

A Saga of Positive Search for Excellence: Female's Economic Determination and Controlling Hand in R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*

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ABSTRACT

The concept of new woman is innovated by Ibsen in his A Doll's House. New woman does not revolt against male-oriented society. She attempts to establish her identity in the patriarchal society. R.K. Narayan dealt with modern emancipated woman who proves herself in the society. The alteration of Rosie from a dependent wife to a self-assertive female is indicated with the image of snake. A snake normally sloughs off its old skin and is reborn. Rosie presents her talent as dancer before a dancing snake Cobra. Later when she becomes a popular dancer, her masterpiece is snake dance. This is unique Indian woman, a new and modern woman complex and economically independent purified by a self-imposed penance and completely free from the male-dominated society and definitions of mythical Sita and Savitri.

Key words: Traditional society, Romantic love, Consciousness, Professional dancer, Emancipated woman.

Introduction

Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man, and she has the same right to freedom and liberty as he... by sheer force of a vicious custom, even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not to have.

(Gandhi 26.2)

It is the general place of criticism that Narayan's female protagonists are more charming and more comprehensive than male protagonists. Rosie in R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* has no complementary parts in Indian English Literature. Narayan's female characters have raised voices forcefully and courageously for their rights as well as their honour. Narayan's women are aware of their existence in rigid, orthodox, conservative and traditional society which does not permit described freedom for them.

R.K. Narayan has carved out status for himself in the brilliant company of Indian English Literature. He is seminal figure in this field. His impeccable style of narrative technique of novels has ranked him as one of the best story narrators in India and abroad. Narayan is the minute and exact observer of society showing most realistic images charged with mild irony and light humour. In all novels of R.K. Narayan female characters take an upright position both for alteration and for resistance to alteration. It is revealed through symbols which represent the inner upheavals of the female protagonists who are the creators of new change in society. It is present in Narayan's significant novel, *The Guide* in the portrait of Rosie.

Two significant techniques of characterization appear peculiar in R.K. Narayan's treatment of characters. First, the introduction of women through various raised platforms of closeness and remoteness and this technique is relevant when Narayan deals with the theme of romantic love and it is also a mean by which he analyses the metaphysical trouble recognizing another person. Second, the exhibition of a character through a complex of impersonations

appointed duties or disguises. This is a method which he reveals the theme of females and their obscure social status; it is also perhaps a methodical way of evaluating metaphysical trouble of acquainting oneself.

Methodology: We may start by evaluating Narayan's treatment of female and romantic love. Few females have sober part in his earliest novel. In this part of novels, the members of the family, comprising of grandmother and mother who have established part to frolick, they give a background and safety but it is the peer group that becomes significant in relation to emotional game and peer group consists entirely of boys.

The symbol of snake is enlarged much further in *The Guide* where Narayan makes his most complex female character, Rosie. The complication lies in the fictional part she assumes, and the stage has to accept her individuality. Rosie's past is arranged in the reference of Raju's narration of the incidents of his former life. Rosie says:

I belong to a family traditionally dedicated to the temple as dancers; my mother, grandmother, and before her, her mother. Even, am a young girl, I danced in our village temple, you know how our caste is viewed? We are viewed as public women.

(Narayan 75)

It is in fact when she tries to move external place Rosie's caste becomes ambiguous in respectable society. Two things pull against her fictional role as wife; her requirement for passion and her urgent need to dance both symbolized in the snake dance. Marco, her husband, neither knows, realizes her dance, which he pronounces, "street acrobatics" (Narayan 76), nor her requirements for the delight of living:

What is your interest? Raju asks her, and she answers, anything except cold, old stone walls.

(Narayan76)

Later Raju observes:

She liked to loaf in the market eat in a crowded hotel, wonder about, sea a cinema – those common pleasures seemed to have been beyond her reach all these days.

(Narayan 78)

Marco ultimately discards her, for her love affair with Raju. He states:

You are not my wife; you are a woman who will go to bed with anyone who flatters your antics

(Narayan 107)

The double irony is that Macro narrates this at a point when Rosie herself is ready to abandon and neglect all her desires of a career in dancing but once discarded by Marco, her husband, she has no other alternative but to go to Raju and to live by dancing. When Rosie comes to stay with Raju in Malgudi, her situation becomes even more ambiguous. The uncle from the village puts it cruelly:

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 into our families.

