision to marry her. They wish to marry her to a reputable and wealthy local landlord in the customary way. She declines to get marry as she has no interest in marriage. Everyone in the family is upset by her choice. One of her relatives finally convinces her. She concurs, but she tells her parents, "I had other aims." I stated that I would choose to work over being a wife. Daisy describes how she is dressed and ready for the guests to view and evaluate her.

They decked me in all the jewellery pieces borrowed from my sister-in-law in the house, diamonds and gold all over my ears, neck, nose, and wrist, and clad me in a heavy sari crackling with gold lace. I felt suffocated with all the stuff over me. (Narayan 131)

Daisy rebels against the mundane, conventional ways of a housewife from an early age. She therefore chooses to startle those who visit her. She disobeys her parents' requests to sit modestly in front of the guests. She cross-examines each guest by posing questions when they inquire about her schooling. As a result, her parents are upset and the guests leave offended. Daisy leaves her home after rebelling against her parents. With the aid of a missionary organisation, she travels to Madras and pursues her education there, where she receives social work training. She lives with fishermen in their huts in various impoverished neighbourhoods. Her early years were marked by hardship, adversity, resilience, and an unwavering battle to become independent on the basis of her own strength. She dislikes having male assistance in her life. S.P. Bharadwaj notes:

A girl running away from the family, her upbringing and education at a missionary organisation, her acceptance of social work and her living, all by herself without male supervision and support, are some of those phenomena which would not be tolerated in an Orthodox Hindu family; nor would a girl of such a family have ventured thus.

Daisy travels to Malgudi to encourage family planning among the populace to curb the disproportionate population growth that outpaces the nation's economic progress. She is totally committed to her work. When performing her duties, she is logical, scientific, and emotionless. In the New Block on the town's popular Market Road, she opens a Family Planning Centre. She meets Raman, the signboard painter. She requests that he paint a notice board that will be displayed in front of her workplace.

Raman resides on Ellaman Street with his aunt. Daisy appears quite hesitant and aloof when she first meets Raman in her office. In addition to hiring Raman to paint a signboard, she requests that he paint a red triangle in the corner of the board. It represents the Family Planning program. Daisy has very contemporary ideas. According to her, marriage represents a woman's enslavement to a man. She decides

to have an independent life. Regarding William Walsh, "Daisy is a peculiarly modern young woman for whom the cult of independent individuality is the supreme value in life." From the moment Raman meets Daisy, he is in her trance. His mind is full of her thoughts. He wonders.

She called herself just Daisy. She was a slender girl in a sari. No one could say who her husband, father or brother was, or where she came from – a sudden descent on Malgudi. Daisy! What a name for someone who looked so very Indian, traditional and gentle! One would expect a person on this job to be somewhat matronly, like the Mother Superior in the convent – large, broad-faced, towering over others, an executive type who could, with a flourish of her arms, order people about. But this girl looked like a minor dancer. (Narayan 31)

Daisy is incredibly motivated to accomplish her goal of family planning with a missionary zeal. She is direct and informs Raman that she anticipates a delegation of ladies to discuss ways to prevent getting pregnant. She does all of the work by herself. She exhibits total independence, unwavering uniqueness, and the ability to plan everything on her own. She chooses to go on a three-week tour of the villages that surround Malgudi. She extends an invitation to Raman to join her on her tour, for which he will receive the appropriate compensation. His task is to choose thirty locations across different communities to write the family planning message.

She will accompany a medical team to perform vasectomies on this journey, which will serve as a kind of survey. If she is successful in controlling population growth and lowering the birth rate, she will be happy. During her tour of villages, Daisy demonstrates an amazing degree of adaptability. Her needs are minimal. She is prepared to travel by truck as well. She uses an air travel bag and a little tin trunk to store all of her possessions. She grabs whatever is on hand, including rice, bread, chicken, beef, fish, and fruit. She washes and dries her clothing wherever, and she bathes in a public well. She is willing to live in the lowest hut and is not picky. She tells Raman:

Let us live at least for a while as millions of our population live; otherwise, we will never understand our own people. Living in a city is not real life. Urban life is standardised and meant to keep people apart. (Narayan 57-58)

Daisy is very straightforward in her replies. When Raman questions whether she is a communist, she replies,

What if I am or if I am not? Is there a label one should always carry like a dog collar?... I like to serve the people in what seems to me the best way, that's all. (Narayan 58)

Daisy is extremely clear about everything important to her objective, no matter how big or tiny. She gathers information and statistics, records every detail in

her diary, and calls a meeting in a school, on the verandah of a friendly house or hut, or under the shade of a tree. Births and deaths are noted by her. She describes birth and its regulation to the inhabitants. She describes how to prevent getting pregnant. She never feels uncomfortable talking about these topics. She uses a gesture or a word to stop the men from snickering or the women from laughing. Children are invited to attend her classes, but they are sent away by the traditional locals.

She travels to Mempi Hills because of her unwavering dedication to the goal of population control. She travels to a Mempi Hills community. She carries her bags on her back and walks the three or four miles there. She hardly turns to check if Raman is following her. He is annoyed by her quiet. Raman uses these terms to convey his annoyance:

She walked ahead, wrapped in her own thoughts, not seeming to give a thought for him. She had offered him the privilege of accompanying her, and he had accepted it, that was all. She treated him as a sort of trailer. (Narayan 63)

Daisy finds fulfilment in avoiding pregnancies. She meets the local teacher as she reaches the top of the hill. She learns that the village's population has increased by twenty per cent. The villagers' superstitious and religious beliefs conflict with her pragmatism regarding birth control. Barren women pray and give birth at an ancient shrine in this town. The villagers consider the children to be God's gift. Raman and Daisy look for a location to write their family planning message. The priest of the temple objects to them when they discover a wall. He addresses them.

