

Topic - The concept of New Women as revealed through Rosie's character in R.K. Narayan's novel 'The Guide'

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Abstract: *This paper deals with the concept of new women as revealed through Rosie character in the novel 'The Guide' by R. K. Narayan. The concept of New Women is first invented by Ibsen in his A Doll's House. New Women is not one who revolt against the patriarchal system through her protest but one who try to establish her identity in this world. And R. K. Narayan is such a novelist who has dealt with such a new women who establishes herself in the society but fails to establish herself in marital society.*

I. Body

In Narayan's canon the women can be seen to go through a process of evolution, if we study closely the four different novels of Narayan – *The Dark Room* (1938), *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Guide* (1958), and *The Painter of Signs* (1976). The women character in *The Dark Room* is a traditionally suppressed housewife, submitting to the demands of patriarchal, Shanti in *Mr. Sampath* and Rosie in *The Guide* reflect the true blending of the traditional and the western culture. In *The Painter of Signs*, the transformation gets complete when we encounter daisy who with her sexual frankness and individual stubborn identity surprises us by her western motives. Thus Rosie is a character who represents the middle phase of the female evolution describing the so change under the impact of west. She belongs subtly to "feminist" phase (1) indicating the clash between the male and female class and yet she never leaves the traditional norms and never does she breaks free of it. Tragically she is the heroine who can not follow her art successfully to the destined end.

Rosi. like Raju is as multi-faceted a personality, who moves from being a Debdasi, to an highly educated girl, then to a housewife rejected by her husband and finally establishes herself as a professional dancer. In spite of her fully gained independence, she often regrets for her failed marriage. She seems to be at the same time conservative and self-assertive- challenging the orthodox Hindu conception of what women should be and yet a part of her is intensely orthodox. She claims her identity clearly by stating – 'that she is a Devdasi'(2). Rosie, the traditional name is a maker of Rosie's social hybridity, expressed in the novel. She belonged to a class and caste outside the compass of organized patriarchal Hindu society. She hails from family of Devdasi -

"I belong to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers..... w are viewed as public women....we are not considered respectable: w e are not considered civilized"(3).

Yet she obtains an M.A in economics and as a result she discards the convention and enters in matrimonial agreement with Marco. But to her utter shock that he is more interested in the sculptured figures on walls and stones in caves, that in his wife who is the living embodiment of these image. Dead and decaying things have attracted him, but nothings that live and move and swing their heads. In this state of mind she meets Raju who pretends to have the desire of the woman. Even Raju's mother is critical to the identity of hers, warning Raju of the bad influence, "...don't have anything to do with this dancing woman. They are all a bad sort"(4)

Rosie's association with Nature shows that it is the only recluse and relief of her life to which she claims, "I am prepared to spend the whole night her...Here at least we have silenced and darkness, welcome things.... Her quick association with a night, with the jungle and wide Mampy hills gives character a new dimension which relates to "echo feminism" and like Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*(5), she is at ease with Nature.

But the most crucial comparison in the novel comes when Raju narrates te scene in which Rosie watches the King Cobra to dance. Rosie's attraction to the snake and her performance of the snake dance are richly symbolic and suggestive. Like the snake which belongs to the world of undergrounds, Rosie too belonged to the socially stigmatized class of Debdasi's reforming herself like the snake to become closer to Lord Shiva-Natarraj. The spiritual transformation is therefore evident here and it is cleared that the metaphor of dance rightly associated with Rosie, giving her a new life and new identity. With Rosie, it is her deep love for dance that brings troubles into her life. She gets frustrated with Marco because he forbids her to dance and get duped by Raju because she appreciates her dancing. However, Rosie's attitude to dance is completely different from Raju's. For Raju, dance is a cultural commodity which can be exploited for money and fame. For Rosie, dance is a vocation symbolizing her independent attitude and being nearer to God.

The transformation of Rosie from a dependent housewife to a self-made woman is indicated with the image of a snake. A snake generally sloughs off its old skin and is reborn. Rosie herself shows her talent as dancer before a dancing cobra. Later when she becomes a famous dancer, her masterpiece is the 'snake-dance'. Raju's mother totally misunderstands the dancer's aesthetic appreciation and calls her 'serpent-girl'(6). Rosie's spiritual transformation is signified in the changing of her name from 'Rosie to Nalini'. Raju compares this change to a kind of reincarnation. Nalini means 'Latus' which rises from the mud, indicating her past life. Through the change of her name, she symbolically seeks an entry into the orthodox society that reject her creativity which is expressed in her dance.

Rosie is an artist par-excellence. She has an aesthetic sense and wishes to nurture it. She is of creature of course, grateful to Raju who has made her national celebrity as the greatest dancer of Bharat Natyam. But the same Raju remains responsible for the abrupt end of her career. He has made her dancing art a commercial venture tainted with the vices of cheap popularity. The loud fanfare with which it storms, defeats the very purpose on which Rosie is so keen. And yet she shows a remarkable consideration for Raju. She slogs day in and day out, parts with her diamonds and gives dance performance enough to raise funds to satisfy an expensive lawyer to save him from imprisonment. And Raju, instead of feeling grateful, grows jealous of her self-reliance. Raju later admits 'Neither Marco, nor I had any place in her life'(7).

Rosie's character has not been projected from her point of view as **Narayan** never intended it to be a dialogue on feminism. **Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak** has charged **Narayan** for making Rosie the heroine of a sentimental tragi-comedy rather than exposing through her situation the evils of Debdasi system(8). She cites this as an example of **Narayan's** "patriarchal hypocrisy". But if we analyze, we will find that Narayan is more specific in portraying the social aspect of the times in which women like Rosie are a part playing and trying to become independent. He never thought in the broader sense of feminism and hence as a social portraiture, Rosie's character stands unique.

In contrast Marco is portrayed as cultural and broadminded in the sense that he accepts Rosie, but he can not go beyond the typical males dominating their wives. A woman is not gadget by any chance is evidently revealed in Rosie who is replete with desires and spirits. And hence there are bickering in the married life of Rosie and Marco. **Som Dev** rightly remarks "**If Rosie is driven to the arms of a stranger, it is partly not her fault. Had he considered the basic needs of the woman whom he takes for a wife. He has offered insult to the womanhood and in turn womanhood in Rosie raises its hood to leave 'fangs marks' on him**"(9).

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. Though like Savitri, Nalini remains fitful to her husband by carrying out his book amidst all the riches of her house, and like Sita, she submits herself to a self-imposed 'agnipariksha' by paying off all Raju's loans, however once the sentence of Raju is pronounced her duty is done, and she is able to overcome the temptation of money, fame and physical desire. If Raju is actually perceived as a saint at the end then, the reader is also invited to witness, Rosie, Nalini's beautification, on her own terms. 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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