

The self–Discovery on the Part of Rosie in R.K.Narayan`s the Guide

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Abstract

R. K. Narayan`s novels *The Dark Room* and *The Guide* project the subjugation and suppression of women in Indian society. It is a matter of regret that women from those days to these days are not given freedom on par with men. The objective of this paper is to study the turmoil faced by Rosie in the novel *The Guide*. The aim of the research paper is to bring out the pathetic condition that prevails for Rosie throughout the novel.

The guide was first published in 1958 and received the Sahitya academy award in 1961 like quite a number of other novels by Narayan, it had its genesis in an incident from real life, In his autobiography entitled *my days*, Narayan recalls how, around 1956-57, he had been musing over the subject of new novel.

“About someone suffering enforced sainthood.”

The outline of a plot came to him following something that happened around that time in his home town of Mysore.

Keywords — R.K.Narayan, Rosie, self-discovery, subjugation, confinement, hybridity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rosie is the major female character in the novel, *The Guide*. She ranks among well known women characters portrayed by Narayan in his various novels. The plot of the novel is mainly woven around the developing relationship between Rosie and the protagonist, Raju. Hence her role is crucial to a proper understanding and analysis of the motives and forces that govern the complex human nature depicted by the author in this novel.

Rosie belongs to a socially despised caste of temple dancers; she is educated having obtained a post graduate degree in Economics. Her mother, who is a dancer, wants her to lead a life of social respectability. Hence she is married to a rich bachelor who lives in a big Sprawling house in Madras. The marriage takes place in response to a matrimonial advertisement irrespective of the consideration of mutual suitability or unsuitability of the tastes and likings of the partner.

Her name, Rosie, may suggest that she is not an Indian. But in reality, she is thoroughly an Indian who wears Indian dress like a sari and has long hair. Her Indianness is more confirmed in her being a

traditional classical Bharatnatyam Dancer. Raju describes Rosie to Velan in these Words;

“ Don’t imagine on hearing her name that she wore a short skirt or cropped her hair ,she looked just the orthodox dancer she was she wore saris of bright hues and goldlace , had curly hair which she braided and beflowered , wore diamond ear rings and heavy gold necklace.”

Rosie’s physical appearance is impressive. She is not glamorous but she leaves a lasting impression on any body’s mind. Raju, at the very first sight of her at the Malgudi railway station feels self conscious and embarrassed while she is getting down from the railway compartment. He describes her graceful personality like this:

“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, the complexion not white but dusky, which made her one half visible – as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice”.

Rosie is a multi-faceted personality as Raju. This is only to be expected from a character that moves from being a devadasi to an M.A in Economics, to a house wife, to a woman who is rejected by her husband for infidelity but nevertheless becomes a successful professional dancer and yet continues to regret her failed marriage. At first glance, it is difficult to understand Rosie’s contradictory motive. She seems to be one at the same time conservative and self assertive. She is child –like in following her heart 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 naive and willful, and she may well be criticised for being irresponsible in her personal relationships. She is totally committed to her art, but also has considerable knowledge of its classical traditions. She challenges orthodox Hindu conception of what a woman should be, and yet there is a part of her nature that is intensely orthodox. Rosie, like Raju, reveals the complexity of human nature.

Rosie’s husband is named Marco by Raju in parody of an explorer, Marco Polo. This name strikes his mind because he is just like a space traveller. He neglects his wife’s desires, wishes and

tastes. He plans to write a book on his subject. William Walsh comments on his personality as one who is

“A queer old abstraction of a man”

He is imperviously disregarding towards his wife's interests and wants. He desires isolation and loneliness where he can follow his study undisturbed by his wife.

There is complete contrariety of interests and likings between Rosie and Marco. She has an undying love for dance. Her veins tingle at the very mention of it. But Marco is allergic to it. He disparagingly calls it “street acrobatics”⁴ and not an art. When she asks Raju to show her a king cobra as she likes to enjoy his dance to the tune of a flute, her husband taunts

“Your interests are morbid”.

