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## THE SEVEN COMPONENT OF THE MYTH IN *THE ENGLISH TEACHER* OF R. K. NARAYAN

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### ABSTRACT

There is no textual evidence of the Savitri Satyavan myth in *The English Teacher*. A thought reading of the novel illustrates that the novel uses this myth and presents a reversal of the protagonist's role in terms of gender. In *The English Teacher*, Krishnan is a lecturer in English at Albert Mission College in malgudi. He finds his job frustrating. In the beginning, he lives alone in a hostel, but anticipating the arrival of his wife and the young daughter, he shifts to a resented house in Saratu Street. His mother, for whom house-keeping is a grand affair, arrives from the village to set the house for him. Krishnan's wife, and the daughter, Leela, also arrive a few days later and receive family's traditional welcome at the gate by Krishnan's mother. The mother leaves for the village after some time. Is religious minded and parsimonious. In spite of occasional quarrels, Krishnan and are extremely fond of each other and equally of their daughter. There is a pact that Leela should be their only child. The sale of a clamorous clock by without consulting Krishnan brings a temporary breach of their relationship, which is resolved amicably later. The earlier phase of their married life bubbles with romantic love, caressing every tete-a tete, be that silly or ingeniously witty. The warmth and togetherness make their lives blissful. Krishnan always craves to call his wife 'Jasmine'.

### KEYWORDS:

Eccentric, Astrologer, Religious, Clamorous, Distress, Exile.

### INTRODUCTION

The happy state of their married life is short-lived. They plan to buy a new house. One day they set out on a trip to see new houses. When they are inside a house slips into a foul lavatory, and gets locked in. After she is rescued by Krishnan, they visit a nearby temple. Then falls ill and remains bed-ridden. Krishnan and his parents in laws experience extreme suffering. Krishnan devotedly attends to

his wife. Though's illness is diagnosed as typhoid, the best available treatment does not cure her. Finally, she dies .Her death fills the house with gloom. The company of Leela is, however a little relief to Krishnan. Whenever Leela enquires the where about of her mother, Krishnan conceals the fact of her death. A peasant lives in a nearby village that happens to work as a medium for the dead, existing in the other world. He gets a dictation from the dead Susila. The peasant manages to send it in an envelope to Krishnan, to Krishnan's happy surprise.

An eccentric head master devotedly teaches his school children. The head master's life is predicted by an astrologer. His life goes on precisely as the astrologer has predicted. On a certain day, the head master's death is predicted. Just before that day, he visits Krishnan and tells him this secret of his life. He requests Krishnan to take over the charge of the school for the sake of the children. But the death does not come to the headmaster. On that fateful day, the headmaster decides to leave his family and enters into the Sanyasa Ashrama. He starts living in the school .Inspired by the headmaster and his school children; Krishnan resigns his college job to work in the headmaster's school.

Meanwhile, with the help of the village peasant, Krishnan succeeds to establish a psychic communion with his dead wife after many efforts. He evokes his wife with all his being. Finally, the boundaries of their personalities are dissolved.

The story of the Savitri- Satyavan myth as narrated below is based on in worship of shiva by shanta Rameshwar Rao.Savitri is the daughter of king Ashwapati. She is born an answer to her parent's constant prayer to savitri a God of Sun, to bless them with a child. Savitri grows into a beautiful and virtuous princess. Her parents become worried about her marriage because amongst the princess of different kingdoms, none seems to them to be a suitable match for their daughter. Therefore on Narada's suggestion, Ashwapati sends his daughter with a royal escort to search for a suitable husband. Savitri finds none to whom she can give her young heart.But one day, while travelling through a forest, she falls in love with Satyavan at first sight. Satyavan is the son of dyumatsena, a former ruler of an extensive kingdom. But now he lives in a forest hut with his old parents in exile and poverty. After her return to the court, Savitri tells her father about her choice of Satyavan. At this, the astrologers tell them that Satyavan is destined to die in a year. Savitri is advised to forget Satyavan and look for a worthy man. But as Savitri is determined to marry Satyavan, they are married soon.

After the marriage, Savitri goes to the forest hut to live there with her husband and parents in law. She works devotedly as a true house wife, and pleases everyone in the hut. Worried as Savitri is, she makes prayers and long penances to prevent Satyavan's death. On the fateful day Satyavan is destined to die, Savitri accompanies him to the forest. Satyavan dies in the forest while felling a tree. Yama, the lord of death, arrives there and quite against Savitri's request takes away the life of Satyavan. Savitri follows Yama and her husband even in the region of the dead. Yama with all his being tells Savitri not to follow them. He even shows her the vision of the dead so that she may return out of terror. But savitri persists in her pursuit. It becomes impossible for Yama to get rid of Savitri. Thinking that she will stop the demand of Satyavan's life and return happily, Yama grants her three boons. But much to Yama's distress savitri still continues her pursuit. Gradually, Yama's attitude to savitri softens. Finally, there is no option for Yama but to return life to Satyavan.

