

THE TRIUMPHANT WOMAN IN R.K.NARAYAN'S GUIDE

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ABSTRACT

R.K. Narayan is not only an Indian author but also a writer who carried the ethos of India into his fiction. Rasipuram krishnaswami Iyer was born on 1906 and died on May 13th 2001. He writes in English. 'R' in his name represents the name of his village and K, the name of his father-Krishna swami. He was fond of reading different kind of books. After completing his early education he went to England to complete his higher education. He passed his B.A from Maharaja College, Mysore. He later on became a news reporter for the newspaper called "THE JUSTICE". He published over a dozen novels, two hundred short stories and four books of non-fiction. In this article we will be discussing about 'ROSIE', the central female character of 'Guide'.

She is highly educated and holds Master Degree in Economics. She lives in a very modern way with an orthodox thinking and dressing. Her bright colored saree and braided hair gives the impression that how much she is attached to her own culture and tradition

R. K.Narayan, was an Indian novelist, short story writer, essayist, memoirist, travel writer, journalist, critic, and editor. He is considered one of the three best Indian writers writing in English; the other two Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. Narayan's fiction contains a unique blend of Indian mysticism and English form. He created fictional world Malgudi, which became one of the everyday concerns set in southern India.

Narayan's father was an administrator and headmaster at several government schools and instilled in Narayan a love of literature. He did not have much academic success, however having difficulty with his college entrance exam in English. In 1926, he enrolled in the B.A program in Maharaja College, Mysore after which he embarked on a short-lived teaching career. After being turned down by several publishers, Narayan gave the manuscript of his first novel 'swami and his friends' (1935) to a friend to destroy it. The friend showed the novel to Graham Greene, who was impressed by it and found a publisher for the book. Narayan's writing career was born and, several volumes of short stories, collections of essays, and his memoirs entitled *My Days* (1974) were published.

There are no doubts that R.K.Narayan was the most famous Indian writer in English. Due to the extreme readability of his fiction, western critics have had a kind of preference for his novels, myth, social implications and political events do make part of the pattern of his writing but they always remain confined to the literary work. On the other side, the overt and mythical implications of Rao's fiction somehow scared many western readers, while the hot-tempered political approach of Anand's novels may have reduced the interest of criticism towards his books to a restricted area of debate. Therefore, for reasons which probably go beyond the writers' choices themselves, R.K.Narayan fiction gathered extremely wide recognition abroad. It must also be taken into account that Graham Greene was his constant admirer; it is not a secret that the Indian writer sent the proof of his novels to his English friend before sending them to the publishers. This is why one never comes across critical contributions to R.K.Narayan's peculiar use of Indian English.

The definition of Indian femininity nowadays as far as Indian culture is concerned, is a difficult point. Various past and western influences do mingle and combine resulting in a very complicated and controversial scenario. Indian fiction in English abounds in cases built around the stereotype of an ideal man and an ideal woman and R.K.Narayan is a case in point. This cliché is less and less evident as we move further from the Indian soil and take into consideration the authors of the so-called 'Indian Diaspora'. The Sahitya Academi award-winning novel *The Guide* is a good subject ground for a study from this particular perspective in the fiction of the South Indian writer. It is one of Narayan's masterpieces; the novel is characterized by a very complex and comprehensive plot.

The whole story is the account of a combining of two tales which cross each other, mix and blend leaving the reader with the feeling of harmonious completeness and coherence the former is the report of an impersonal omniscient narrator in the third person in the historical present, whereas the protagonist's confessions to Velan, who automatically plays

the role of the implied reader. The novel opens with Raju's release from jail. He finds himself in the uncomfortable and awkward position of one who has to restart life from zero, as he does not even know where to go and how to earn a living. The first series of combinations makes him decide to live in the temple of a small village while a second one ironically invests him in the role of the sadhu, a sage, whom the entire population addresses to receive blessings. From his confessions, the reader learns about the protagonist's former occupation as a tourist guide through Malgudi.

