

## Toxic Masculinity in the Dark Room by R.K. Narayan and Night of No Moon by Syed Waliullah: A Comparative Study

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**ABSTRACT:** This dissertation is concerned with analysis of Syed Waliullah's *Night of No Moon* and RK Narayan's *The Dark Room*. The researcher aims at making a comparative study of the novels by both the writers that will employ an inter and intra analysis of the texts to have a comprehensive idea of the facets that interlink as well as contrast the works of the two pioneer writers of ostensibly different social and cultural orientations. Waliullah observes Bangladeshi rural society from a close quarter, attempts to go deep into the structures and practices and portray them inside and outside objectively employing humor, irony and sarcasm with implied commentaries for the betterment of the society. Narayan too presents as an insider the structures and practices of the Indian Society and the changing trends with special focus on the psychological penetration in the simplest possible manner. Despite being writers of different spatial and temporal locations, they are prone to realism hence faithfully presents societies they know, people they interact, situations they experience and commentaries they believe can bring about desired changes. The researcher focuses on a comparative study of the themes of the selected novels, analysis of the characters, social institutions, major practices and situations to show resemblances as well as the divergences and establish a cultural bridge. The study explores the portrayal of the societies with positivities and negativities and reformative suggestions to make the reader think and act for betterment

**KEYWORDS:** Masculinity, Patriarchy, Charlatan, Justice and Superstition.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The term 'Masculinity' refers to a set of attributes, behaviors, and roles associated with boys and men. Although masculinity is constructed by the society, some research show that some behaviors regarded as masculine are biologically influenced. To what degree masculinity is biologically or socially influenced is subject to debate. Masculine qualities and roles are generally considered typical of, appropriate for, and expected from boys and men. Masculinity varies from culture to culture, society to society and community to community. However, masculinities and femininities indicate social roles, behaviors, and meanings prescribed for men and women in any society at any time. Such gender ideologies have to be separated from biological sex, and must be understood to be plural as there is no single definition for all men and all women. Masculinities and femininities are structured and expressed through other axes of identity, such as class, race, ethnicity, age and sexuality. Masculinity is always appreciated in the Indian sub continental society. Men are supposed to be masculine as they are considered to be the bread earners and protection providers for the women. The society along with all its institutions nurtures masculinity in men because, a masculine man is the hero of the hero of the society who can lead the community. However, masculinity being a powerful tool for men, appeared as the symbol of oppression for the women of the societies of India and Bangladesh.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Narayan draws a picture of women who suffer in their dark places but his movement is not drastic. What he presents is that he shows real image of women in the year 1930 in India. As a heroine for *The Dark Room*, Narayan's female character Savitri, the name which points back to the mythological Savitri and her devotion to her husband Satyavan. As Sen (1985) comments, "to deconstruct the archetypal Hindu myth of the devoted wife by showing how the myth loses its meaning in a society where women's loyalty and dedication are forcibly extracted, rather than freely given" (Sen,56). Narayan does not advocate female subservience by presenting Savitri back to her bullying husband, rather problematizes the traditional belief about women's position in the tradition-ridden Indian society by focusing the situations under which Savitri is compelled to walk out of her house and family and then, she is compelled to return. Narayan wants to foster the hypocrisy of the patriarchal society and power through which religion is used to exploit women community. Savitri, after she leaves family finds a job where she has to stay in a priest's temple. In the novel *Night of No Moon* Aref Ali needlessly involves himself with the odd turn of events in his life.

When Qadir wants his help to peter out the dead body, Aref can have rejected it. But he feels no reaction in his mind; rather he thinks some indomitable force pushing him towards the concluding scene of life. Even he cannot not understand what Qadir expects him to do: "it was not possible for him to distinguish truth from untruth, the common from uncommon, right from wrong any more" which creates a complete absurd situation" (Waliullah 90). Incorporating Qadir to evacuate the dead body and then complaining to the police against Qadir makes the circumstances even more absurd that intensifies Aref Ali's existential crisis. In the end of *Chander Amabasya* Aref Ali's life gets a rational meaning or order. He has troubles dealing with his individual history against the national, although he continuously struggles to rationalize his nihilistic ideologies. This struggle to find meaning where none exists is what the existentialists call, the absurd. So strong is their desire to acquire the meaning of life that they dismiss out of hand the idea that there is nothing to be found. When they realize the meaninglessness of their existence in that religiously occupied absurd society, they start living in the moment accepting death as the ultimate, yet absurd conclusion of life, through which they try to liberate themselves from the unattained pile of questions beneath their minds. (Sattar, et al, 870)