In view of the first component of the myth, Savitri as the protagonist of the myth it is evident that her role is central to the myth. The myth opens with a detailed account of her birth, followed by a description of her unusual intelligence, beauty, virtues and training. Her unfaltering decision to marry Satyavan despite the knowledge of the latter's death in one year as predicted by the astrologers reveals the firmness of her mind. After the marriage also, the narrative is concentrated on Savitri's role as a

housewife and her intense concern over her husband's impending death. Then, Savitri is shown as making prayers and penances. After Satyavan's death, the narrative shifts to the otherworld, the region of the dead, when the living savatri follows Yama for the revival of Satyavan. With her faith and devotion she pleases Yama- and secures boons for his parents and father-in-law and also enables herself to compel Yama to receive Satyavan eventually. As far as the role of Satyavan is concerned, he appears to be a poor man, though originally royal and inherently noble, living in the forest. Though his love and duty towards his wife and parents evoke admiration, he contributes far less significantly to the myth than Savitri.

In view of this mythical component, a major displacement takes place in the novel. The novel presents a reversal of the protagonist in terms of gender. It is Krishnan, and not sisila, who appears to be the protagonist and so, Krishnan's role is largely elaborated in the novel. As the novel opens, Krishnan is found to be pondering over the day's work with an air of self-criticism. Then, the narrative moves on to the description of his college activities, the Principal Brown, colleagues and the hostel where Krishnan stays temporarily. Then, Krishnan is worried about the safe arrival of his family. Presently, he takes a house on rent. After the arrival of both Krishnan and seem to be sharing their roles in an equal proportion. As a good house wife gives priority to every tiny detail pertaining to the house. But during's prolonged illness which leads to her death, she remains a mute spectator, and Krishnan's role becomes more prominent. Krishnan serves his wife devotedly. But she dies ultimately. After's death the narrative concentrates on the delineation of krishnan's pursuit to communicate with his dead wife.

At this stage also plays an important role to help Krishnan communicate with her. But as belongs to the other mode of existence, her role is confined to the transcendental plane and even at the spiritual level the efficacy of's characterization is debatable. Now "behaves more loke an animated philosophical treatise than an immortal soul and as a spiritual entity" Therefore, Krishnan serves as a protagonist throughout the novel. The mythical Savitri, a female protagonist is displaced in the fictional Krishnan, a male protagonist and the mythical Satyavan is displaced in the fictional.

In view of the second component of the myth, Savitri's choice of Satyavan, the myth and the novel present a contrasting situation. In the myth Savitri is granted full freedom by her father to choose anyone as her husband. But as fate brings it, instead of choosing some wealthy prince as her husband, savatri chooses Satyavan, young man who lives in a forest hut with his parents in exile and poverty. Moreover, Satyavan as she is told by the astrologers is doomed to die in one year. But it seems that Savitri's choice is not only intuitive but sacred also, for she does not alter her choice of Satyavan despite her father's insistence to do so savatri's choice of Satyavan as her parents observe, is "no passing infatuation no childish fancy."It is pure love though at first sight, unshaken by any impediment. Neither Satyavan's poverty, nor the knowledge of his impending death in a year, nor Ashwapati's advice to choose any other worthy man as her husband, can alter Savitri's decision. Savitri's choice of Satyavan seems to be a pre-ordained scheme."Savitri saw him through the curtains of her palanquin and suddenly she knew, as if the Gods had whispered it to her, that this was the man she must marry."

But in the novel, Krishnan and are introduced as a married couple, bearing Leela, their only daughter. Whether their love is consummated in marriage, or they are married through an arranged marriage, finds no mention in the novel itself. However, an argument in support of their marriage as an arranged one can be deduced on the basis of the marriage of Krishna's elder brother. All the details pertaining to this marriage, the attitude of Krishna's mother to her daughter-in-law, her reference to the dowry, suggest the traditional set up of the family. In such traditional families in India, the marriages are generally arranged ones.

In the myth, Savitri enjoys a privilege to choose her husband. In the novel, most probably, is deprived of this privilege. So, it causes displacement in the novel. In view of the third component of the myth, the role of astrology, the myth and the novel present a similar situation. In the myth, Satyavan's predicted death serves as a warning. The astrologers predict that Satyavan has "no more than one year to live." In the novel, the headmaster's death is also predicted by an astrologer, who can see past, present and future as one, and give everything its true value. On the basis of the astrologer's report, the headmaster visualizes his death and tells Krishnan: "This is perhaps my last day. Tomorrow, I may be no more."