The pivotal juncture coincides with the encounter of the Raju with Rosie, an extremely fascinating and jolly dancer married to a man called Marco. The two main characters start an extramarital relationship. He becomes Rosie's agent and she soon reaches fame. Yet, money, celebrity, and a new exciting lifestyle drive him on a misleading moral path; he gets entangled with an unclear affair, charged with forgery and sent to jail. The combination of half a tale portraying Raju as a tour guide and half as a spiritual guide explains the reason for the choice of such a title, with its overt note of irony. The female protagonist –Rosie incarnates the typical role of the alluring woman; she communicates through an instinctive body-language and that, let alone her professional career, makes her irresistible to Raju's eyes: 'I was only conscious of her movements', the guide as to admit. On the other hand, Marco is an archaeologist as fond of his research projects as insensitive and detached from his pretty wife's graces. Marco marries Rosie even though she is a devadasi, a dancer, a role which Indian society traditionally considers akin to prostitution, adopting fairness in views very unlikely to be found among Indian men. At any rate, there is much evidence to suggest that Narayan's ironic mode of investigation is amused at firing upon Marco's weak points.

Marco was just impractical, a helpless man. All that he could do was to copy ancient things and write about them. His mind was completely in it. All practical affairs of life seemed impossible to him, such a simple matter as finding food or shelter or buying a railway ticket. It seemed to him a monumental job. (p5)

The relationship, therefore, pivots on a fundamental discrepancy between these two characters and the contrast with Rosie becomes sharp and strident. Her freshness, dynamism, joviality, and vitality are extremely evident in more than one occasion 'she behaved like a baby: excited, thrilled, and appreciative of everything.'

In a similar passage the woman's emotionalism- once more paralleled to a baby-counterfoils Marco aloofness and impassiveness:

The girl was in ecstasy. Our house was surrounded by rich vegetation. She ran like a child from plant to plant with cries of joy, while the man looked on with no emotion. Anything that interested her seemed to irritate him. (p.7)

Starting, from these premises, it is not a surprise that their marriage ends up in failure. Yet it is not the gap between the two that separates them but the total apathy of both towards the partner's interests. If Marco does not seem to produce such a great effort to understand and approach the world of dancing, likewise does Rosie also fall to understand archaeology? The problem is emphasized by their fatal drive towards their jobs as a means of self-realization. (New Insights Into The Novels Of R.K.Narayan-M.K.Bhatnagar,pg167-170,171,174,)

Rosie is a multi-faceted personality as Raju. This is only to be expected from a character, which moved from being a devadasi to an M.A in economics to a housewife, to a woman who is rejected by her husband for infidelity but becomes a successful professional dancer- and yet continues to regret her failed marriage. She is childlike in following her desires without giving thought to consequences, and a woman of the world in the way she manages her career after her break with Raju. She can be naïve and willful, and she may well be criticized for being irresponsible in her relationships. Yet she is not only utterly sincere and committed to her art, but also has considerable knowledge of its classical traditions. She challenges the orthodox Hindu conception of what a woman should be, and yet there is a part of her nature that is intensely orthodox. Rosie, reveals the complexity of human nature.

Significantly, Rosie enters Raju's life through the railway which brings tourists to Malgudi. The railway signifies Malgudi's break with its traditional and homogenous past- it opened up Malgudi to influences from the world outside, just as it destroyed young Raju's innocence when he picked up the bad language from the workers on the track (p64). The exotic nature of Rosie's modern name also proclaims her as an outsider to the conventional world of Malgudi.

Raju wonders-

“why did she call herself Rosie? She did not come from a foreign land. She was just an Indian, who should have done well with Devi, Meena, Lalitha, or anyone of the thousand names we have in our country”(p9).

So when Rosie driven out by Marco, arrives in Raju's home, his old fashioned mother is equally nonplussed-

“she looked anguished for a moment, wondering how she was going to accommodate a ‘Rosie’ in her house’s(140)

The non -traditional name is a marker of Rosie’s social hybridity, which is emphasized in the novel. She belongs to caste and a class outside the pale of organized patriarchal Hindu society. She is unable to give her father’s name, and thereby locate her social identity when Raju’s mother cross-questions her (p142) Rosie hails from a family of devadasis-

“I belong to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers”- and is under no illusion as to how devadasis are regarded-“we are viewed as public woman... we are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilized’ (84).

Raju’s mother echoes the conventional wisdom when she warns her son-

“...don’t’ have anything to do with these dancing women. They are all a bad sort”(69).