I built this temple and installed the Goddess of plenty, long before anyone came here and built these houses. The Goddess came to me in a dream and commanded and I made it my mission in life. For a hundred miles around there is no temple like this. Barren women come and pray here for three days, and conceive within thirty days. (Narayan 70)

And he says that Daisy is doing sin. She is against the religious belief. He observes:

And yet this woman has been propagating sinful practices. I heard a report of what she said.... I know all that you said. Be careful, you evil woman, don't tamper with God's designs. (Narayan 71)

She is confused by the eccentric nature of the priest in the temple and his blind faith. But she remains undisturbed about her cherished goal. Her absolute attention to the task of birth control is underscored by Raman, 'If she were a despotic queen of ancient days, she would have ordered the sawing off of the organs of generation.' (Narayan 56-57)

Daisy is all against an increase in the birth-rate of new-babies. But she has a tender woman's heart towards the babies, who are already born. She tells one of them

not to suck its thumb. She says to their mother that these things must be taught early in life.

Daisy possesses self-control. She is bold. When Raman and Daisy travel in a cart, Raman arranges a bed on the ground under the cart and attempts to rape her. But she is aware of the coming danger, and she smartly steals away noiselessly from the cart. She sits on the branch of a tamarind tree till the early morning. She warns the cartman that they are not married. He is a person employed by her for a specific job. Daisy feels that Raman may harass her further. She threatens him that she is going to complain to the police against him on their arrival to Malgudi.

Daisy leaves an impression of fear on weak-minded Raman. He feels depressed, remains silent and confines himself to his room. He suspects that the police may come up any time to arrest him. But even after a week, nothing happens. He feels great relief and attends to his work of painting a signboard for the bangle seller.

The association of Daisy and Raman has a turning point in the development of the novel. One evening, Daisy comes to Raman to pay his bill. The front door of his house is closed. She comes to the back wall and finds Raman there. He is busy with his painting of a signboard. She asks him to jump over the wall to her side. Thereafter, their relationship develops. They enjoy together on the sandy shore of Sarayu. They exchange the memories of their past. They fall in love with each other. She allows him to come to her house in the evening, and both spend their time together till late at night. Raman decides to marry her.

Daisy agrees to marry Raman on two conditions. First, they will have no children. Secondly, in case there is a child by mischance, she will give it away so that she can pursue her mission of population control. She also tells him that she will leave him if he questions with regard to her commitment. Raman agrees to these conditions. He says, "Whatever you say, I will never interfere. I won't question you. I will be like the ancient king Santhanu" (Narayan 159).

Daisy's consent to marriage with Raman enthruses him, and she starts to make arrangements. He plans to make some alterations to his house. But Daisy is least bothered about the comforts. In her view, a home is 'Only a retreat from sun and rain, and for sleeping, washing and depositing one's trunk.' When Raman proposes the changes to be brought into the house. She says, "Everything seems to me all right as it is. Leave them alone." (Narayan 170) She tells him that she can manage with any sort of food. Raman is all enthusiastic about the arrangements he has planned to be made in the house.

Daisy leans against the bedroll lying on the floor in Raman's room. She asks Raman to come closer to her if he likes. He moves closer to her and says, "Now I feel

better. After all, we are a married couple.” (Narayan 174) Raman feels it is a great moment of profound harmony between them.

Premarital sex is frowned upon in middle-class Indian society. However, Daisy is a strong advocate for modernity. Raman and Daisy make the Gandharvana-style marriage decision. They share a home with their spouse. Their marriage doesn't work out. Daisy temporarily gives in to Raman because she is so passionate about being unique. She decides against getting married to Raman. Daisy is informed about the dire state of family planning in Nagari by a women's delegation. In order to address the issue of population expansion, she chooses to travel with them to those regions.

As Daisy is prepared to leave right away on her trip, Raman visits her office to remind her of the plan to move into his home. Raman is displeased with her choice. Raman asks her to go on this expedition with him. However, she won't make any commitments to Raman.

Daisy is dedicated to her goal of controlling the population's explosive increase. As she departs Malgudi, she tells Raman,

“Let us face the fact,” she whispered, her breath wafting on his face, “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.” (Narayan 178-179)

Daisy apologises to Raman for the error in her marriage vow. She suggests that Raman look for another suitable mate. She declares,

You will be happy married to someone very different. Seek a proper partner for yourself... You can, any girl will accept you, no, adore you. You are everything a girl dreams of. (Narayan 180)

Daisy repents for her relationship with Raman and leaves him alone. She explains:

“At some moments, and moods, we say and do things – like talking in sleep, but when you awake, you realise your folly...” she fumbled on, unable to state it all very clearly. “Oh, forgive me for misleading you....” (Narayan 180)

Daisy's promise of marriage to Raman does not get fulfilled. Daisy refuses the role of the traditional Hindu housewife and sticks to her mission of family planning. Her individuality gets the upper hand in the end.

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