Waliullah's novel, *Chander Amabasya* written after he moves to Paris, reveal the influence of Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. As Serajul Islam Choudhury notes that Waliullah introduces the existentialist strain into Bangla fiction. *Chander Amabasya*, for example, is about Aref Ali, a young teacher, who discovers the dead body of a young woman. He suspects an important villager of the murder but is caught up in a dilemma about revealing his suspicions. He musters up the courage to expose the murderer though he knows that by doing so he is signing his own death warrant. (Zaman.) The novel *Chader Amabasya* is a depiction of a mental journey of the protagonist Aref Ali whose simple life gets shaken by an incident of the killing of a young woman. The incident makes Aref think and rethinks his position and reshape his moral being an external stand. The novelist presents how the hero makes use of the defence mechanisms to shed off his anxieties and secure his life. But the mental journey takes him to a point where he is mature and strong. Aref comes out of the cocoon both physically and mentally to overcome the challenges that paralyze the higher attainments. Aref emerges as a man with an understanding of situations and surroundings and enjoys dominance while he is supposed to be vulnerable. (Mondol, 312)

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology shows that the whole research-work will be based on Indian and Bengali literatures in the contexts of Narayan's and Waliullah's treatment of masculinity. The relevant literature is the major source of information for the preparation of the paper. The selected novels have been analyzed to strengthen the new findings of the research. Another remarkable point in this context is that for the purpose of in-text citation, references, citation, and documentation, MLA style has been followed strictly. This research work has been done through collecting primary and secondary materials available in the libraries, markets and internet. The research-work is of the view that Narayan's and Waliullah's texts would contribute to the philological field, portraying powerful women who survive and exert their presence in today's society in different ways.

**Toxic Masculinity in the Night of No Moon:** Syed Waliullah's *Chander Amabasya* (1964) is rendered by Afia Dil as *Night of No Moon*. It narrates the story of a young man whose world of innocent dreams collapses when he is forced to enter the world of experience. Aref Ali, the young teacher is 24, has come from a village to work in a Junior Secondary School in a small Mofussil Town. One Night, a young woman, the wife of a village boatman, Karim Majhi is strangled to death by Qadir who has a clandestine relation with the woman. Aref Ali, a young man of Romantic idealism goes out during the night to enjoy the beauty of the full moon and almost stumbles upon the dead body of the murdered woman. The young teacher knows the murderer, but his love for life keeps him from acknowledging the stark reality. He even thinks of forgiving the murderer. But his loyalty to truth finally gives him the courage to expose the name of the murderer. Though he realizes that by doing so, he is going to sign his own death warrant. He says, "Never in his life, had he run around like this-like a helpless animal pursued by hunters in the dead of night. But this was also true that the inexperienced young teacher had never seen the dead body of a young woman inside a bamboo grove before." (Waliullah, 13-14)

Some critics identify foreign influences on Syed Waliullah's last two novels-**Night of No Moon** and **Cry, River, Cry**. James Joyce (1882-1941), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), Franz Kafka (1883-1924) or Albert Camus (1913-1960) are the most common names which are uttered in connection with the use of 'stream of consciousness' in **Night of No Moon**. A reader may discover semblance between the young teacher and Joyce's Stephen in **Ulysses** (1922) or Woolf's **Misses Ramsey of To the Lighthouse** (1927). Regarding plot, a reader may find such similarities with Kafka's **The Trial** (1925), English Translation (1937) and Camus's **The Outsider** (1942), English Translation (1946). Waliullah is often considered the pioneer of existential analysis of character's psyche in the literature of Bangladesh. He wants to present the manipulation and activities of charlatans through exploiting the

religious beliefs of the common people in his writings. In **Night of No Moon** characters are prisoners of circumstances and the circumstances are controlled by economic realities and the linkage between the characters and circumstances is unbreakable and inexorable. The inner qualities of his heroes are quietly dependent upon their circumstances and we find them facing their own selves without self-knowledge.