Rosie’s tolerated harsh words of Raju’s mother, thinking that she will change her mindset but the notion which was very old is not changing so easily.

Raju’s uncles hector her-

“Are you of our caste? No, our class.... After all, you are a dancing girl. We do not admit them to our families. Understand.?”(p169).

It is shocking that they completely ignore in their prejudice Rosie’s other identity as an educated woman with an M.A.degree (p142) Raju’s was surely inhabiting a fool’s paradise when he had bravely assured Rosie earlier-

“All that narrow notion may be true of old days, but it is different now. Things have changed. There is no caste or class today”(p85)

To signify Rosie’s ‘difference’ and her position outside the boundaries of ‘normal’ society, she is associated with the novel with nature in its most primal and unfettered manifestations. She is completely at ease during the night vigil at the Peak House in the dense jungle high up on Mempi hills where panthers, bears, and elephants prowl at night-

“I’m prepared to spend the whole night here.....here at least we have silence and darkness, welcome things, and something to wait for out of that darkness’(79).

But the most crucial comparison from nature for understanding her character is the identification of Rosie with the snake, the cobra. Raju narrates the scene in which Rosie watches the king Cobra dance.

The whole thing repelled me, but it seemed to fascinate the girl. She watched it swaying with rapist attention. She stretched out her arm slightly and swayed it in imitation of the movement;

she swayed her body to the rhythm-for just a second...(68)

Rosie overwhelms Raju when she first alights at station platform.

‘She was not very glamorous if that is what you expect, but she did have a figure a slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a complexion, not white, but dusky, which made her only half visible as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice.’

This is the reader’s predicament too, for the portrait of Rosie (alias Nalini)- the elements being so strangely mixed in her-remains dusky rather than bright, being seen through the film of a lover’s muddled infatuation. After all the alarums and excursions, all the excitement and suspense, all the regrets and recriminations,

Raju realizes that

‘ neither Marco nor I had any place in her life, which had its sustaining vitality and which she had underestimated all along’.

Rosie’s summing up is masterly:

” I felt all along you were not doing the right things. This is karma. What can we do?’ there is, indeed, no failure of nemesis in ‘The Guide’.(K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar-Indian Writing In English.p379)

Later when she becomes a famous dancer, Rosie’s greatest performance, her ‘masterpiece’, is the ‘snake dance’ (p211-212). Raju’s mother misses the dancer’s aesthetic appreciation for form and movement when she abuses Rosie as a ‘serpent girl’(p170), implying that Rosie is like a snake in having a venomous and destructive nature. The symbolism of the snake has far deeper reverberations in the novel. In identifying Rosie with the king Cobra, Narayan associates her with instinctive or creative energy as represented through dance, thus contrasting her with both with Marco’s carefully cultivated academic learning, and with Raju’s passionate quest for self-gratification.

Rosie’s spiritual transformation through dance is signified in the changing of her name from ‘Rosie’ to ‘Nalini’. Raju compares this change to a kind of rebirth or reincarnation (p176-177). Through the change of name, Rosie symbolically seeks entry into the orthodox society that rejects her, but it also points to her creativity which is expressed through her dance.

Indeed the metaphor of the ‘dance’ defines Rosie’s fate in the same way that the metaphor of the ‘guide’ defines Raju’s. For both of them, their defining characteristics are also the cause of their problems. Raju’s propensity to take people in hand and keep them happy, to guide them, leads him into all manners of vicissitudes. With Rosie it is her deep love for dance that brings trouble into her life- she gets frustrated with Marco because he forbids

her to dance, and gets seduced by Raju because he appreciates her dancing. But Rosie's attitude to dance is completely different from Raju's. For Raju, dance is a cultural commodity that can be exploited for money and fame. For Rosie, dance is a vocation. This soon leads to conflict.

'I'm tired of all talk of superior and inferior. What is so superior about us?' she asked in real indignation 'Well, you know, you have more engagements than a hundred of them put together,' I said 'that's more money, she said. 'I don't care much for that sort of superiority.'(p190)

This rift in their values eventually leads to their separation.

