

The Archetypal Indian Woman in R. K. Narayan's "The Guide"

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Abstract: The paper presents R.K.Narayan's effort to redefine the position of women in the society that has always constricted their opportunities. His feminist sensibility lies in allowing her heroine to explore her talent rather than reducing her to an ideological position prescribed by society. This paper tries to observe the character of Rosie and trace the evolution that she goes through in the novel "The Guide" by R.K.Narayan.. She obtains her freedom and moves all over India alone doing her own work. As a result of her bold actions, it is often thought that she is very different from common Indian women. I have tried to show that in reality she is just like our diverse Indian culture which conceives both traditional and modernity. She may seem ahead of her time but certainly contemporary. In fact her hegemony somehow forecasts the evolution of women's role in the Indian society. Rosie in this aspect stands as an archetypal Indian woman. Thus even today's modern Indian women can identify themselves with Rosie.

Key Words: Culture, Hegemony, Identity, Evolution, women, power, education, assertive

The Guide is Narayan's most famous novel in which he portrays the character of a woman who defies almost all traditional codes for women and comes out full way to establish herself as a human being. Rosie, an M.A. in economics, challenges the orthodox Hindu concept of what a woman should be. The impression keeps on reverberating due to the complexity of Rosie's character. "I couldn't understand her" (Narayan, 119)- says Raju about Rosie in his narration to Velan. The readers of the novel too feel alike. She challenges the Hindu orthodox stereotype of how a woman should be and yet a part of her complex nature is intensely orthodox. In her we can see a woman trying desperately to free herself from the pigeonhole, at the same time allowing the doors of patriarchy to enclose her.

The author portrays her character with all his sympathy, exposing the hypocrisy of the patriarchal society and showing how miserable the condition of even a highly educated woman was in that society and at the same time showing women gradually getting conscious of their personalities and demands. Rosie gives more importance to the gratification of her personal interest than to the observation of social codes for women. She ignores the taboos and other social practices that thwart her independence and moves on in her own way with her back to the society's reaction and criticism.

Her name is only a starting point of her unorthodox life. She traditionally belongs to a Devdasi family who are dedicated to the temples as dancers. They are viewed in the society as of low class women. Yet she acquires a University degree, which is not only unconventional but almost revolutionary. She also looks for ideas in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Even employs a pandit to explain the old Sanskrit verses. Thus we realize that Rosie not only has bookish knowledge but can blend her knowledge with her art like a truly educated person.

Next is the author's portrayal of the character of Rosie further questions the position of women and exposes the cruelty and inhumanity of the male dominated Indian society. Rosie is an educated woman but her education fails to promote her status and gives her a better position in the society. As she said in the novel "We are viewed as public women. We are not considered respectable; we are not considered as civilized". Moreover Marco never treats her as a human being who has some individual expectations from her life. His male ego coupled with his pride of his knowledge makes him blind to the fact that Rosie is not an artifact to be put and showcased in the bed room. She is his wife who deserves a happy conjugal life. Rosie finally comes out of this society that treats women as dolls and tries to stand on her own feet.

By throwing both Marco and Raju away from her life, Rosie strongly defies the well-defined place of women in Malgudi where a woman is never allowed to go on her own way, but is made to remain a puppet. An inner strength, until unseen and undiscovered by herself, leads her to soar so far out of Marco's and even Raju's reach that neither Raju nor Marco can control her. Raju at last comprehends that "she would never stop dancing ... 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.” ."(Narayan, 223)

Thus Rosie, at the end, portrays a very strong character. She has the ability to come out of the clutches of indifferent and exploitative men. She breaks the unfair social rules that try to bind her and her art. Most of all she establishes her own identity through her art. Thus she actually can be seen as the forerunner of today's confident and hardworking Indian women who are also sensitive and respectful towards their tradition. They take care of their work and family together. They follow the tradition but don't hesitate to break it and create new norms when it seems to block their path of self development. Rosie is truly a precursor of this new age. The Guide is remarkable because it gives an element of agency and shows a woman's ability to come out of the clutches of both an indifferent husband and an exploitative lover. This is a very different Indian woman, a new woman complex, and independent purified by a self-imposed penance and free from the patriarchal descriptions of mythical Sitas and Savitris that have fettered Indian women for centuries.

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