

Love in R.K. Narayan's
The English Teacher

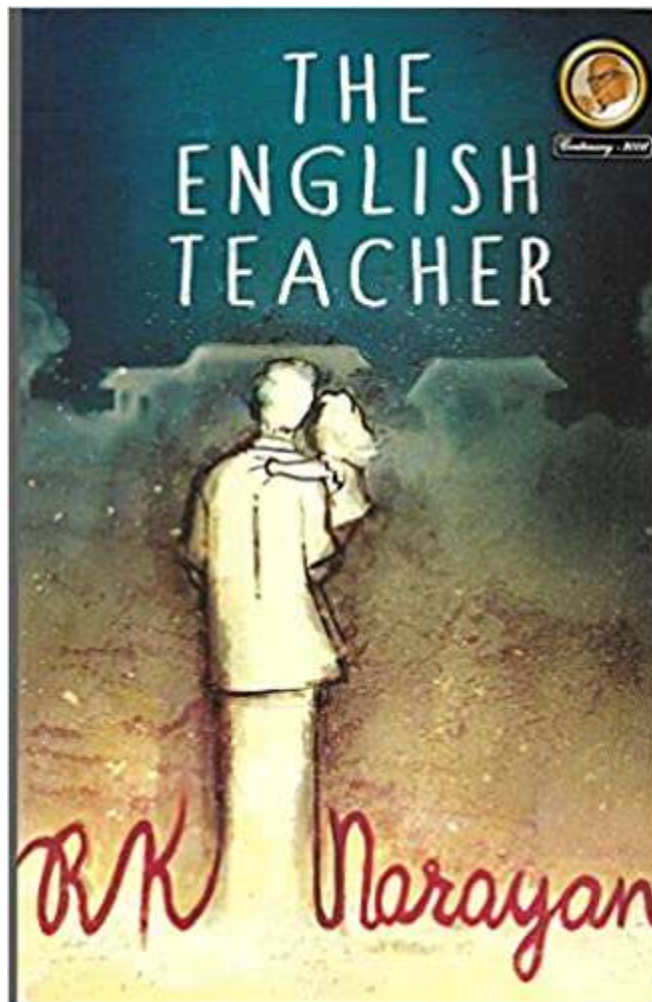
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Courtesy: https://www.amazon.in/English-Teacher-R-K-Narayan/dp/8185986037/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=The+English+Teacher&qid=1600747823&s=books&sr=1-1

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to focus on the novel *The English Teacher* which is written by R.K Narayan. This was his third novel. It was published in 1945. His novels can be classified under four Categories:

1. The school and college novels of earlier period such as *Swami and Friends*, *Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher*.
2. Domestic novels such as *The Dark Room*.
3. Novels dealing with money like *The Financial Expert*, *Mr. Sampath*, *The Guide* and *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*
4. Political novel such as *Waiting for the Mahatma*

The English Teacher is a song of love. It is a love story. This novel is dedicated to Narayan's wife Rajam. It is an autobiographical novel. Susila, the wife of Krishna, is similar to Rajam, who like Susila, died of typhoid. Leela, the child of Krishna and Susila is also similar to Hema, the daughter of Narayan's. Dickens wrote about David Copperfield:

“The pen that wrote David Copperfield was often dipped in my own blood.”

This quotation is true of *The English Teacher*.

Keywords: R.K. Narayan, *The English Teacher*, Autobiographical, tragedy, love, typhoid, spiritual, emotional

Introduction

Of all the novels of R.K. Narayan, *The English Teacher* is the loveliest, finest and most tender tale of love and spiritual romance. It is the love story of Krishna, the English Teacher, and of the sprightly, vivacious Susila, his wife. Both love each other tenderly and extremely. Their love is true and constant, and it does not change. Their love is as divine as that of ROMEO and JULIET. Her love for him is silent like that of Viola in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. She loves him very much. She waits for him anxiously when he reaches home from the college. There is a touching scene which shows her love for him: “I left the college usually at 4.30p.m., the moment the last bell rang, and avoiding all interruptions reached home within about twenty minutes. As soon as I turned street, I caught a glimpse of Susila tinkering at her little garden in our compound, or watching our child as she toddled about picking pebbles and mud...It was not in my wife's nature to be demonstrative, but I knew she waited there for me”. (*The English Teacher*35)

Krishna's love for his wife is platonic, Shakespearean and Shelleyan. It is said that whereas Keats could not marry the woman he loved Shelley could not love the woman he married, Shelley could not love the woman because he found them only flesh and blood and not the ideal woman of Plato for whom he aspired. Krishna did find a Platonic woman in Susila. His love for her is pure and constant as Shakespeare expressed in his sonnet *True sonnet*. His love is deep like the ocean and sacred like the evening star. It is as true as that of Romeo and Juliet and of Ranjha for Heer and that of Majnu for Laila. In this way, the love of Krishna for his wife Susila towers above the love of other relations. *The English Teacher* is a romantic love story. They led an idyllic, ecstatic married life.

Here, Krishna becomes the teacher at Albert Mission College.

His wife Susila and daughter Leela come to stay with him. His daughter welcomes him when he comes back from college and his wife gives him coffee. All lead their lives happily and comfortably. Now Susila is a perfect housewife. Krishna gets a suggestion from his father to buy a house on the third birthday of Leela. His father is ready to give him money for buying a house. Now, Krishna becomes happy. He and his wife go out on Sunday morning to Lawley Extension to choose a house or a site. Susila wears her indigo saree. Krishna looks at her indigo saree and smiles to himself. She notices it and asks, "Why that?" He replies, "Nothing, nothing". Her eyes sparkle with joy. Here the hero describes her beauty: "She was a phantom of delight when first she gleamed upon my sight." (*The English Teacher*52)

The real tragedy starts with his father's offer of money for him and his wife to purchase a house. On the way, they take their breakfast in the Bombay Anand Bhawan restaurant. There Krishna saw a bearer Mani, who had served him for many years through tiffin. Susila is so much pleased with the marble walls that she runs her fingers over them. She tells Krishna that he would like to have tile walls in her house when they come out of the restaurant, Krishna prefers to hire a *jutka* for going to Lawley Extension but Susila likes to walk. We find her expression in these lines:

"It was a most exhilarating walk down the river. she splashed her feet in the water, rested under the banyan, heaped up sand and kept muttering," How the little girl would love it if only she could be brought here! I think she will simply roll in the sand. But we must take care not to let her go near the water."