Aref Ali's world of imagination is uncorrupted by sin, crime and cruelty. When he sees the dead body of the village boatman's wife, he thinks it a figment of imagination. Even he suspects himself to be the killer as he appears on the stage at that time which prompts the killer to throttle the woman. He also tries to think that it is not a murder but an accident. But that residual hope is destroyed when Qadir himself unveils his clandestine union with the boatman's wife as something not more than sensual indulgence. Then he is left with no choice but to tell the truth to Grandfather and goes straight to the police station. Though the living are speaking on behalf of the living, not on behalf of the dead, Aref Ali speaks for the dead and against a living man, the murderer. Syed Waliullah's heroes are exceptional and unheroic. He is interested in the untypicality of his heroes. The deep and helpless loneliness of his characters are inviting to him. Aref Ali, though a dependent on Baro Bari is unbending as Jamila and Khodija and raises against the fake spiritualist Qadir, the pampered younger brother of Grandfather. **Night of No Moon** is the story of the collapse and disintegration of Aref Ali's world of dreams and the disintegration of his world of dreams when he enters the world of experience from the world of innocence. The happening causes many disturbances in the innocent mind of Aref Ali. He cannot expose the truth to anybody, neither can he bear the upheaval caused by it. As a result, he cannot concentrate on his regular duties. Next night, Qadir again comes and proposes to him to go to the bamboo grove where the dead body reclines. They two draw the dead body to the nearby river and throws it into the river.

As the time passes, the agony of Aref Ali increases. The boatman discovers the dead body of Karim Majhi's wife and that causes various rumours among the local people. The young teacher hears these but cannot participate. Gradually, he breaks down within himself. In such a time, he asks one to call Qadir. Qadir comes in the night and asks the young teacher, "**What is your trap?**", The whole world of the young teacher gets bewildered. Qadir says that it is an accident. There is nothing to do. What is the benefit to call him repeatedly then? In the mean time, a new development takes place. Qadir admits that he himself is the killer of that woman. But it is not killing, rather it is an accident. Hearing the footsteps, and later on, the voice of the young teacher outside the bamboo grove, Qadir becomes puzzled and strangulates the young woman's throat to death. He does it not to kill her, but to stop her from crying. He cannot remember whether he presses her throat in place of her mouth. Aref Ali analyzes the whole situation from a different angle. At last, Qadir says he has no other way before him. As a result, Aref Ali exposes the truth of the incident first to Grandfather and then to the police authority concerned. Meanwhile, Qadir begins to threaten the young teacher by imposing all the responsibilities of the killing of the woman upon Aref Ali. In the last chapter, we see that, Aref Ali is arrested in the police office and the police are blaming him for killing the woman. In actuality, Qadir is not only lustful but also a killer of a woman, the village boatman's wife, whom he has physical relationship with. He is a cold blooded murderer. Grandfather recites a Surah from the Holy Quran and becomes silent and says: "**Very few people know it, but your grandfather Qadir, is a dervish.**" Waliullah, 31 "This dervish of external religious garb is as false as Majeed of *Tree Without Roots*. But he is worse than Majeed. Because Majeed does everything for his existence whereas this Qadir, like Iago, does everything unprovoked, prompted by his motiveless malign or malice.

**Night of No Moon** is replete with deception, hypocrisy and meanness, Qadir and his elder brother, Grandfather, are so called pious men who hide themselves behind the rituals of religion and while counting rosary beads show ruinous lack of humanity. Fake dream theme is used by Majeed of *Tree Without Roots*. Dervish Qadir of **Night of No Moon** uses it to deceive the common populace. Qadir is not only a misogynist but also lustful. Majeed is lustful though not a misogynist. His only normal behavior is when he agrees to get married. Three years ago, the misogynist Qadir gets married. But he has practically no relationship with his wife now. They often do not talk to each other for long periods of time. "**The Dervish agreed to get married at all is a great thing. How can he behave like an ordinary husband?**" commented Grandfather once. He supported Qadir's disinterestedness in his wife; "**He just doesn't talk to her. Does he beat her?**" "**No, he doesn't. Then, why complain?**" (Waliullah, 34).