Rosie's identity as a temple dancer and as the exponent of Bharat Natyam, the centuries-old temple dance of Southern India dedicated to Shiva- Nataraja, also helps to explain the apparent contradictions in her characters which puzzle Raju so much. For a woman she jeopardizes her marriage for a casual acquaintance, Rosie seems to have extremely old-fashioned notions about the relationship between husband and wife, and the role of a woman in society. Even as a successful professional dancer, she seems to be almost ashamed of being spirited and talented and a woman of wealth and social standing in her own right. These contradictions appear to stem partly from her ingrained traditional values, which she imbibed from the sacred environ of the temple-dancer, and partly from the sense of being a social outcast, which was the actual lot of the temple-dancer.

Rosie's desire to serve food to her husband and Raju at the pea house during their happier days, and "be the last to eat like a good housewife"(p77), can easily be understood as her delight in having a regular home life, a common enough experience for most women but one which is usually denied to the devadasi. Her gratitude to Marco for having married her in spite of her background, and her abiding sense of guilt at having betrayed his trust for all that they were incompatible, can be traced to the same reason. Rosie says of her infidelity to Marco-

"I realized I had committed an enormous sin' (p150),

and even she has been turned out by Marco, she defends him by saying-

"after all, after all, he is my husband"(p201).

What bewilders Raju, however, is the way she rejects him even after he has helped her to become a prominent dancer, while her attitude towards the dominating and hard-hearted Marco remains one of submission and subservience.

Raju is 'appalled at the duplicity of her heart' (p138).

This is not fairly to Rosie. Though she repeatedly refers to their liaison as sinful, and though Raju betrayed her trust by forging her signature, she shows her sense of duty towards Raju by financially helping him to fight the criminal case. But she would rather if she could go back to Marco who, however, will not have her again. What Raju fails to understand is that, as a temple dancer dedicated to the god Shiva-Nataraja from a very young age, Rosie's Hindu values are extremely deep-rooted. As a votary of Nataraja, it is the traditional Hindu world –the view that defines her horizon-without it, she would lose her main identity as a dancer worshipping her god through dance. (critical essays on R.K.Narayan' The Guide: with an introduction to Narayan. Krishna Sen.p48-53)

Narayan's women move steadily from their age-old tradition defined subordinate position to a secular position where they are woman, but not heavily chained by patriarchal shackles. India's historical and sociological studies on woman's condition of the writers' time show that Narayan's portrayal of women in his novels is, no doubt, fictionalized, but not imagined, rather based on his observation of the matter of facts of the prevalent condition of women in India's age-old tradition-bound patriarchal society.

Narayan's women are true to what they were in society. He has just imagined his women characters but has not imagined their problems and their attitudes to their problems. He has objectivity observed the problems of women of his time and their attitudes to those problems and reflected them accordingly in his writings. As a result, Narayan has been called an objective chronicler of Malgudi since what he has said of his women is actually what he saw in and of them in the society. In his early three novels: *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor Of Arts*, and *The English Teacher*, women are traditional having sita -like syndrome and being loyal to the time-honored and age-old traditions of India, but over time his women change following the changes come on different aspects of social life of Malgudi.

Narayan's women characters are the authentic representation of women of his time. Narayan's women behave just as they behaved in their social positions and situations. Narayan began by portraying tradition-bound women and gradually transformed his women into Draupadi images.

Rosie though a post-graduate is never a modern woman. She is not corrupted with modern and materialistic values. She is a traditional Indian wife, longs for affection and care from her husband. She cannot cope up with the archaeological interests of her husband, Marco. Marco dislikes being disturbed by anyone, even his wife in his studies and professional activities. Rather he longs for appreciation from his wife. This difference in wavelength is

the reason of dispute between Rosie and Marco. Joseph the steward of the bungalow where Marco stays for his professional work reads Marco well and has all praise for him.

This Rosie is caught in her contradiction between her dedication to dance and its patron god on the one hand, and the cultural norms and values that are predicated by her vocation on the other. Paradoxically, it is this same, almost religious dedication to dance that turns out to be the core of her inner strength. It is only when Rosie soared so far out of Raju's reach that he can at least view her objectivity, that he finally comprehends the source of this strength-

‘.....she would never stop dancing.....whether I was inside the bars or outside, whether her husband approved it or not. Neither Marco nor I had any place in her life, which had its sustaining vitality and which she had underestimated all along’(p222-223).

