



## **An Interpretive Look at R.K. Narayan's The Guide and Its Representation of Indian Women**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The first book written by Narayan was titled *The Guide*, which reveals that the main character is most likely Raju, the most well-known guide in Malgudi. On the other hand, the majority of the published manuscripts of *The Guide* have a picture of a Bharat Natyam dancer wearing a sari. This dancer is almost certainly Rosie. Due to the layered nature of Rosie's personality, this seemingly little detail sheds light on how the character made an effect on the minds of the readers, and how that impression continues to reverberate even after the figure has been forgotten. During his explanation to Velan, Raju mentions Rosie and adds, I couldn't comprehend her (Narayan, 119) in reference to Rosie. The novel's audience members had the same reaction. She defies the traditional Hindu notion of how a woman ought to be, yet despite this, a significant portion of her multifaceted personality is quite traditional. In her, we witness a woman who is frantically attempting to liberate herself from the pigeonhole while simultaneously allowing the doors of patriarchy to cage her.

**KEY WORDS:** - Indian women, Marriage, dependent, dominant

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the realm of Indo-English fiction, R. K. Narayan has a space all to his. On many fronts, he cannot be compared to anybody else. He steers clear of dramatic situations in favour of the everyday humour that characterises the existence of middle class people in South India. Even from the outside, he seems to be no more than an average guy who may be any one of the millions of educated men living in South India. And yet, despite having nothing particularly remarkable about him, this unassuming guy worked his way up to become one of the finest, if not the greatest Indo-English author of all time. Even though he is busy with popularity and travelling the world, he still manages to find time to write novels about the lives of the basic, unrefined souls who inhabit Malgudi, the village that serves as his dream. His novel *The Guide* was adapted into a movie success. If his wit and humour have earned him a permanent position in the galaxy of Indo-Anglian authors, then the Dickensian variety of comedic characters he has created has only served to increase his appeal.

It is significant because “Rosie reaches Malgudi through the Railways, which brings a touch of modernity with it to the otherwise conventional and uniform culture of Malgudi. The unusual origins of her westernised name are another indication of the social hybridity she has. Raju use to wonder –

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. (Narayan,9)

However, her unconventional way of living does not begin and end with her moniker. Her family has a long history of serving temples in dance-related roles as Devdasis, and she herself comes from that lineage. In the eyes of society, these women belong to a lower social level. In spite of this, she goes on to get a degree that is not just unorthodox but also close to being revolutionary: a Master of Arts in Economics. In point of fact, Rosie studies historical books



on dance, such as Bharat Muni's Natya Shastra, and she even hires a pundit to interpret the ancient Sanskrit lines to her. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are two further sources of inspiration for her. As a result, we come to the conclusion that Rosie is not only well-versed in academic subjects but also has the ability to integrate her education with her artistic practise, just like a properly educated person would. She ends up marrying a well-educated and seemingly open-minded individual. But in all honesty, his primary goal is to establish a reputation for being an open-minded and progressive guy. He never acknowledges Rosie's skill as a dancer and entirely disregards her strong ambition to pursue a career in dance even though she expresses it often. Rosie, like any other genuine artist, views dancing not just as her passion but also as her vocation—it is her method of communicating with God. She will never be able to quietly take the slur that Marco makes against her paintings.

As a result, Rosie comes to the conclusion that she no longer wants to be married to her legal spouse and begins cohabitating with another guy named Raju. Even in modern India, partnerships of this kind are not strongly promoted, but Rosie, or maybe it is more accurate to say that Narayan, has the bravery to pursue one in 1958. It is a land of the Sita-Savitris, the mythologies that Narayan has employed in this storey as well. In this country, the virtuous women forgive all of the faults that their husbands have made, and they provide agnipariksha to demonstrate that they are physically pure. On the other hand, Rosie demonstrates another option.

Rosie's dedication to the art of dancing is the facet of her personality that stands out the most. She learns how to use it for professional purposes after she becomes a Devdasi. But as we can see, dancing means something far more significant to Rosie than any form of monetary gain. In the beginning, it is her method for attaining spiritual holiness, and in the later stages, it is her strategy for acquiring an autonomous identity. Rosie, the dancer, is given the name Cobra, which is also the name of a snake. Raju provides the following narration for the moment in which Rosie observes the dancing king cobra:

The whole thing repelled me, but it seemed to fascinate the girl. She watched it swaying with the rapt 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"... (Narayan, 68)

