
Women in Indian Culture: A Study of R.K. Narayan's *The Guide***Dr. G. Usha Rani**

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Abstract

This study analyses the portrayal of women in Indian culture in R.K. Narayan's novel *The Guide*. Rosie is the major female character. Rosie's transformation from a weak and dependent woman to a powerful and independent woman is a well-known example of the advancement of women in India during that era. Through a careful analysis of *The Guide*, this study increases knowledge of R.K. Narayan's literary works and their impact on society. It also depicts the south Indian middle-class life and it set at the background of Malgudi, the fictional town created by the novelist. The patriarchal structure of the home disadvantages women. Along with being teased, mistreated, humiliated, and mocked, she often experiences psychological and emotional strain. But after colonial rule ended, she became more resilient due to her personal socioeconomic circumstances. She is now financially independent and makes her own choices. Rosie has talent, intelligence, and the ability to make her own decisions. Marco calls her dancing style as "Monkey Tricks", combines street acrobatics with sensual cobras. Rosie with her hard work becomes a great dancer.

R.K. Narayan portrayed Indian women as complex people with distinct needs and goals. He looks at how societal influences, cultural standards, and family expectations affect women's life and limit their freedom of choice. He acknowledges that individuals are powerful and able to fight against the social norms for their better future.

Keywords: Patriarchal, psychological, emotional, socioeconomic, acrobatics**Introduction**

The Guide, written by R.K. Narayan, depicts a different type of woman. A significant female character in this novel is Rosie. Her name is an unconventional, westernized name that reflects her social hybridity, and her exoticism makes her stand out from Malgudi's traditional culture. She is a member of a caste of temple dancers who are hated by society. Even though she is from a Devadasi household, she earns an M.A. in economics. In organized patriarchal Hindu society, her caste and status are not acceptable. As a dancer, her mother aspires for her daughter to live a respectable life. Because she was unable to provide her father's name, she was unable to identify herself socially. Ramesh Dnyate views:

Narayan's ironic intention becomes clear in giving her a characteristically symbolic name. Like the rose, her life remains surrounded by the thorns. Rosie marries Marco, an eccentric anthropologist, through the matrimonial advertisement. She marries Marco for the sake of social prestige that she can enjoy because of her husband's honorable position irrespective of the tastes and likings of the couple.

Rosie and her husband, Marco come to Malgudi from Madras to see a King Cobra and to study the cave paintings. Marco is more interested in the sculptured figures in the caves than in his wife who is a living embodiment of these images. What really Marco wants is a wife like a servant. Marco neglects Rosie totally. He ignores the fact that there is another human being with him. She is given beastly treatment by her husband. Rosie says:

I followed him, day after day, like a dog – waiting on his grace. He ignored me totally. I could never have imagined that one human being could ignore the presence of another human being so completely. I followed him like a shadow, leaving aside all my own pride and self-respect. (151)

Raju is a guide who helps Marco in his research on ancient art and painting in caves and temples. Marco plans to write a book on this subject. He totally disregards his wife's desires. There is complete contrast between Marco and Rosie. Their interests and likings vary from each other. She loves dance. Her veins tingle at the very mention of it. But Marco is not interested in dance, he calls it "street-acrobatics". When Rosie asks Raju to show her a king cobra as she likes to enjoy its dance to the tune of a flute, her husband says:

If it interests you, you can make your arrangements. Don't expect me to go with you. I can't stand the sight of a snake: your interests are morbid. (64)

Marco is constantly preoccupied with his studies; Rosie finds him boring. She despises his terrible fascination with lifeless, frigid stones. The pair is completely at odds with one another. Rosie is dissatisfied and unhappy, and she and Marco frequently fight. Rosie stays at the town's Anand Bhavan Hotel while Marco travels to the Peak House in Mempi Hills to study the old paintings in remote caverns. Marco is completely focused on his research. Raju becomes close to Rosie while Marco is away. She pouts and tells Raju about their mixed emotions. Raju, who is clever and crafty, takes advantage of Rosie's discontent with her married life. She betrays her spouse after falling into Raju's passionate trap. This leads to the disturbance in their married life.

When Marco's neglected Rosie gets close to Raju, they fall in love. When Marco learns of their romance, he seems pretty upset and is prepared to reject Rosie. He says:

You are here because I'm not a ruffian. But you are not my wife. You are a woman who will go to bed with anyone that flatters your antics. That's all. I don't, don't want you here, but if you are going to be here, don't talk. That is all. (152)

Feeling bad about her error, she promises him that she would never again be interested in dancing and that she will be totally devoted to him going forward. For thirty days, she never stops following him up and down the Peak House to the caves. He doesn't pardon her, though. At Malgudi station, their relationship finally ends when Marco tells her he only has one ticket for himself and leaves her there. Marco abandons Rosie and returns to Madras. Under these circumstances she turns up to Raju's house to live with him. But Raju's mother who is an orthodox woman refuses to accept Rosie since she belongs to a low caste. She says to her son Raju:

This cannot go on long, Raju – you must put an end to it.... You can't have a dancing-girl in your house. (153)

When Raju's mother asks Rosie about her father, she is unable to give her father's name because she hails from a family of Devadasis. Rosie says to Raju about her family background.