Marco had attempted to make Rosie feel ashamed of dance because he associated it with the cults of the devadasis. Raju on the contrary, wanted her to be proud of her career as a dancer, but only because it brought in money and fame. Both of them had misunderstood the way Rosie felt about dance. For her, it was a form of self-expression and a way to show her devotion to her god. Though she feels grateful to Marco for marrying her in spite of her low caste status, thus giving her social respectability, his ban on her dancing had begun to suffocate her. She is attracted to Raju only because she believes that he appreciates dance, and she leaves him when she discovers that this is not so. Thus it is clear that Rosie lives in her terms and conditions and appeared as a triumphant modern woman. (Critical Essays On Narayan's *The Guide*: With An Introduction To Narayan. Krishna Sen.p540

In the *Guide*, one finds a clash between caste, classes and their old values on the one hand and the weakening modern social and moral structure on the other. Marco only paid lip-service to a casteless, conventions society that was slowly taking place before him by advertising for a good-looking educated girl regardless of caste. old prejudices die hard and Marco for all his erudition looked upon dancing as just street acrobatics and he killed Rosie's instincts for life and love of art by denying her both of them. (Narasimhaiah 132).

Narayan is acclaimed as a regional or social novelist. The locale of the *Guide* is the small town of Malgudi where Raju has his home, the village Mangal from where Velan hails and Madras(Chennai) where Rosie is invited to dance. This semi-urban and largely rural setting is typical of the places in which most Indians live. Thus the locale is almost the microcosm of India. Through the social portrait of a single region, Narayan succeeds in presenting the larger picture of Indian society, both in its general features as well as in its specifically post-independence lineaments. The world in ‘*The Guide*’ is ‘structured along with simple

binaries'- Malgudi and Mangal, the town and the village, urban sophistication versus rural simplicity, modernity versus tradition, cynicism versus faith'(sen86)

Rosie's caste affiliation is attacked by the general people as 'public woman' but Raju negates the prevalent mode of and asserts that Rosie caste is 'the noblest caste on earth'. To quote Gajendra Kumar from his essay 'R.K.Narayan's The Guide; The Vision of Indian Values:

'time is changed and continuously changing. Now there exists no caste, class or creed. Marco too demonstrates his modesty and embraces Rosie as his wife.'(p174)

It is through the character of Rosie in The Guide', that Narayan truly takes up and treats the concept of woman's emancipation. She is an artistically inclined young wife of Marco, the eccentric art critic, who meets Raju an enthusiastic tourist Guide at Malgudi railway station and this meeting gives a new turn to her life. Rosie's marital life with Marco was woefully incompatible. In the initial stage, he aggressively defies the wishes of his wife who desires to see a king cobra.. he snubs her

' don't expect me to go with you. I can't stand the sight of a snake- your interests are morbid.'

On the other hand, Rosie has a distaste for "cold, old stone walls' she is perturbed by the fact that her husband, whom Raju calls 'Marco' is more interested in books, papers, painting and old art than in being a "real live husband'. He is too unrealistic type.

We had seen transformation of Rosie to Nalini. She made a path for herself in male dominated society and came out triumphantly on her own terms and conditions. She showed that she doesn't need any superior male by her side, whether it's Marco or Raju.

CONCLUSIONS:

R.K.Narayan stands as a milestone in the Indo Anglian literature. He is oft-quoted name among the common wealth writers. Besides Graham Greene and William Walsh, other English and Indian critics also, recognize his contribution and uphold his artistic gift. He will always be remembered by the posterity for his simple and lucid expression, hilarious humor and consummate art.

Narayan's heroine Rosie's passion and dedication for dance had given her all name and fame to her, which she dreamt of earlier. She is one of the finest characters, penned by R.K.Narayan in 'Guide'. In this male chauvinistic society when male breaks his wedlock and manage to live life with someone else, no one is going to question him but if a women is doing the same she will be considered too bad, abused and never allow to rest her in peace . This is the double standard and hypocrisy of our society.

Rosie is the embodiment of elegance, beauty and grace. Her character undergoes hardship, turmoil, suffering from Marco and Raju both, Yet She has tremendous tolerance power and good optimistic attitude through which she became triumphant in the end. She has given preference to her career which gave her new name, fame and reputation in the society.

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