So far as the predicted death is concerned, the mythical Satyavan is displaced as the fictional headmaster. But so far as the fore knowledge of the predicted death is concerned, the mythical Savitri is displaced as the headmaster in the novel. Moreover, despite the prediction of Satyavan's death, Savitri is determined to marry him in the myth. The knowledge of Satyavan's death in one year does not alter her decision. She firmly declares to her father that she has "chosen Satyavan and will not choose another". Similarly, Krishnan in the novel is determined to pursue through the medium, though his knowledge about the medium is accidental. Thus, the mythical Savitri becomes the fictional Krishnan. So, the character of Savitri seems to diversify into the characters of the headmaster and Krishnan. Krishnan, in the pursuit of his dead wife, seems to perform the role of the mythical Savitri and the headmaster also, by maintaining the secrecy of his predicted death till a crucial moment, identifies himself with the character of Savitri. In the myth, Savitri alone bears the burden of Satyavan's predicted fate. Thus, displacement takes place in an interesting way in the novel. In the present context, the mythical Satyavan diversifies into the fictional headmaster and. Further, the mythical Savitri diversifies into the fictional headmaster and Krishnan. But it is true that largely Savitri parallels Krishnan in the novel.

In view of the fourth component of the myth, Savitri as a perfect housewife, in the novel parallels Savitri in the myth as a perfect house wife. Savitri's expertise in performing the household works, the sense of adaptability, emphasis on main training cleanness and piety in and around the hut, not only amazes Satyavan but also fills her parents-in-law with love and admiration for her. Savitri shoulders the entire household responsibility as she enters the hut. As far as the knowledge of housekeeping is concerned, Savitri and receive it from their mother and mother-in-law respectively. Savitri, in the myth, learns from her mother how to "spin and weave and sew, to cook and make a home beautiful and its inmates happy". Similarly, in the novel's mother-in-law keeps in the village after he marriage to train her up in "housekeeping". Displacement at this level occurs through the change of characters. Krishnan is Savitri's parallel in the novel. But so far as the house keeping issue and the training related to it are concerned, Savitri in the myth finds in the novel as her counterpart.

The fifth component of the myth, Savitri's last penance for three days and nights before Satyavan's death, finds relevance in the context of Krishnan's attendance to his sick wife in the novel. The penance undertaken by Savitri, involving a nobler sacrifice of herself, is above and beyond any ordinary ritual throughout's illness, Krishnan treats her with love and sympathy. When is unable to keep away the foul lavatory scene from her memory and develops an aversion to food, Krishnan encourages her to eat: "Bring those lime pickle. Now be a good girl and finish off that rice with the help of the pickles. He arranges for Dr.Shankar of Krishnan medical hall to attend to Krishnan would sit up the whole right for her anxiously, asking himself over and over again about the result of's blood test. He also gives moral support to his wife: "you will come out of it with a new life. All your old ailments will be gone. Even the pain at the waist you have been complaining for so many days." Krishnan puts a chart on the

wall to read's temperature. He hammers out ice blocks into pieces every twenty minutes and applies ice to susil's forehead once in every four hours. All his waking hours are spent at susil's bedside. It is evidence that Krishnan is whole heartedly devoted to the service of his sick wife.

In the myth, Savitri's penance, meant to avert her husband's death, has a religious dimension. But in the novel, Krishnan's attendance to his sick wife in terms of the medical treatment to cure her deadly sickness has a secular dimension. Therefore, the novel is displaced from the myth through the change in dimension.

Compared to Savitri's great penances and their efficacy's worship of the gods as her routine work in her house is merely the faint shadow of the former. Unlike Savitri's unflinching faith in her penances, seems to have been offering her usual prayers to the gods as every religious-minded women in India does. But viewed in the context of the entire narrative, especially the later half of the novel's prayers bear a great symbolic significance. Krishnan's view lends a strong support to it: "she seemed to have a deep secret life". Further, the visit to the temple after the lavatory episode marks a crucial change in the lives of Krishnan and. Her prayer before the image of "srinivas", the god in the temple, changes Krishnan's attitude to her worship, "oh! Becoming a yogi". But this time Krishnan cannot help shutting his eyes and praying for. "God blessthis child and protect her". At the symbolic level, if the lavatory episode leads to sickness and eventually to death, her visit to the temple enables and Krishnan to communicate to each other even after her death