On the other hand, Rosie feels bored in his company as he is always busy silently in writing or studying or deciphering paintings and carvings on the walls of caves and temples. She despises his morbidity of interest in cold and lifeless stones. She makes an oblique reference to her husband's interest while replying to Raju's query about her personal interest. She remarks that her interest lies in anything except “cold, old stone walls.” Thus, there is complete dissimilarity of interests between the wife and husband. Hence she lives discontented, unhappy and unfulfilled life. As a result of which they often quarrel. Their relationship is described by Rosie to Raju. She says :

“When we are alone and start talking, we argue and quarrel over everything. We don't agree on most matters, and then he leaves me alone and comes back and we are alright that's all.”

It is significant that Rosie enters Raju's life through the railway which brings tourists to Malgudi. The exotic nature of Rosie's Westernised 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 any of the thousand names we have in our country.”

The nontraditional name a marker of Rosie's social hybridity, is emphasised in the novel. She belongs to a caste and a class outside the pale of organized patriarchal Hindu society. She is unable to give her father's name, locate her social identity, when Raju's mother cross questions her. She says –

“I belong to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancer.”

And there is no illusion as to how devadasi's are regarded –

“We are viewed as public women we are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilised .”

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.”

Raju's uncle says –

“Are you of our caste? No. Our class? No After all you are a dancing girl. We don't admit them in our families. Understand?”

It is shocking that they completely ignore in their prejudice Rosie's other identity as an educated woman with an M.A degree. Raju is surely inhabiting a fool's paradise when he bravely assures Rosie-

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

Rosie falls a victim to the clever maneuverings of Raju. The events that follow lead to the calamitous rupture of wife husband relationship between Rosie and Marco. During their stay at Malgudi, Rosie's stays at Anand Bhavan Hotel in the town where as Marco remains at the peak house in Mempi hills where he is studying the ancient paints. Rosie visits him on every alternate day to see that he does not face any problem regarding food or other requirements. Rosie's staying away from her husband coupled with her dissatisfaction in her married life comes handy to shrewd, cunning and crooked Raju. She is attracted towards him irresistibly as he places upon her ardent ambition to become a Bharatnatyam dancer. She is caught into his amorous snares and turns infidel to her husband. During one of her visits to the peak house, under emotional stress consequent upon Marco's persistent interrogation she breaks down and makes a self- confession of her extra-marital relationship with Raju.

This breach of nuptial trust results in irreconcilable breakdown of their husband wife relationship. She feels penitent for her mistake and assures him of giving up her interest on dance forever and guarantees her complete loyalty to him in future. She follows him up and down the Peak house to the caves continuously for thirty days. Marco hardly speaks to her. Whenever, she tries to help him in anything, he repels her. He does not forgive her. The final rupture comes when at the time of departure for Madras at the Malgudi station; Marco leaves her there, telling her that he has only one ticket for himself. Under these circumstances, Rosie is forced to go to Raju's house. Marco is more to be blamed for this disaster. The impenetrable self confinement and the lack of adaptability on his part despite his wife's unconditional, honest repentance are mainly responsible for this sorry state of affairs.

Rosie's association with Raju, after Marco leaves her, brings her moral downfall. Raju fulfills Rosie's desire for seeing king cobra dance. 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 the rap test 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.....”

Raju takes her to round-the-city visit to places like a cinema hall, market place, a restaurant and Sarayu river. He constantly encourages her to dance to tickle her ambition and guarantees his whole-hearted co-operation in making her one day an unparalleled dancer. Being moved by these promises, She blurts out to him,

“What a darling ! you are giving me a new lease of life”

The fact that she is not basically a morally debased woman becomes clear in her occasional contemplative and morose moods even during caresses and love-making of Raju. She has sincerity in her heart for her husband she openly acknowledges to Raju the good gestures of her husband in giving the comforts in a hotel, she says:

“After all – after all-Is this right what I am doing? After all, he has been so good to me, given me comfort and freedom, which husband in the world would let his wife go and live in a hotel by herself, a hundred miles away?”

