

Portrayal of Women in R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*

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R.K. Narayan is a true artist whose primary business as a writer of novel is to create an aesthetic longing into the heart of the readers rather than to teach or preach them. He is concerned neither with the exposure of the various drawbacks of society nor with highlighting the cause of the downtrodden and the havesnots, nor with the portrayal of spiritualism and inner conflicts; he, like a true artist, is content with only portraying the realistic picture of human behaviour, its various experiences – sweet and sour, rough and sublime.

Great literature lives by virtue of characterization. We remember Shakespeare by his *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello* and many others. Some artists are capable of producing permanent characters that make a niche in memory, but such is not the case with R.K. Narayan. In *The Guide* we have fairly – drawn characters but not the great ones. Except Rosie no character etches out with deep cuttings and carvings on the stone. She has been very vividly drawn with a certain depth. The characterization lacks the multiple focusing, the characters can stand on their own legs and the writer does not do much by way of giving him flesh.

The character of Rosie is not simple but intricate. She is the heroine of the novel. She is present in more than half of the novel. Inspire of her quarrels with her husband she has her loyalties in fact. Rosie is an enigma, not much concerned with her body but with her soul. Deeply concerned with her inner self, she moves with perfect spiritual freedom. She is pathetic, for she has a bruised inward life. She is great despite her being the victim to the search for inward adjustment.

She is damned by the maladjustments in social life. She hates materialism, not much for the fanfare of popularity which she gets. The major strength of her character rests in her inwardness, like that of Helen in *Howards End* of E.M. Forster, though the book reveals the latter with much more greatness than what R.K. Narayan has done to the former.

The novelist has accomplished a great task in building up this enigmatic character. She is very baffling psychologically, for her outward behaviour is not necessarily the index of her inner life. One has to put her under a close scrutinizing autopsy to understand her. The externals in her case do not provide a clue to her real spirit. Even Raju cannot understand her. She is too difficult to be understood by him. Her inward life is much more interesting than her outward life. This lily has been darkly shaded with sinister streaks. It adds to her intricate personality making it a little more to understand her. What she seeks in life is adjustment which is neither here nor there. This character has been banished both from heaven and earth. The undercurrents of her inner life interest the novelist, but the large extent, deplorably, is her externals. At times she appears to be a mature woman and at times a baby which makes the character still more baffling. She is more of a dreamer than real and as such delineated fascinatingly by the artist. She gets severed from her husband and yet has a hope to convert him. As a character she covers many grounds in the novel.

Despite her being the daughter of a dancing caste she has a pure soul, if not the body. The novelist sets the white off against a dark sinister shade. The suggestion is that she is snakish, a snake up the sleeve of one who has to

possess her, a husband or her lover. But it is not true. The tragedy of Raju lies more in his own faults and lacuna and in the rigid frame of society. She is not to be blamed for getting severed from her husband, for he is callous and not of a type which could please the soul of a woman. She is not a snake-woman, but one bitten by the snakes of society and ignored by a husband. The sinister shade cast across her by the novelist is not justified by the fact which refutes this possibility at once.

Her psychic life is interesting from the point of view of its search for adjustment, which is evidently denied to her. In her case the marriage is a failure. Marco, her husband understands the language of the ruins much better than the requisites of a woman's soul. When she should be in the arms of the man, she is appalled to note that he is still poring over the cryptic meanings of the researches in his room. The spiritual void is pathetic indeed. Then she turns towards her lover for fulfillment. The physical fulfillment is gained at his hand, but not the spiritual one because it gets tainted by rank commercialism. It is a threat to her sex life again. She endeavours to seek the psychic solution which is denied to her by the odd circumstances. Rosie is a spiritual failure indeed; she has not been able to adjust herself to the elusive forces of life. Her soul is a round peg in square hole.