Later on, when Rosie has made a name for herself as a dancer, her most impressive routine and what she considers to be her masterpiece is the snake dance. In addition, the snake has a further meaning for a dancer in the country of India. In Hindu mythology, the naga is also the representation of Shiva-Nataraja, who is known as the Cosmic Dancer. Rosie commits herself to the God as the protector of her artwork, and she has a fantasy of having a bronze statue of Nataraja, the God of dancers, the God whose primordial dance produces the vibrations that set the worlds in motion in her house someday. "Rosie does her snake dance to the tune of an old hymn that invokes and worships Shiva, who is symbolised by the fabled Snake that Rosie conjures up via the movement of her rippling movements. The serpent that is said to live in the locks of Shiva himself, as well as on the wrist of Parvati, Shiva's bride, and in the ever-radiant dwelling of the gods, which is located in Kailash. This is a song that exalts the snake and reveals its mystical aspect. It is a song that raises the cobra out of its status as an underworld reptile and transforms it into a creature of grace and an adornment of the Gods. Rosie, like the cobra, comes from a underground or otherwise socially stigmatised class; however, she is able to draw



near to the gods through her dance, which she considers to be the purest form of worship. The image of the cobra as the mystic symbol of Shiva is connected to Rosie herself in this way. Even Raju is forced to confess it: I could honestly state that when I watched her perform, my mind was free, for once, from any sexual notions. To me, she was a complete and utter abstraction. (Narayan,125)

Within a short amount of time, Rosie, also known as Nalini, achieves world-renowned status as a Bharat Natyam dancer. This achievement of Rosie's, to become a thoroughly welcomed and respected BharatNatyam dancer, to successfully pursue her art, and to transform herself into a self-made woman, is a revolution in itself. Rosie lives in a country where women are still harassed and questioned in their workplaces just for being women, and this achievement of Rosie's is a revolution in itself.

In spite of all of this, there is a fundamental aspect about her that continues to be conventional. To begin, she never truly respects her own Devdasi clan, and she always takes in a composed manner what is said about them in public - we are considered as public ladies. We are not thought of in a decent light, and we are not believed to be cultured. (Narayan, 84) As a lady with a significant amount of education, she should have made an effort to improve the reputation of her family in the community or teach others about the discriminatory practises of the Devdasis. In point of fact, Gayatri Chakroborty Spivac has accused Narayan of turning Rosie into the protagonist of a romantic tragicomedy rather than illuminating the negative aspects of the Devdasi system via the circumstances of her life. (3) Once again, Rosie continues to bear the weight of her broken marriage throughout her whole life. To begin, it would seem that Rosie has some very archaic ideas about the nature of the connection that exists between a husband and wife as well as the place that women occupy in society. She never stops thanking Marco for marrying her in spite of who she was or where she came from, and she does it often. In the end, in the end, he is my spouse, she said. (Narayan, 201) and it is far preferable for one to terminate their life on their own front porch. In addition to this, she has a persistent feeling of shame for breaking his confidence, as seen by the statement I knew I had done a tremendous sin. (Narayan, 150) Even after many years, when she becomes a household name with her own identity, the book that her uncaring and disrespectful husband wrote will always retain a special place in her heart, and she will carry it with her for the rest of her life. She is fully aware that her spouse is incapable of appreciating either her work or her femininity. Even when it comes to her relationship with Marco, who is authoritative and callous, she maintains a submissive and deferential attitude toward him. In addition, the fact that she changed her name from Rosie to Nalini is a sign that she wanted to blend in with the same traditional culture that she ultimately questions and departs. The word Nalini refers to the lotus, which is where the goddess Lakshmi sits. According to Hindu mythology, Brahma also enters a state of deep concentration while reclining on a bed made of lotus petals. As a result, her westernised name, Rosie, serves as a sign of her condition of social exclusion. However, by changing her name to Nalini, Rosie is attempting to symbolically gain acceptance into the traditional culture that has rejected her.

As a result, it is clear that Rosie is torn between her devotion to dance on the one hand, and the cultural expectations and principles that are pressed upon her by the culture around her on the other. Even Rosie might be considered as a direct outcome of Narayan's hypocritical patriarchal