The sixth component of the myth, the trip to the foet, can be read in terms of the search for a new house in the novel. Savitri has a fore knowledge of Satyavan's death. As Savitri has a foreknowledge of Satyavan's death. As Savitri opens her eyes, she knows that this is "the day of which the astrologers had spoken. On the contrary, Krishnan is ignorant of's impending death and so, there is a contrast in the moods of Savitri and Krishnan. The thought of Satyavan's death fills Savitri with fear and anxiety. On the other hand, Krishnan is ignorant of the unpleasant course of the event which will lead to's death. He is elated in her company while they are searching for new house. In his joyous mood Krishnan starts his pranks with on the way. Krishnan's happiness over the trip is an artistic build-up for the coming anti-climax. "But the end of the fatal jaunt is still hidden and unsuspected. Mean while husband and wife romantically discovering each other taste the joys of young love".

The southward direction is also significant. Krishnan proposes to buy a house which faces south. As Krishnan tells himself: "I must have a house, which faces south". The trip in the novel is also south bound. "Lovely Extension formed the southernmost portion of the town and consisted of well laid- out residential buildings, lining the next roads and cross roads". And this southbound trip in the novel leads to her death eventually. In the myth also Yama proceeds southward after taking Satyavan's life.

Moreover, the novel is displaced from the myth through elaboration of this mythical component. The mythical trip to the forest is elaborated in the novel. The trip to the house in Lovely Extension includes the visit to a restaurant where Krishnan and indulge in a useless controversy over the propriety of tiles used outside the bathroom in a house. Nearly an hour later they come out of the restaurant and walk in the direction of the river, a couple of miles in the opposite direction. Krishnan promises his wife to take her to an all- India tour and even to England and Europe sometime in future.

Similarly, the house finally selected by Krishnan and, the house which Krishnan would love to call 'the Jasmine Home', is placed in an ironic contrast with its foul lavatory, which symbolically predicts Susila's death. Further, when Susilas is locked inside the foul lavatory at the back of the house, Krishnan unknowingly tells himself: " I am sure she is thinking of a very grand kitchen garden in the backyard distress inside the foul lavatory and krishnan's view of her prolonged absence are also set in an ironic

contrast. Further, the green painted lavatory door and the foul lavatory inside are also set in contrast as says later. Despite all the attempts, death overpowers eventually a stony silence closed in on the house, punctually by the stentorian breathing, which appeared to me the creaking of the hinges of a prison gate, opening at the command of a soul going into freedom. Thus's death in the novel is displaced from Satyavan's death in the myth in the manner of dying.

In view of the seven component of the myth, life after death, the myth and the novel present similar situations. In both the myth and the novel, life after death is dealt with at length. About three fourths of the myth is devoted to the life after death. Similarly, the last four chapters, about half of the novel, deals with the life after death. Secondly, when Yama takes away Satyavan's life, Savitri follows Yama even in the region of the dead and persuasively appeals to him to return life to her husband. Similarly, when Krishnan comes to know his wife's willingness to communicate to him, he persists in his pursuit to hear from her through the medium.

Besides, in her pursuit of Satyavan, Savitri has to pass many ordeals put by Yama as the test of her love. In the myth, Yama uses all the possible means to divert Savitri from her pursuit. Yama advises savatri repeatedly not to follow him. He tells her: "No person can follow another into death". In the beginning, Yama adopts a mild tone. But when he sees that Savitri still follows Him, he speaks with a cruel finality and commands her not to follow Him. But Savitri continues her pursuit with incomparable stead fastness. At this, Yama loses His temper and puts savatri to the test of her love.

The theme of love, death and reunion run as a throughout the fabrics of the myth and the novel alone. In the myth, the love of Savitri and Satyavan is challenged by Yama, the lord of death. In one year after their marriage, Satyavan dies. Similarly, in the novel, dies in the prime of her youth, about four years after their marriage and just in one year after she comes to the city. Death, both in the myth and the novel, is viewed as a continuation of life. Between the world of the living and the world of the dead, there exists no boundary. Savitri, as she walks into the kingdom of Yama, sees no wall, no boundary. She tells Yama: "I saw that death is only a continuation of life". Similarly, Krishnan in the novel acquires this vision towards the close of the novel when, after having resigned from his college job, he evokes his wife. Krishnan finds no boundary between himself and his dead wife." The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved". And it is here that Krishnan ventures to communicate with his dead wife, as Robert Martin Adams observes, to find their meaning.

Death causes parting, but it is also a benediction and it appears in the myth and the novel equally. In the myth, Savitri secures Satyavan's life. Besides, she also wins several other boons from Yama. Yama returns eye sight to Dyumatsena, reinstates him to his throne and blesses Savitri's mother with sons. Similarly, death teaches Krishnan in the novel.

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