I belong to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers; my mother, grandmother, and, before her, her mother. Even as a young girl I danced in our village temple. You know how our caste is viewed?... We are viewed as public women.... We are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilized. (84)

Raju's mother wants her son not to have any relation with the dancing women because they are all a bad sort. Rosie faces bitter experience in the house of Raju. She lowers her head in shame and disgust when Raju's uncle speaks of her caste and class insultingly. Raju's uncle says:

Are you of our caste? No. our class? No. do we know you? No. Do you belong to this house? No. In that case, why are you here? After all, you are a dancing-girl. We do not admit them in our families. Understand? (169)

Raju's mother is at first sympathetic to the deserted Rosie, but as the scandal spreads about Raju and Rosie, she asks him to send her away. She calls Rosie a "viper". Contrary to this, Raju lets his mother retreat to her old village, to his uncle. Rosie is now free from all social restrictions and launches herself upon her career as a classical dancer. When Rosie discloses to Raju her ambition to become a famous dancer of Bharatanatyam, he encourages her and helps her in realizing her dream. Rosie, supported by Raju, becomes a professional dancer and thus fulfils her ambition. Raju wants to change the name of Rosie and call her 'Nalini', to be more poetic and significant.

Rosie enters a new phase of life with her new name 'Nalini'. She becomes a famous professional dancer. Her devotion to the traditional Indian classical dance shows her regard and attachment for the traditional culture of the Indian society. She becomes famous by her 'snake dance'. Throughout the novel the image of snake dominates the narrative. In the beginning Rosie comes to Malgudi to see a King Cobra. Raju's mother describes Rosie as a 'snake woman'. She says, "On the very day I heard him mention the "serpent girl" my heart sank." (170). The symbol of snake is further extended in the novel as Narayan creates his most complex woman character Rosie / Nalini. For Krishna Sen, "The symbolism of the snake has far deeper reverberations in the novel."

Rosie as a true artist wants to enjoy every moment of her life. She likes gatherings. She says, "They are people with the blessing of Goddess Saraswathi on them, and they are good people. I like to talk to them" (190). She loses interest in dance when it is commercialized and exploited by Raju for material prosperity. She conveys to Raju, "I feel like one of those parrots in a cage taken around village fairs, or a performing monkey." (203) Though she becomes a famous dancer, she does not forget her husband. One day Marco's photograph appears in the *Illustrated Weekly* of Bombay. She reads about Marco's

achievement, and expresses her desire to have a copy of Marco's book; *The Cultural History of South India*. Rosie could not get away from her guilt even after Marco's exit from her life. She is conscious of her enormous sin and infidelity. She says 'I deserved 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 have done.' (201)

Marco sends Rosie a copy of his new book on the caves he has discovered with the help of Raju. Raju's jealousy surfaces and he hides the book. Raju also betrays Rosie's trust by forging her signature for the jewelry that is sent by Marco. Police arrests Raju on the charge of forgery. Rosie sold her diamonds and gathers all the cash to fight the criminal case against him in the court of law. 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. Despite her efforts to save him he is convicted and sentenced to prison for two years. Though Rosie is an independent and wealthy woman who has carved out a successful career for herself, she remains a believer of Karma. She says, 'I felt all along you were not doing right things. This is Karma. What can we do?' (216)

Though Rosie establishes her own individuality, her inner being has Indian sentiment that finally drives her to her husband Marco. When she decides to return to her husband she says, 'He may not admit me over the threshold, in which event it is far better to end one's life on his doorstep.' (220) Commenting on the situation of Rosie Pavani and Gopal says, 'Rosie is guilt-ridden and how she is conscious of her middle-class status as a wife (21). When Raju is convicted to a jail term, she leaves Malgudi and settles down in Madras independently. Raju knows what Rosie can do:

I feared that, in spite of her protestations to the contrary, she would never stop dancing. She would not be able to stop. She would go from strength to strength. I knew, looking at the way she was going about her business, that she would manage – whether I was inside the bars or outside, whether her husband approved of it or not. Neither Marco nor I had any place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she herself had underestimated all along. (222-223)

Rosie's position among Narayan's women is unique. Rosie is a remarkable blend of tradition and modernity. Ramesh Dnyate rightly observes that "Although she determinedly fights against the slavish tradition, she cannot totally liberate herself, and in final analysis, remains essentially Indian."

In *The Guide*, the relationship between Marco and Rosie is characterized by their indifference to each other. There is complete contrast of interests and likings between Rosie and Marco. Marco is a scholarly and intellectual husband whereas Rosie is an emotional wife. Marco is totally impractical and has no time to think of his wife's burning emotions and passions. He neglects her totally. There is no love, proper understanding and devotion to each other. Rosie neglected by Marco comes closer to Raju who is a guide. They become lovers. Marco abandons Rosie. Raju gives shelter to her. She becomes a famous dancer with the support of Raju. Raju betrays Rosie's trust by forging her signature for the jewelry that is sent by Marco. Though she becomes famous dancer she does not forget her husband. She

is a remarkable blending of tradition and modernity. Marco and Rosie in *The Guide* violate the traditional norms in their relationship. Marco's passiveness and intellectuality clash with Rosie's burning passions and emotions.

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