Aref Ali is lodged at the Baro Bari. He also eats there. In return, he coaches the boys of the house twice a day. As the kind Grandfather has arranged it for him, his devotion to Grandfather knows no bound. The situation described above shows socio-economic background of Aref Ali. It is for the young teacher a big question of existence. The young teacher has similarity with and differences from Majeed of *Tree Without Roots*. Like Majeed, Aref Ali suffers from existentialist crisis. Majeed is a rogue, whereas the young teacher is an emotional, grateful, responsible and innocent young man.

The corpse of the murdered woman expresses quest for justice. Dervish Qadir, the spoilt, pampered and protected member of one of the influential families of the area is the murderer. Ironically, the young teacher is held responsible for this heinous crime and is punished for the crime committed by Qadir. So, in **Night of No Moon** there is the miscarriage of justice. The question of Aref Ali's existence is inseparable from his good job and kindly patron. In **Night of No Moon**, Qadir is the killer of Karim's wife. But when he senses that, for love of truth the young teacher is going to lodge a complaint against him, he decides to lodge counter-complaint accusing the young teacher of the murder of the boatman's wife. He also thinks that the good family name, fame of Baro Bari and his reputation as a dervish would save him. To Qadir, family name is more important than the life of a human being:

**He would say that, he had seen the dead body himself and he had seen the young teacher also near the bamboo grove. Thus, it would not be difficult for them to accuse the young teacher of being the killer. Moreover, his reputation as a dervish would provide him with a pretty good alibi for being out at that hour of night. On the top of that, his family's name and fame would help him, too. (Waliullah, 107).**

**Night of No Moon** contains a picture of woman's endless humiliation in a male dominated society where loveless physical relationships compel them to be mere sex-objects. It also narrates a serious miscarriage of justice and adds that any miscarriage of justice should be a matter of grave concern.

### **Toxic Masculinity in *The Dark Room* (1938)**

**The Dark Room** deals with poignant tale of Savitri, and R.K Narayan takes her back to Mysore and into the captivating world of the author's fictional town, Malgudi. Conservatism and reforms are two favorite themes of R.K Narayan which he has dealt with certain irony and genial humor. These two themes are strikingly contrasted as per as these two characters, Savitri and Shanta Bai are concerned. Savitri is made to feel how helplessly she is on her husband, Ramani and this strong sense of dependence is corrosive to their long-standing marriage. Ramani strongly recommends Shanta Bai's name to the Head Office for her employment. Englandia Insurance Company employs the elegant and fiercely independent Shanta Bai, recently separated. Events reach climax when Savitri's favorite piece of furniture, a bench, is taken from the household to furnish the room hurriedly assembled for Shanta Bai in the office. Savitri, feeling slighted and humiliated retires to one private place, the dark room. After receiving more information about Ramani's hobnobbing with the sophisticated and much cultivated Shanta Bai, Savitri gathers up the very few belongings she has and walks out of the house, leaving her three children staring hopelessly and dumbfounded after her. Savitri's attempt to drown herself is aborted by Mari, the lock repairer. She struggles to be self-reliant and soon she realizes that such an attempt to be independent would soon be refuted in a patriarchal society and decides to return home though a finer part of herself dies. Its protagonist and the most vocalized character is a mistreated wife, Savitri. It is R.K Narayan's most woman-centered novel and is an attack on patriarchy. In a letter to Graham Green, the author has outlined his intentions in terms of his view of woman which is social as well as metaphysical: "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 and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances. My novel dealt with her, with this philosophy broadly in the background." (My Days, 119)

The central themes of this novel are the marriage of the protagonist, Savitri with Ramani and the latter's adulterous relationship with another modern, educated, Brahmin woman, Shanta Bai. Savitri's plight is compassionately portrayed but sympathy for her predicament is achieved through contrasting her with Ramani's mistress, Shanta Bai. This mistress of Ramani, a modern, educated woman, dramatizes the struggle of educated independent woman of her class and caste. Ramani's attitude towards the fair sex is usually dismissive. But this attitude changes in an instant when he sees the bewitchingly beautiful Shanta Bai. Shanta Bai tells him everything about her marriage in the interview board at the age of 12 to a cousin who has been a gambler and drunkard. Being disowned by parents and left behind by the husband at the age of 18, she turns to education. R.K Narayan's depiction of Shanta Bai as a type of new-woman endeavouring to find a niche for herself in a society where the workplace remains male-dominated.

