

THE ENGLISH TEACHER: A PORTRAYAL OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

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Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayanaswami Iyer (R.K. Narayan) is counted among the front ranking Indian novelist in English literature. ‘The English Teacher’ marks the first phase of Narayan’s genius and though this novel is dedicated to his wife Rajam, it bears the autobiographical touch. This novel bears the series of experiences in the life of Krishna and his quest towards achieving inner peace and self- development. With the arrival of Susila, Krishna found a new meaning to life and his life fills with happy domesticity of living. But these happy days were numbered as it was about to end with Susila’s illness. Finally it was all over and Susila set off her journey to the world of eternity. But Krishna’s journey was about to begin, it was the spiritual journey to communicate with Susila again. ‘The English Teacher’ is the brightest example of unconditional love, which does not end with death. As an autobiographical novel, the love which is portrayed between Krishna and Susila, act as a reply to all those love and memories which gets rusted with time.

The English Teacher’ is a love story that is completely different from the other love stories one reads. This is a love story which is unending and unconditional; less physical and more spiritual. The love between Krishna and Susila was abyss, pure and fresh. Susila is introduced in the novel with her letter to Krishna and Susila’s entry to the novel marks the beginning of the love story which is as sacred as the stars and as deep as the uncharted ocean. The first instance of love the readers get is with the letter of Susila. The letter of Susila carried the fragrance of her box in which she kept all her stationery. It also carried a mild jasmine smell which surrounded her and all her possessions. Krishna’s act of smelling the letter showed the depth of his love. With smelling the letter he wanted to get the touch of her.

Krishna’s house searching episode and Susilas arrival to Sarayu street witnesses a deep love of Krishna for his wife and child. Krishna rushes to the station and gets anxious about the huge luggage which her wife was carrying with her. His anxiousness got so intense that he went to the station Master and asked whether he can stop the train a little longer and he also wished that the luggage’s should get lost in the compartment. Finally after a topsy turvy situation when his wife Susila was in the platform, he experienced a cold sensation, watching her. Krishna’s worries about small matters shows his pure and true love for his wife.

Krishna’s love for Susila is also noticed when he found her crying for making him angry. Susila found herself guilty after selling Krishna’s old watch and some newspapers. But when he found her sobbing, he was unable to resist himself. He was baffled and he wanted to take her in his arms and comfort her. With this when Susila confined herself in a room, he felt like a torture.

He said- ***“Later I heard the silent night punctuated by sobs...I was completely shaken... It was becoming a torture. I could stand no more of it.”***

Chapter 3 of the novel ‘The English Teacher’ bears both joy and sorrow of the couple. Krishna’s father proposed to purchase a house for them in Malgudi and this proposal brought basket of happiness in the lives of both Krishna and Susila. A romantic journey was about to begin when they agreed to look out for a house. Krishna described Susila as-

“I gazed on my wife, fresh and beautiful, her hair shining, her dress without a wrinkle on it, and her face, fresh with not a sign of fatigue... ‘The divine creature’, I reflected within myself, looking at her tall, slim figure.”

On their way they walked down the river together, talked about future and passed some precious time together. They approved the house and they were happy. But something omen was waiting for Susila in the house. She got stuck in a bathroom and brought with her disease back home. But here Krishna’s unconditional love is what highlighted in the chapter; as he devoted himself in the service of his wife Susila. When Susila suffered from fever, Krishna tried to feed her, when she rejected he got upset but when she accepted he felt relieved-

“I was elated .The gloom which had hung on me for these four days lifted, and I hummed a little tune to myself as I went to my room.”

When Krishna came to know that Susila was suffering from typhoid, the anxiety of Krishna knew no bound. He suffered from sleepless nights and woke up at 6am and recorded the temperature and once in four hours. He acted as a nurse. But there was one satisfaction to Krishna. It was Susila’s disease that brought them so close-

“It kept me so close to my wife that it produced an immense satisfaction in my mind... The sickness seemed to bind us together more completely than ever.”

But things were about to change. Krishna one day heaved a sigh of relief as Susila was soon recovering from her condition. But that was the day to bid her farewell as she was getting ready for her eternal journey. Finally the time came and she bid adieu to her family. Susila’s death made world of Krishna looked bleak, gloomy and empty. Losing his wife was to him losing his love. He slept irregularly, sometime heard Susila’s voice and sometimes cherished the sad memories. This place of the novel evidences deep, constant love-

“I was never a sound sleeper at any time in life, but now more than ever I lay awake most of the night, sleeping by fits and starts. My mind kept buzzing with thought sand memories.”

Love between Krishna and Susila was not over with Susila’s death. While Krishna found his life loveless and gloom, Susila wanted to communicate with Krishna. Susila choose a medium to express her thoughts and ideas to Krishna. With all his zeal Krishna wanted to speak to his wife. Though with the first meeting Krishna never felt satisfied, the second meeting was a successful one. After proper communication with Susila, Krishna felt as if a dead load has been lifted. He acted as he has founded his precious jewel, which was once lost. Krishna’s communication with Susila recalled their old memories of the temple, the toy engine she bought for her child etc. She also urged Krishna to look after her sandalwood casket which was very close to her. After Susila’s death, the communication between Krishna and Susila gave Krishna a new meaning of life. The communication gave him relief, joy and made him free. But when there was break of communication, Krishna was conferred sleepless night. He says-

“For the first time in months I felt desolate. The awful irresponsiveness of Death overwhelmed me again. It unnerved me.”

Krishna’s love for Susila was observed even after her death. Successful communication brought two souls closer and when there was improper communication he felt disgusted. A

strong bond of love between the two never ended with Susila's death. The concluding part of the novel leaves a deep mark in the hearts of the readers. The last and the concluding part of the novel describes, Krishna calling out Susila with her name and she replies. Readers then remain the witness of a conversation between Krishna and Susila, which was the voice of the reunion.

It was the actual reunion, reunion of Krishna and Susila; which occurred after Krishna's journey to the world of eternity. The last part describes how Krishna looked at Susila and said she looked beautiful, how he picked up the garland from the nail and offered it to her and how she received it with a smile on her face. It also describes how with dawn Susila rose on her feet and cold breeze lapped their faces. Then the boundaries of their personalities suddenly got dissolved. It was a rare immutable joy- it was a moment for which one feels grateful to life and death.

So, 'The English Teacher' is a fantastic creation by R K Narayan. This novel is the brightest illustration how love could be unconditional and intense. The novel proves the words- "*Love is not what we say, love is what we do*". So needless to say Narayan's 'The English Teacher' remains as a glaring example of that love, that does not end with death or more appropriately it can be said an example of 'love beyond death'.