Rosie’s great trait lies in her honesty in realizing her past mistake; she does not resort to duplicity. Even after becoming a great dancer, she does not forget her husband. She has feelings for his good things. This is evident in her enthusiastic reactions to the glowing comments made about Marco’s book, *The Cultural History of South India*. She happens to read the glowing comments in the *Illustrated weekly*, she comes downstairs to Raju in eagerness and expresses her desire to have a copy of that book. Raju has already received one copy but suppresses this information fearing that she may turn favourable to Marco. She feels highly agitated later on to know Raju’s misleading behaviour. Raju reminds her of Marco’s cruel act with her in deserting her helplessly at the railway station. She honestly acknowledges her fault in the whole episode and expresses gratitude to Marco for his tolerant and non-violent attitude towards her. She says,

“I do, and I deserve nothing less. Any other husband would have throttled me then and there. He tolerated my company for nearly a month, even after knowing what I had done?”

Rosie has an artist’s heart which make her susceptible to spontaneous outburst of emotion and joy at the sight of beautiful natural surroundings at the Peak House. She feels excited looking at the vegetation, greenery and wild animals. She leaps like a child in excitement – which is expressive of an

innocent heart replete with warmth and vitality of life. The emotions suppressed in her heart by her husband’s cold indifference get welled up into demonstrative expression when she is taken round the city by Raju to different places. A cinema house, Sarayu river and sub-urban stores, Her joyous exuberance is described thus:

“She behaved like a baby –excited thrilled, appreciative of everything – This was perhaps the first time that she was seeing the world. She was in ecstasies.”

Rosie is by temperament a genuine artist. Dance courses through her veins. She is sincerely devoted to it. In the hotel at Malgudi, she undergoes a rigorous discipline of dance rehearsals starting at five early in the morning and continuing till eight and then she studies for two hours the ancient works of art like *Natya Shastra* of Bharat Muni. Ultimately, she becomes an accomplished classical dancer by dint of sheer hardwork and devotion. She adopts a pseudonym, Nalini. She stages dance performances in different parts of India. Her engagements stand three months in advance. She gets a lot of acclaim and earns a lot of money which is solely managed by Raju who misuses it according to his own whims in showmanship.

Rosie is modest in temperament and habits. Her devotion to the traditional Indian classical dance shows her regard and attachment for the traditional cultural trappings of the Indian society. She aspires to be an accomplished dancer because she is educated and talented. She wants to bring her talent to its full fruition. Such hectic life, despite its glamour, showmanship and promise of wealth and social prestige, gets on her nerves. She tells Raju,

“I am tired of all this circus existence”

Raju retorts to her that it is her own choice to become a dancer. She replies,

“Not the circus life. I visualised it as something different. It is all gone with that old house of yours”

The same sentiment of exasperation and disillusionment is given expression in these words.

“I feel like one of those parrots in a cage taken around village fairs, or a performing monkey”

Rosie’s simplicity, modesty and capacity for adaptability to circumstances get illustrated in her behaviour at Raju’s house. She helps Raju’s mother in domestic chores like sweeping, cleaning and scrubbing of utensils after finishing her dance rehearsals. The mother is tolerant towards her despite her disapproval of her stay with Raju which is against the norm of social propriety, as a married woman’s place is only by her husband’s side, however, unjust or irrational he may be. She knows that Rosie is a well –meaning, accommodating woman. After Raju’s

mother's departure for her brother's house, Rosie cooks food for Raju. She does not want that they should engage a cook just to cook food for two persons. She employs one, later on, when she gets too busy in staging public performances. She objects to know that they are spending two thousand rupees per month on themselves.