Shanta Bai is a modern educated woman whose intelligence and education leave her displaced within the traditional world of Malgudi. Her modernity and independence are dedicated for achieving her ends through feminine wiles rather than by feminist self-sufficiency. The enemy of marital happiness in **The Dark Room** is the modern world and the other woman. **The Dark Room** introduces for the first time the theme of modernization in Malgudi. The heroine of the novel, Savitri, finds herself in thick soup when she discovers her husband's marital faithlessness. This is occasioned by the "Progressive" policies of the Englandia Insurance Company to train up an Indian woman for executive employment. Savitri, like Chandran, seeks salvation in a new life, brushing aside bitterly the traditional role and narrowly escapes death. At last tired of some degraded domestic service and harrowing loneliness, she returns to her home and children.

The book ends with Savitri's submission to her obligations. The author has clearly suggested that by leaving home, the protagonist has repudiated the traditional role of a Savitri. But through this transgressing act, she has become a new woman effectively though she has broken with dharma that consigns women to be victim in a patriarchal society. Savitri is trying to become self-reliant which is a startling quality. **The Dark Room** seems to be attacking the subjugation of women. It also suggests the possibility of a transformation. So, at least, in part, the novel interrogates the fixed roles assigned to women in classical Hindu discourse. Modernity has unsettled the basis of gender relations and pleading for a reworking of the mythic archetype of Savitri. Ramani's domineering behavior withdraws her into the dark room in the family home. This physical retreat seems to be an expression of her psychic alienation. The Dark Room is a refuge in which Savitri is able to escape from the tyrannical authority of Ramani. Savitri's occupancy of **The Dark Room** suggests the possibility of transforming it into a permanent site for female autonomy. Narayan's writing is more concerned with the forces that are destabilizing the traditional balance of gender relations within the society—forces such as the advent of women into the workplace than a sympathetic view of the emancipated modern woman. **The Dark Room** addresses the problems faced by a Brahmin woman in a changing society. The focus on Savitri's predicament has the effect of privileging the wifely devotion personified by Savitri over the West-dominated modernity represented by Shanta Bai. Mistreated by the husband and left unfulfilled by her education, Shanta Bai is also a victim of modernity. Narayan has presented her as a seductive "Other Woman" though altogether the other is less sympathetic to her.

Narayan, in the novel *The Dark Room* (1938), wants to present a typical happy housewife, female protagonist Savitri. Narayan portrays the sufferings of the South Indian middle-class housewife who finds herself confined to the cramped environment of an unhappy married life that imposes on her the demands of obedience and subservience. Being fed up with the whims and dominance of her unfaithful husband Ramani, she, like a rebel, decides to leave the house and attempts to drown herself in the river Sarayu. Her suicidal attempt fails as she is saved by a village blacksmith whose wife Ponni gives her shelter and helps her in getting a job of a temple caretaker for the local priest. Her failure to cope with the unfamiliar outer environment and life without her children whom she leaves behind, for which Savitri goes back home and to sulk in the dark room of her house. Thus, the plot takes a realistic turn being set in the age when women's mental and physical dependence on men and their family make impossible for them to exit their difficult domestic circumstances and survive on their own. Notwithstanding his initial attempt, Narayan succeeds in making the housewife escape from the futility of a married life in the novel *The Guide* published in 1958 incidentally two years after the Indian edition of *The Dark Room*. (Kaul 50) Savitri is married to a tin-god husband, Ramani. Her husband, the domestic tyrant, expects in his home life to be danced attendance. Regarding women William's speech is very much important: *The Dark Room* is the account of marriage given throughout from the point of view of the wife, in which the image projected is that of the Indian woman as a victim, written, it should be remembered, some thirty five to forty years before the current talk of women's liberation. (William,6)