behaviour. However, as I have said before, in order to comprehend Rosie and the reasons behind her reluctance, one must take into consideration the many different problems that are connected to her. To begin, it is essential to keep in mind that she is only one of many significant female characters that appear in Narayan. Therefore, in order for us to properly comprehend the situation that Rosie is in, we need to situate her among the collection of women that Narayan has created. Savitri, a housewife of the middle class who acquiesces to the requirements of patriarchy, is the protagonist of the 1938 novel *The Dark Room*. (4) In the film *Mr. Sampanth* (1949), Shanti, a widowed actress and dancer whose trademark was her handbag made of cobra-hood complete with the spectacle-like mark, becomes the mistress of Sampanth, who is to bring her fame by casting her in a film. Sampanth's plan is to bring her fame by casting her in a film. (5) Shanti seems to operate as a precursor of the much more fully formed character of Rosie in many aspects, right down to the specifics of the tale. Rosie, in contrast to Savitri in *The Dark Room*, is able to establish herself even after being rejected by her spouse since she is able to support herself via her painting. Shanti did the same thing in *Mr. Sampanth*. In an India that is steadily transforming as a result of the influence of the west, Rosie is a symbol of the increasingly autonomous women of that country. As a result, we are able to comprehend the duties that were placed on Narayan's shoulders, and we can really see his growth as a writer and social reformer via the adventures of his heroines”.

Rosie's history is another facet of her existence that plays a significant and decisive role in her life. Her early existence as a Devdasi is something that continues to haunt her and has a significant impact on how she lives her life. She gets married to Marco, and despite all of his misdeeds, she continues to be thankful to him since he removes the stigma that she has of being from a devdasi family. Rosie's desire to serve food to her husband and Raju at the peak house during their happier days and be the last to eat like a good housewife can easily be understood as her delight in having a regular home-life, an experience that is common enough for many women but one that is typically denied to the Devdasis. Rosie's desire to serve food to her husband and Raju at the peak house during their happier days and be the last to eat like a good housewife is the only thing that will keep her from getting over the fact that she was married off to an incompetent like Marco is the appreciation she feels toward him for marrying her in spite of her history. Narayan once mentions in his autobiography *My Days* that Rosie's complicated personality and self-contradictory judgments are a product of her unique social background. This is something that Narayan believes to be true. (6) In this regard, Krishna Sen makes the observation that Rosie's unusual blend of rare independence and creativity with deep conservation and veneration for tradition could not have existed under any circumstances other than as a temple dancer who has gained an entry into conventional social life. (Sen,60)

In addition, we must keep in mind the cultural hegemony that exists in every patriarchal society, particularly in the context of Indian culture. “The term cultural hegemony originates from Marxist philosophy and was popularised by the Italian theoretician Antonio Gramsci. It refers to the dominance of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class, who manipulate the culture of that society (the beliefs, perceptions, and values) in order for their ruling class to view looks like the universally valid dominant ideology that justifies the social, political, and economic status quo as natural and perpetual for everyone, rather than as artificial social constructs. Gram (8) In modern-day India, a child's identity is decided shortly after birth based on factors like as



their gender, religious affiliation, and social caste. If the kid is a girl, then her primary identity will always be that of a female, regardless of how old she becomes. This will be the case for the rest of her life. Since she was a baby, she has been indoctrinated with all of the social mores and conventions that are expected of her by society, including how to act appropriately as a female. In the same way that a colonised person under colonial rule, who after a certain period of time starts believing in his or her inferior position, the majority of girls, too, in any patriarchal system becomes so saturated in their submissive roles set by society that they think it is right, inevitable, beneficial, and justified for women. This is similar to how a colonised person in a colonial rule starts believing in his or her inferior position after a certain period of time. In point of fact, women, even in modern-day India, are the ones who enforce such restrictions on other women with greater severity than males do. Rosie is no exception. She is unable to break free of this patriarchal rule despite the fact that she has a lot of knowledge, an outspoken attitude, a passion for her work, and an autonomous identity.

As a result, Rosie presents herself as a really courageous figure at the end. She has the power to free herself from the control of guys who are apathetic and predatory. She defies the unjust societal norms that are an attempt to shackle both her and her work. Through her work, she develops her own individuality, which is the most important thing. As a result, she might be considered as the precursor of the self-assured, hard-working Indian women of today who are also sensitive to and appreciative of their culture's customs. They are able to balance their job responsibilities with those of their family. They observe the custom, but they are not afraid to deviate from it and establish whole new standards if it appears to go in the way of their own growth. Rosie is in every sense of the word a forerunner of this new century of Indian women. Therefore, it is possible to say that Narayan's compassion for women is a novelist's apolitical views on the predicament of women in general and, more specifically, the traditional Hindu women, who are shackled to custom and cultural conventions. Even though R. K. Narayan was born into a very traditional Brahmin household, he never shied away from depicting the issues that plagued women both within and outside of the context of the family. The author of the book explores the status of women during that particular time period in history, namely the pre-Independence era and the post-Independence period, in a manner that is extremely matter of fact and in a style that is described as as is, where is. In retrospect, a literary study of the main novels written by R. K. Narayan through the lens of a feminist perspective would provide a kaleidoscopic picture of the situation of the "Indian woman as well as the development of the idea of the Indian woman through time.

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