(Narayan 134)

Furthermore, Raju's mother departs with her brother, thus at the same time, Narayan shows a shift in Rosie's, own scale of values. She has an urgent need to dance and to dance professionally she needs a full orchestra and an assembly of hearers. She firmly acts to these ends. By the time she and Raju have selected her a new name, Nalini and views her past life, her caste, the hardships of her married life, appear to be forgotten. By the time she is settled as a great and renowned dancer, there are other substitutes in her life – style and in this way she observes her skill and career which distribute and disunite herself from Raju. Paradoxically, the more she is outside customary social regulations the more traditional her values become. Her friends are artists. They are fortunate and blessed because they have the blessing of Goddess Saraswati on

them, they are sincere people. Raju, however, illustrates them as a jealous lot. These people come to her because they are inferior:

Raju considers that if she recollects Macro at all, it must be with bitterness. On the opposite in backward view, she considers that she may have been misunderstanding her judgement of her husband: Any other husband would have throttled me then and there.

(Narayan 150)

Ultimately, the development of her career fetches her no joy. She feels all the time that she is being dominated:

I feel like one of those parrots in a cage taken around village fairs, or a performing monkey as he used to say...

(Narayan 151)

When Raju is perceived for the not forgery, she states hardly:

I felt all along you were doing right things.

(Narayan 181)

There is the final shift in the way she observes her life after Raju's forgery during the judicial trial of the case and up to the verdict of a judge; by now she seems to be in under restraint over his life, absolutely qualified of gaining enough money to assist herself and Raju as well as pay the lawyers's fees:

...the mastery passed to her.

(Narayan 184)

Still, she professes to Raju that she is unwilling to dance in public places anymore, after her commitments:

I am tired of this circus existence.

(Narayan 196)

Throughout Rosie's role in the novel, there is an incessant polarity and the requirement for respectability described by her own family of dancers and her husband Marco; later the ambivalence between her desire to dance and the unavoidable commercialism of her performances which creates her reject the life of a dancer; the pull between the requirement of her life and the call of her dance. There is an incessant shift of significance within the worth she tries to encircle and resolve. This contest within Rosie is paralleled by the ambiguous retorts she summons.

The predominating feature of the snake-dance is perfectly operated throughout the novel to bring out the ambiguity which is portion of Rosie's make up. The snake dance starts and ends with Raju's attachment to her. On her arrival to Malgudi, her first statement to Raju is that she needs to see a King Cobra dancing, and it is the investigation for the Cobra that first attracts the two together. Marco thinks this an unhealthy interest and denies to go. Raju himself is opposed by the snake but when he observes Rosie's Cobra's motion copying has the natural conviction that she is the superb and outstanding dancer of the nation. And Raju's mother, on knowing this incident, at once takes the decision that Rosie is a "snake-woman", a snake adorer to be distrusted and terrified. She calls Rosie an adder when she goes:

The moment he sets eyes on you he was gone. On the very day I heard him mention the serpent girl, my heart sank.

(Narayan 198)

To the end, Raju's mother believes that Rosie is the chief cause of her son's ruin.

The final performances of Nalini that Raju visualizes also culminates with the snake dance. It is the effect great effect of her dance and music that elevate the Cobra from being an underground creeper into a creature of spirituality, grace and an embellishment of the supreme and unknown authority of the universe. The association between Nalini and the two appearances of the snake is obvious earthiness and enthusiasm abstraction from strong emotion. Raju sees her as if for the first time and completely remembers his mother's warning. He himself realizes to

warn Mani about the seductiveness and cruelty of her beauty but understands at the same time that for the sake of business of her own life and art she discards these qualities behind. Narayan exhibits female characters in his writings with two specific points:

One is to do with the illusion of romantic love and attachment, the other with the illusion of independence from social norms. But finally we must place his treatment of women characters within the context of his main concerns as a novelist: that is, the tension between unique experience and ordered universe, and the loneliness or aloneness of each individual.