Narayan portrays women as victimized in the tradition-bound patriarchal society of India in *The Dark Room*, a pre-independence novel being published in 1938, when women were still docile and subservient and were living with satisfaction under the male domination. Yet there was another group of women who were growing conscious of being exploited and victimized. *The Dark Room*, which Narayan calls "the early testament of women's liberation movement" (*My Days*,119), portrays four women characters, Savitri, Shanta Bai, Gangu and Ponni, and all of them in some way or other stand to deconstruct the culturally accepted beliefs about the women's position in the Indian Hindu society. Narayan chooses a woman as a protagonist for this novel, who metamorphoses into a rebel against the forced loyalty and dedication of women. Savitri, the protagonist, is a middle class housewife having three school-going children. Meek and obedient as she needs to be as a wife in India, she serves her philandering and bullying husband Ramani until she is middle-aged by digesting his injustice and betrayal. Ramani's betrayal reaches beyond the limit of tolerance when Savitri's favorite piece of furniture, a bench, is taken away. In the name of borrowing to furnish the room he has managed in his office for one Shanta Bai. Ramani's further betrayal makes her realize how she depends upon him helplessly. Realizing the fact that she has been treated as a puppet, firstly, by her father before marriage; and secondly, at her husband's house, she grows into a rebel against the traditionally defined position of women in the Indian middle class society. A meek Savitri turns against the mythical implication of her name by protesting: "I'm a human being. [...] You men will never grant that. 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" (Narayan,85).

Here the novelist implies the truth that a woman in her social status is treated as an inferior being where she has no power and right to protest the male domination. According to S. R. Ramteke: "Savitri's predicament is primarily because of the fact that she lacks the moral courage to assert herself owing to the religious taboos, which have far reaching effect on the women folk in the Hindu society" (Ramteke,12).

Savitri leaves her husband empty-handed, leaving everything behind given her by men. Before leaving, when Savitri puts off ornaments, Ramani says: “This ring and this necklace, and this stud were not given by me. They are your father’s” (Narayan,88). Savitri protests by saying: “They are also a man’s gift.” (88) Savitri does not find any difference between a husband and a father or a son. All men, she finds, are alike having the same concept about women’s position in the male dominated society. She attempts to bring an end to her dependency on men and to establish her as a complete human being. But, ironically enough, soon she discovers that a woman cannot be anything else but a dependent on men: “If I take the train and go to my parents, I shall feed on my father’s pension; if I go back home, I shall be living on my husband’s earnings, and then on Babu” (Narayan,93).

Savitri’s revolt resembles Ibsen’s Nora’s in *A Doll’s House* as they both stand against the society that keeps them in servitude. Savitri’s or Nora’s stand is not against any particular Ramani or Torvald Helmer, but against the society where a wife is never a better-half, rather a much worse-half only worthy of being played with by a man as he pleases. Savitri correctly observes: “What is the difference between a prostitute and a married woman? – The prostitute changes her men, but a married woman doesn’t; that is all, both earn their food and shelter in the same manner” (Narayan,93). However, Narayan brilliantly presents the character of Gangu, who is an interesting character. She is religious, visiting temple regularly. She is not immoral. Narayan further adds:

Savitri found Gangu fascinating. She had a humour, abundant frivolity, and picaresque ambition [...] It was her ambition to become a film-star, though she lacked any striking figure or features or acting ability; she wanted to be a professional musician, though she had no voice; she hoped to be sent some day as Malgudi delegate to the All-India Women’s Conference; to be elected to various municipal and legislative bodies; and become a Congress leader. (Narayan, 15).