I watched her once again... "Do you know how I used to spend all my morning here when I was in the hostel.... I used to get up at dawn....". (*The English Teacher* 55)

Here, Krishna tells her that they must go on an All India tour sometime. He tells her that he would take her to England and Europe if he earned a lot of money out of the books he is going to write. When Susila asks where the child would live in their absence, Krishna replies:

“She will be grown up by then. We can leave her with her grandparents. You must see everything. **I imagined, even as I spoke, how** she would touch the marble of Taj, stand astounded before the snow-covered Himalaya’s and before the crowd and magnitude of European cities”. (*The English Teacher* 56)

Krishna and Susila have left for Lawley Extension in *Jutka*. His colleague Mr. Sastri has promised to help him in choosing the house. He is the moving spirit of this new extension, secretary of the Building and Acquisition society and almost energetic “Extender”.

His building is the first in the New Extension. Both reach Sastri’s house a small bungalow in a vast compound overgrown with trees. Sastri is sitting under a tree digging its roots. He takes them both in, and seated them in the veranda, on a discoloured rattan chair. Sastri says:

“Still interested in houses? Why don’t you buy a site and build a good house? I have a beautiful site for you up there.”

“Oh, I can’t wait for all the bricks and mortar to take shape. I don’t know anything of house building, too much bother.”

“Leave it all to me.” Sastri said “I will do it.” (*The English Teacher* 57)

Krishna replies:

“I’ve, no patience to wait, my dear fellow, I pleaded I can’t stand all the nuisance. I want a house at the moment I think of it.” (*The English Teacher* 57)

At last they approved a house. It had wide compound and broad windows. All the doors and the walls looked fresh with paint. It was very attractive with two Jasmine creepers trained over an arch on the gateway. It was full of flowers. Sastri looked pleased that a house of his selection had received such approval. The main door was opened, and Krishna and Susila inspected the house room by room. A hall, four rooms in addition to the kitchen, a pleasing light, blue paint on all the walls inside the house. They were thrilled. While Krishna, Sastri and the contractor talked about the magnificent beauty of nature all around the house and the menace of mosquitos, outside the house, Susila went to have a look round the compound. When half an hour passed away, Krishna thought of Susila, and ran to the backyard to look for her. She was not to be seen. He looked for her and called “Susila, Susila!” She answered from somewhere. I

called again, and she cried: “Push the door open I can’t open it from this side”. He found that her voice come from the other side of a green painted lavatory door. He gave it a kick and the door flew open. She came out red and trembling. He looked at her and felt disturbed. He asked, “What were you doing here?” She was panting with excitement. “What is the matter? what is the matter?” (*The English Teacher*, 62).

She replied, “I went in there. The door was so bright, and I thought it’d be clean inside... but oh!” She screwed up her face and shuddered unable to bear the disgust that came with recollection. I felt agitated, “Why did you go there?” I cried. She didn’t answer. It was a sad anticlimax to a very pleasing morning. I looked at her feet. “You went in barefoot”, she nodded. “Where are your sandals?”

“I forget them at home” I shook my head in despair “I have told you a hundred times not to come out barefoot. And yet...Oh, darling, Why did you go there?” (*The English Teacher* 62)
She replied:

“The door was so bright.... I thought it’d be clean inside too... but I could not come out. After I went in the door shut by itself with a bang. I thought something terrible had happened... Ah, the flies and other things there!” She was convulsed with disgust “Oh, Oh... A fly came and sat on my lip...” (*The English Teacher* 62)

When they reached home Susila threw herself on the floor even without changing her dress. She suffered from headache and fever.

Here we find the tragedy which is born of chance and circumstances. Had the letter Tess wrote to Angel not slipped under the carpet, things would have been different in Thomas Hardy’s tragedy. Same here, had Krishna and Susila not gone for choosing a house, things would have been different. Tragedy takes its place in the foul lavatory, where Susila got imprisoned and where a foul fly sat on her lips which remained even though they have been washed several times. She lies in bed for several days without touching food. She dislikes being treated by a doctor, but she readily accepts her husband’s proposal to call him. when she says, “I shall go and have a look round the compound”, it is a symbol of a journey to the land of death.

Thus, *The English Teacher* is a love story. It is here we find several such small things which reveal Krishna’s deep love for his wife. It also shows the parents’ love especially that of the mother for the child Leela. When the parents inspect the house to buy, they, especially the mother does not approve of the house which will not suit her child. She says:

“The child will lose her way, not knowing which is her house, they are all alike”. (*The English Teachers* 58)

Here we find Krishna’s concern and consideration for her his anxiety for her illness and hope for her recovery. He encourages Susila and caresses her forehead. He feels that her illness has given him an opportunity to serve her. In the same way Krishna loves Leela extremely after the death of his wife. He decides to spend the whole day in her company.

His extreme and abundant love for his child we find in these lines:

“It was a matter of fact my chief occupation in life. I cared for little else. I felt a thrill of pride whenever I had to work and look after the child. It seemed a noble and exciting occupation the sole responsibility for a growing creature.” (*The English Teacher* 103)


Primary source

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