(Atma Ram 70)

R.K. Narayan has delineated two sets of women characters, absolutely different from each other. On one side there are those for whom fidelity to valued traditions is a matter of course. Their obedience to consented values and principled domesticity is uninquired. They are essentially ruled and instructed in their day to day experiences by high principles and the gained lore of by gone days. These females, whether dealt as grandmothers, or mothers or housewives. Narayan's prejudices as an author reflect a well explained pattern in his delineation of women characters. To start with these females are not completely conventional type like the other ones. They are separated by their relationships with males other than their relatives. These relationships are artful and diverse.

It is at this time that Rosie chooses to become a professional dancer in the modern world (as distinct that is from belonging to and identifying with a family of temple dancers). As a dancer from her particular background, she straddles the traditional and the modern, she is at the cutting edge of modernizing her profession but close enough to an older tradition, having herself danced in a temple as a child. The change of name from Rosie to Nalini is significant; it suggests splitting or doubling; it generates a complexity of roles, an ambiguity in her shitting (or negotiation) between them. Thus the tension between the life of passion and the need for respectability, represented respectively by her own family of dancers and her husband, Marco; latter the ambivalence between her need to dance; and the inevitable commercialism of her performances which makes her repudiate her life as a professional dancer.

(Srinath 108)

These females are further distinguished by the qualities of modern civilization which adhere to them as dangerous endowments. They immediately charge their surrounding by the zest and hope they present for life, by their soul of insubordination and self-confidence and by the formidable deviation from truth they commit for the gain of corporeal or some other freedom. Observed at from conventional point of view their imprudent courage puts life into disorder for themselves and for others. If enthusiasm and essentiality provide a temporary and exciting terror meaning to their effort at self-confidence, their disillusionment provides meaning to life itself. After a kind of deep somnambulism, they are revived to purified awareness. All women characters develop a studied aversion for the pursuits grasping rule on their brains. They may be pronounced the first few iridescent flowers, empty of scent, in the garden of that mingled culture which developed in the thinking of the Britishers who thought of civilizing the people of India.

These female characters, for need of a better expression, may be announced professionals. They are put aside from the rest by their career – awareness. They surprise us by their capable urge to develop and go ahead. They are more adventurous, less sacrificing. The cardinal virtues of belief, faith forbearance and service to the members of family agitate them little.

Narayan portrays his female characters with condescension, rational sympathy and a profound sense of humour. These females are similarly affectionate, lovable and serve as symbol of the virtue of enduring Indian cultural traditions and ideal values. Howsoever, they may work against the Indian patterns of conduct and they may transgress cherished ideal values of family relations. Narayan, nowhere selects carefully the correcting rod of invectives to flog them into

better sense. Not only so Narayan's attempt is to highlight that custom is an immortal vitality and the sinners must be restored by force of its traces in the individual psyche. So, these females are drawn with slender sensitiveness.

The merit and demerit of these modern women lie in their observing askance at the worthwhileness of present enduring taboos on females and in their energetic inquiry of a meaning and stay in the profits which is shown by the alteration. The high paradox of their lives is that they are sandwiched between the generic enticement of the promoting present and the omnipotence of tradition. Narayan has shown them psychologically and has very skillfully presented their temperamental changes coextensive with the observation they achieve during their search for a purposeful identify. In the greater number of cases these females meet a profound sense of frustration during their adventurism. They are like on ill-punctuated script only with a mark of outcry at the end.

All these modern women have been transported to Malgudi from outside. They are all prey of unhappy situations, great or small.

Results: Rosie has come to Malgudi for a sight-seeing trip with her archeologist husband, Marco. Later on; she too comes down on the stage as a professional dancer. To gain success in her life she wagers her choicest possession of chastity and fetch disgrace upon herself. Rosie first discards her role as a traditional temple dancer and then betrays her husband. She is more educated or well-versed in the manners. Her ardent distaste for and her temperamental maladjustments with purposeless orthodoxies may be marked the effects of formal liberal systematic instruction. If this knowledge effects a broad view, it also generates a looseness in human love. It provides impulse to hedonistic tendency and undeterred free fellowship between the sexes.