Narayan first draws the picture of women suffering in *The Dark Room*, but his movement is not drastic. What he attempts in this novel is that he wants to present the actual position of women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century India. As a heroine in *The Dark Room*, Narayan’s objective is to choose the name Savitri, the name which points back to the mythological Savitri and her unquestioning devotion to her husband Satyavan, is, as Krishna Sen comments, “to deconstruct the archetypal Hindu myth of the devoted wife by showing how the myth loses its meaning in a society where the women’s loyalty and dedication are forcibly extracted, rather than freely given” (Sen,56). Narayan does not advocate female subservience in the conclusion of the novel by bringing Savitri back to her bullying husband, rather problematizes the culturally accepted beliefs about women’s position in the tradition-ridden Indian society by drawing the circumstances under which Savitri feels compelled to walk out of the house and then to come back. The novelist exposes the hypocrisy of the patriarchal society that uses even religion to exploit a woman.

F. Alam, in his essay “Reading R. K. Narayan Postcolonially”, terms the priest as “the most disagreeable character” saying that “clearly Narayan has no sympathy at all for the official upholder of tradition and religion and caste.” Unlike a tradition-bound woman accepting fate as destined, Savitri accepts her fate as associated with her mythological namesake only after discovering the reason that makes them subservient to men. As she says to her husband, “We are responsible for our position; we accept food, shelter and comfort that you give, and are what we are” (Narayan,87). To promote the status of women, Narayan does not show any westernization to be the only way out. Savitri’s rival, the single career woman Shanta Bai who quotes Omar Khayyam, detests Indian mythological films is depicted as a wrecker of home. Shanta Bai comes out full-way by defying the traditional status of women in the Indian society. She abandons her drunkard husband and her family and thus smashes the walls of the doll’s house. But, she perverts her feminine independence by destroying Savitri’s familial peace and by making Ramani a womanizer. Thus, Narayan problematizes the long established- position of women in the tradition bound orthodox society of India through Savitri’s revolt, and shows his abhorrence towards westernized attitude by portraying Shanta Bai, who is tempered with westernized feminine independence as a drifter and wrecker of home.

However, while Savitri is vanquished, and Shanta Bai is a wrecker of home, it is Savitri’s close friend Gangu who succeeds in keeping a balance between tradition and her independence. Gangu is educated and is, as we find, training to be a film star, a professional musician, the Malgudi delegate to the All India Women’s Conference, and a politician. She has in her activities the full- support of her school master-cum-husband who believes in women’s freedom. Thus, triumphant in her marriage, Gangu is a happy, married woman. Another woman Narayan offers in *The Dark Room*. It is Ponni, a wife of the blacksmith-burglar who saves Savitri from getting drowned into the river. Ponni is a childless middle aged woman, and as an issueless woman she should be especially vulnerable in the society, but still she is a woman with complete freedom and dominance over her husband. Mari, Ponni’s husband, maintains a sweet relationship with his dominating wife who is the only most spirited, and, truly

speaking, the bravest character in the novel. Not only that, Ponni teaches the vanquished Savitri how to manage and treat a man: "Keep the men under the rod, and they will be all right. Show them that you care for them and they will tie you up and treat you like a dog (Narayan 105). Narayan emerges as one of the most powerful novelist in presenting the realities of the women's lives. Using the form of a fiction, the novelist probes onto women's search of her identity in the Indian socio-cultural environment. In spite of being rooted in material experiences, his women are able to move out of confinement in search of a better independent life. Savitri's journey in search of her independent identity begins with her arrival at Sukkur village, where she is employed by a village priest. But soon she grows home-sick and she compares the comfort, security and togetherness of her home to her present predicament. Narayan tries to explore the theme of economic independence through the relationship between Ramani and Shanta Bai in this novel *The Dark Room*. Savitri's dependence, slavish status and question of her identity are compensated by Shanta Bai's economic independence. Sundaram remarks: "It is the sort of relationship that takes place in every society where the old double standards are still valid, and the women are economically so helpless that they just have to lump what they do not like" (Sundaram 48). Here in the novel *The Dark Room* Narayan has presented the social status of women very perfectly and realistically through the portrayal of Savitri, Ponni, and Shanta Bai. In *The Dark Room*, women are like material adjuncts possessed by men in the tradition-bound conservative society. *The Dark Room* concludes with a dreary, weary and dark picture of women in patriarchal society of India. The predicament of women is insurmountable. *The Dark Room* ends as it begins telling about the obstacles of sensitive, intelligent Brahmin women in a rapidly changing and modernizing society, and like other R.K. Narayan's novels, it negotiates the middle ground between myth and modernity. It only bemoans the impact that social change has on women in Malgudi society.