Raju's arrest on charge of forgery of her signatures on a legal document deals a hard blow to her trust. Still, she survives it and commits to Raju that she will do everything possible to get him acquitted in the case despite the latter's shocking treachery. She executes for him a bond of ten thousand rupees. She manages her performances independently in order to earn money to pay for the lawyer's fee. After Raju's conviction to a jail term, she leaves Malgudi, settles in Madras and continues her performances in different parts of India. Thus, she succeeds in surviving the ups and downs of her life on the inherent strength of her resilience and adjustability.

Raju acts as a trainer and critic to Rosie. When she becomes an accomplished dancer, he acts as her impresario. He keeps her under his total sway. He is the sole in charge of booking her programmes and of the income that accrues from her performances. He is allergic to anybody who stays with her for a long time. He sits on the middle sofa during her performances and makes her begin or finish the show at the gesture of his finger. He exploits her to the maximum. He confesses his monopolistic claim over her. He says

"I had a monopoly of her and nobody had anything to do with her."

He further elaborates his attitude by saying,

"She is my property. This idea was beginning to take root in my mind."

Rosie –Raju association reaches breaking point after the revelation of Raju's trickery and deceit. Rosie is totally disillusioned with him because of his fraudulent acts of misusing all her money and forging her signatures on a legal document sent by Marco for the release of her jewellery –box kept in the bank under their joint custody. Raju's parasitic tendencies are always shown to be in full play in this part of the episode. The author underscores his exploitative instincts in his comments about his decision to adopt sainthood. He says,

"He has not trained himself to make a living out of hard work

food was coming to him unasked now."

Hence, he adopts sainthood. His penance for rains is forced upon him by circumstances. Making a virtue of necessity, he decides to go through it genuinely. This is for the first time in his

life that he has undertaken to do something outside his selfish purpose. The author comments,

"... for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested."

All these details relentlessly expose the complex, devious tactics of Raju and emphasize the simple mindedness and easy vulnerability of Rosie. Her unsuspecting credulity in Raju becomes her hamartia.

Rosie is driven to the point of parting ways with Raju by his undignified exposure. Still, she assures him of her full help till the disposal of law suit against him. She proves her integrity by selling her diamonds and shares for the sake of furnishing money for his surety. When he is convicted to a jail term, she leaves Malgudi and settles down in Madras independently.

She tells him :

"It does not mean I'm not going to help. If I have to pawn my last possessions, I'll do it to save you from jail. But once it's over, leave me once and for all; that's all I ask. Forget me, Leave me to live or die, as I choose; that's all."

Rosie's essential virtue lies in her unreserved avowal of a sense of indebtedness to Raju for the help in the past despite the ultimate ignominious exposure of his selfish, crafty ways. Rosie –Raju relationship is more because of temperamental likeness of the two rather than a sensual, passionate union. William Walsh rightly emphasizes the identity of temperament, likes and dislikes as the basis of their coming close to each other. He says:

"She and Raju are of a kind and they fall in love at once. Not that there is anything heady or tumultuous about their affair, which strikes one as being as much a crisis of nerves as of passion. Their relationship, both at the beginning and later when she breaks off with Marco and comes to live with Raju, appears to be much more of feeling than sensuality, a temperamental rather than a passionate union."

Secondly, this relationship exposes the self – seeking exploitative nature of Raju who is at focus in the novel. Thirdly, it drives home the point how a failure in husband –wife relationship can be mischievously exploited by a third medium for nefarious purposes. Fourthly, Rosie reveals her thus far undiscovered potentiality for self –reliance. This fact is recognized by Raju when he realizes the truth that neither Marco nor he has any place in her life which has its own sustaining vitality and which she herself has underestimated all along. This self – discovery on the part of Rosie occurs after her separation both from Marco and Raju.

II. CONCLUSIONS

R.K.Narayan portrays Rosie as an independent woman who has commitment to her art. She focuses on her interests though her husband is disregardful towards her interests. She is modest in temperament. Rosie rediscovers herself after her separation both from Marco and Raju.

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