One can expect from Rosie who has nourished her mind for education. She is M.A. in Economics and an accomplished dancer. Thus from these common observations and evaluations it may be inferred that Narayan's artistic sensibility achieves a set norm of characterizing these modern women like Rosie. This norm may be called:

A modern, good-looking and educated lady, cut off from family traditions and harassed by annoyances especially her own, moves into wider dimensions of the society in quest of her independent identity, falls a victim to thought of frustration and, after an inner crisis, resolves to her entire consolation to return to her original place of departure.

(Goyal 11)

Rosie, in *The Guide*, belongs to a family of traditional temple dancer. She has danced in many temples during her childhood. Dance is in Rosie's blood. She marries a scholar, much higher in position, rich and intellectual. She breaks the family values to earn the respectable position of a modern married woman, but ideal position, marriage and its authoritative fastening and ideal have been strange to her family. Her following life happens a battleground between her two selves. She decays to harmonize the two circumstances.

Rosie and Marco are an ill agreed pair. Rosie cannot get calm and peace unless she is silent over it. Even a name of dance plunges him in the worst of temper. Marco criticizes dance as 'street acrobatics' highlighting mere shallowness of one's nature. Their tastes are at discord. Moreover, Marco sees his matrimonial accountabilities towards her in his scholarly pursuits. He is spiritless and hardened towards Rosie who happens meditative over the need of the company of one live scholarly husband. Raju, the guide observes this imbalance and conjugal disquiet, and allures the lady's favour by appreciating her skill of dancing. He sustains the promise creating her the queen of the world by establishing her as dancer number one. He receives her round the town, sits and talks with her, cajoles her with so many things. This he works in Marco's absence when he is busy in wall-gazing some fifty odd miles away in his cave analysis. Raju fills the vacuum in Rosie's life. He provides her what she has been distressing for. His hold on her feelings and affections is tightened.

Raju thoroughly authorizes Rosie with false praise and assures of a bright and prosperous future career as dancer. In her frenzied pleasure Rosie most heedlessly throws to the winds the holiness of wedlock. After a long fascination of physical attachment in affection, Rosie one day reminds Raju:

At one time you spoke like a big liar of art,
but now you never give it a thought.

(Narayan 199)

These words sufficiently explain what has been operating at the back of her mind - dance, her only connection with heredity and past. She creates a confession of her sin injudiciously to her husband and then honestly apologizes with sincere grief and unhappiness. But Marco discharges her as a woman who will sleep with anyone that overpraises her antics.

Discussion: She comes back to Raju after her sad abandonment. They commence to live like a married couple. A kind of contact is established between them in which each obliges the other. Raju introduces her skill of dancing to a whole world of praisers. Soon she tastes the delicious flavour of success. When she is at peak point of her career and popularity, Raju is mourned to see a deterioration in her reliance on him. What now important to her is the achievement of perfection in her art of dancing. Her enthusiasm and devoutness to Bharat Natyam fills Raju with astonishment as to his own future because she has been sponging upon her and has rendered himself in competent of any job. His implacable lust for wealth and feverish booking of stage compensations on her behalf breed languor a dangerous heaviness in her. Raju takes over interest for her meets. The same destiny as Marco's anxiety.

Concerned about his future, Raju puts forged signature of Rosie on papers sent by Marco for discharge of Rosie's jewellery. He also hides the book sent by Marco lest it should set her off straight to Marco. In this last phase of their relationship, Raju observes with confused haste, the vibrations of her mood and exclusive devotion to dance:

I was aware that some sort of awkwardness had developed between us.

(Narayan 199)

At this stage of her decreasing interest in him Raju knows:

Neither Marco nor I had any place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she herself had underestimated all along.

(Narayan 199)

Conclusion: After an intense crisis of conscience, she realizes herself truly limited and obliged to Marco. She feels a disgust for her present life. She informs Raju that she is tired of all this circus existence. She returns from Malgudi to live her life henceforth as a renowned and popular dancer and as an honest, regretful wife in anonymity.

In this way we observe that Rosie is able to go beyond Indian orthodox traditional values for achieving her identity and individuality. She proves herself stronger than her companions and ultimately provides the significant reciprocal devotion and submissiveness. Rosie is especially modern young woman for whom the cult of freedom and identity is the highest value in her life.

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