On coming into contact with Raju she feels that she has been unbottled, her ecstasy gushing out all frothing, effervescent and buoyant, from the choking atmosphere, but her hopes are soon belied because Raju's disposition is made of material values, for which she has scarcely and need. Her broadly based soul fails to adjust itself in such a case. The theory that if one gets sexually adjusted well nothing else matters seems to have been exploded by Narayan in the novel. Raju's affair with her is just a holiday in the inclement weather of her spiritual life.

She is a quaint admixture of a domestic woman and harlot. She comes up to the principle of D.H. Lawrence that an ideal should have something of a 'harlot' in her. She has it and that in quantity. Inhibitions are none of her concern. She has a free soul and in the hand of a different type in the hand of a different type of artist she might be challenging, Rosie in *Cakes and Ale* of W.S. Somerset Maugham, too generous even in lavishing sexual pleasure to others. The moralist like Narayan curbs this freedom to a large extent. Marco says to Rosie that she is not his wife; she is a woman who will go to bed with anyone that flatters her antics.

He doesn't know that he himself has got to be blamed for her aberration. Rosie is not undomesticated. She cooks meals and looks after the men folks with great domestic care. But she is not a self either. She cannot be used like a chattel. She has a soul after all which gets knocked against the hard granites of life with jagged ends. She believes in karma like a typical Indian. "I felt all along you were not doing things. This is karma." (*The Guide* 193)

As a body, Rosie is immaterial, she is essentially a soul. Her exterior is deceptive, she lives in her aspiration and desire. She may give her body to anyone without caring for it. She gives it to Raju and they live like man and wife outside wedlock. Passion pertaining to body does not perturb her; it is the soul which does. She is an uninhibited creature, and she is bold because of this fact. Her soul gets injured at the hand of her husband and scalded at the hand of her lover. She remains a little indifferent to society, for her real world is that of the inside.

Rosie in certain aspects of her personality appears to be pugnacious, and also sweet. She is seldom normal. She is pugnacious because of the rough treatment she gets from her husband. She scarcely shows any such thing to Raju. Even when she discovers that he is hiding things from her, she adopts a tone which is not

pugnacious. A bruised soul is often pugnacious, and she is one. Pugnacity gets development in her because of her spiritual need warped by Marco.

Though she appears lovely in her yellow crepe saree, she is not a rage by any chance. The way she has been described shows that the writer does not want to present her as an exceptionally pretty woman. The strength of the character lies in the personality of the woman, and not in her physical features. She is a brunette and not a blonde. She is dusky in complexion. She is nice from the point of view of her contours. She has a supple body like that of any woman dancer. It becomes prominent when she dances to the tune of a snake-music.

Rosie's character has been conceived romantically. In body she has been marvelously sculptured. She has a fascinating child-like habit. The character has been delineated by the novelist with the consciousness of feminine rhythm. She is the living music on earth – half plaintive and half-bubbling with life. While viewing her in *The Guide*, we become aware of a certain rhythm in her personality. She is above the common women of our planet. She is half-dream and half-existence. Though she is not very glamorous, she touches us like some warm battery current. This character could only have been conceived by one who is aware of the form like some great sculptor.

The personality of Rosie is action-packed. Something quivers in her like a jelly. In our Indo-Anglican fiction, Rosie, as a character, has a place. She could adorn any gallery of the feminine portraits in any literature. In her action-packed personality she shares some traits of Rebecca (Becky sharp) of W.M. Thackeray in *Vanity Fair*, and that with some advantage. She is not cunning like her. She draws the strength of her personality from some inner saintliness despite the want of chastity. She has been created by the artist on the principle of active life. She is replete with life.

Rosie is a little brash in her behaviour with the people. She is a bold and brash brunette. In this the life element glimmers. It is not to her discredit, but credit. She remains unconcerned with the social impact in her. She beards society in its den. She neither feels elated on success nor feels depressed in the untoward circumstances. She behaves boldly with the people.