**A Comparative Study between *Night of No Moon* and *The Dark Room*:** R.K. Narayan and Syed Waliullah are eminent Indian Subcontinental novelists who have created wonderful and marvelous women characters. Their portrayal of women characters attempt at establishing human values within the existing background of traditional social system of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Waliullah fosters the grim reality of the society by depicting the brutal murder of an underprivileged woman having no help from the people of the society. The men and women belonging to the class of the boatman's wife invent horror stories to entertain themselves instead of seeking justice. They know that, they will not get any justice from the society. On the contrary, they maybe in greater danger because of their poverty. In *Night of No Moon*, Grandfather doesn't find any wrongdoing in the crime committed by his pampered younger brother Qadir. As a social being, such a reality is entrenched in the mind of Aref Ali. In this way, Waliullah has tried to bring the society, religion and economic class to the forefront of the complex hierarchy of the conflict quite invisibly. On the other hand, R. K. Narayan also draws the picture of a suppressed woman of the male-dominated society. As the critical and subtle observers, both writers have tried to highlight the women's position in the society through the art of characterization and plot-construction.

In *Night of No Moon* Waliullah conveys subtle messages to the readers and the people of the society regarding male domination and suppression on women. Character assassination is the prime weapon of an oppressor to keep the woman under his grip. Morality is defined by the laws made by men in order to justify their misdeeds. His *Night of No Moon* is regarded as one of the brightest novels in Bangla literature. On the other hand, Narayan has presented the role, position and duty of a traditional Hindu wife in the character of Savitri in Narayan's *The Dark Room*. Savitri, a female protagonist, is a tradition-bound loyal Hindu wife, who is devoted to husband and children. She represents a modest woman who does not complain under the chain of restrictions for which she is deprived of her freedom. The paper deals with how a dutiful wife suffers silently in the orthodox Hindu patriarchal norms of the Indian society. Savitri belongs to the group of oppressive women who does not have the slightest power to do anything of their own. She loses all notions of her independence, her individuality, stature and strength. Besides playing the traditional wifely role, Savitri is an affectionate and considerate mother who thinks for the welfare and well-being of her children. After her attempt to commit suicide, she pockets her pride and returns home only for the sake of children but not as a submissive woman. She leads a life of toil and travail for the rest of her life. After all, she is the symbol of wifely devotion. She is also the mother who acts like a tree nurturing her children under her shade and she is an epitome of selflessness, humanity and morality justified by nature.

Finally, it can be said that, Savitri in *The Dark Room* and the dead woman in *Night of No Moon* fall victim to the toxic masculinity prevailed in the society. These characters represent hundreds and thousands of Indian Sub continental women who have been living a very pathetic life. These two literatures unfold the suppressed pain of women and the hypocrisy of the privileged part of the society. R.K. Narayan and Syed Waliullah have a common particular style. The heroine, Savitri of *The Dark Room* and hero of Waliullah's *Night of No Moon*, Aref Ali end their journey at a point from where they start it. The plays of Christopher Marlowe and the tragedies of Shakespeare

have only heroes of towering height and shadowy heroines' Narayan has a sketchy heroine, Savitri in *The Dark Room*. The heroine of *Night of No Moon*, the wife of the village boatman, Karim is shadowy. Both of them are novelists of common men. These two novels under discussion have "the silvery undertone of sadness". R.K. Narayan is sympathetic to social conventions in *The Dark Room* but this is not true with *Night of No Moon* of Syed Waliullah.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated the well-reputed novels *The Dark Room* by Narayan and *Night of No Moon* by Narayan and Waliullah from a feminist point of view. The fictions of these two novelists seem synonymous with everyday mundane life. In this dissertation an attempt has been made to explore the similarities and dissimilarities of the life of the people of two different soils with all their

Beliefs, dreams, disappointments, superstitions, ignorance, religious bigotry and exploitation and they form the pivotal part of the fictional world of the two writers. Hopefully, this work will open the door for many more such researches and contribute to enrich comparative studies in the field of literature in the Indian Subcontinent.

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