Rosie, the dancer is fatigued in the company of a dead, unreal husband who is completely absorbed in his own wanderings into the stone-walls discarding a live, real woman and neglecting her natural passions: 'what is your interest?' Raju asked, 'Anything except cold, old stonewalls' she said (*The Guide* 120). This brings out Rosie's predicament, and it also brings on to the surface the contrast between the mechanical mode of existence, and the living, organic needs of a human-being. Raju comes in between as a symbol of the world outside so full of gaiety and human warmth to invade into the placid, mechanical existence of Rosie. Narayan's story could also be seen as Rosie's struggle to come out of the womb of sterility and darkness into the pulsating air of the blue canopy.

Her marriage with Marco is not a success, but we find something strange in her relation with him. She has been able to strike a spiritual chord, for when disillusioned with the commercial motives of her lover she thinks of him. Still marital relations in this character remain unfulfilled. Bodily she is more married with Raju than with Marco. In certain phases she is even spiritually married to him though not within the legal wedlock. The actual marriage just happens and is not designed by her.

She is interested in the classical dance both on the side of theory and practice. She is devoted to the subject in one way less than her husband to his subject. They should have met on this ground but they don't. Her husband is unimaginative. The tragedy occurs due to the lack of sense of proportion. As a pundit of dance, she studies Natya Shastra of Bharata Muni, a thing as old as thousand years.

Rosie has all the weaknesses of a woman, a human female. Biologically she is a healthy organism. The novelist has conceived this character with a sense of fine delicacy. He adds more romantic colours to her already romantic attitudes. Her intricate personality has been delineated with cantour. The novelist, however, is not interested in the elaborate emotional side of the woman. The social motif soon invades the possibility of an elaborate emotional life. The question of her loyalty to a man lies embedded in the psychological difficulties is essentially a tragic character for the men with whom she comes into contact in the novel are not interested in her emotional life. Marco, her husband remains unconcerned with it, and the commercial perversions of Raju abuse it. She remains above her body which is a trash. Spiritually she transcends her living state. She is an unfulfilled heroine in the sense that she is not lucky enough to find real fulfillment in life. Materialism is none of her concern; it is trash like her body. Her aspirations are nobly pitched. She is the artist who becomes emotionally frustrated. Her tragedy is the failure of an artist. Though Narayan has strained all nerves to depict the character faithfully, it has not been done with that subtlety with which the heroines of some of the great artists, particularly the French, are painted. Here the externals look much more prominent than the inner nuances.

The mother of Raju is a symbol of Indian tradition, one who has lived her life in a hide-bound manner. She is one who cannot understand the liaison of her son with the wife of another person. She seethes with anger though she feels all along that she cannot undo it. When her brother arrives from the village, she gives vent to her inner feelings. She loathes Rosie in the heart of her hearts. While Raju's mother is of one piece, Rosie is the symbol of revolt against the tradition.

Narayan's story has other implications also. Rosie, the dancer is fatigued in the company of a dead, unreal husband who is completely absorbed in his own wanderings into the stone-walls discarding a live, real woman and neglecting her natural passions: "What is your interest? Raju asked, 'Anything except cold, old stone walls'" she said. (*The Guide* 120). This brings out Rosie's predicament, and it also brings on to the surface the contrast between the mechanical mode of existence and the living, organic needs of a human being. Raju comes in between as a symbol of the world outside so full of gaiety and human warmth to invade into the placid, mechanical existence of Rosie, Narayan's story could also be seen as Rosie's struggle to come out of the womb of sterility and darkness into the pulsating air of the blue canopy.

As a craftsman Narayan develops his characters well. The coverage of the novel is wide indeed and it needs a variety which is supplied by him with the variety of characters. Every single character is led to his destiny as he deserves. The principle of poetic justice is observed by the writer in the building of the various characters. They have clear distinction of individuality about them. Some of them have been drawn intensely and some not. The major characters naturally receive the best strength of the talent of the writer. Genius Narayan is not. He achieves effects through labored contrivance, through the art of narrative is powerful enough which redeems him from this shortcoming. Except the character of Rosie which is roundish all are flat. Even the hero has been drawn flatly.

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