



# NO MORE OF 'NUNNERY': A PERSPECTIVE OF R.K. NARAYAN IN THE GUIDE

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**Abstract:** Infidelity of women is a recurrent topic throughout fiction. Attitude towards this infidelity always mark a woman with grave accusations. In human history to look for love or comfort elsewhere when it is lacking in your own home or to take a stand for yourself against the attitude of your partner is forbidden. Look what happened to Ophelia when she returned all the favors made by Hamlet in order to break off what they had, she was asked to leave for a 'nunnery.' She was called an immoral and cold-hearted beast. It gave rise to wild speculation among readers. This paper discusses R.K. Narayan's efforts to redefine the stand of women in society in the 1960s through his character Rosie in *The Guide*. It exhibits the helplessness or deprecated situation of women under the purview of a patriarchal society. Throughout his fiction, Narayan held Rosie in defense of her actions. He did not approve of the socially approved method of subduing women by denying them decision-making powers, dignity, pride and self-esteem.

**Index Terms -** *Infidelity, feminism, Indian women, marriage*

## I. INTRODUCTION

'Go thee to a nunnery,' is a phrase which has marred all literary scholars for a lifetime. This insult was shoved in the face of Ophelia by Hamlet in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. The anger was a clear eruption from betrayal which Hamlet felt abruptly. He shouts, "be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow," or if not, "marry a fool" who would not be wise enough to understand "what monsters you make of them." Throughout literary history, intentional-unintentional betrayal by women seeps through pages like a dark stain. But all of them had one outcome which was women being declared as immoral pests. Ophelia was commanded by her father Polonius to stop associating herself with Hamlet. As all he gave her were his false vows and rebuff his affections. With a heavy heart at all the memories she had with Hamlet, she returned his trinkets and presents. Just to be slayed to death by his sharp words.

The 'nunnery' fate of Ophelia has troubled majority of us. Our conscious recurrently told us that Ophelia didn't deserve this, it seemed a bit rushed and uncalled for and her death made her seem an even weaker character. All of these troubled thoughts were calmed by R.K. Narayan through his character Rosie of *The Guide*.

To visualize the acceleration of the race around comes in the purview of R.K. Narayan. His times were demanding an expression of women's domestic, spatial and societal roles. With the waves of feminism in India, he took charge to redefine the position of women in a society that has always constricted their opportunities to think freely. He hoisted the flag of the 'Women's Liberty Movement' through his novels. In *Hamlet* itself, on the one hand, Shakespeare sends Ophelia to a 'nunnery' and on the another, calls the man a 'piece of work'. This latter expression reaches a boundless and perennial summit in the 1960s. R.K. Narayan breaks through the perspective and lands on the conclusion that there shall be no nunnery for women.

## II. THE CHARACTER OF ROSIE IN THE NOVEL

*The Guide* is often considered to be centered around the transformation of Raju from a tourist guide to a spiritual guide. Equally, it discusses the journey of Rosie, a devadasi woman who completes her M.A. in Economics and leaps out of the temple zone to the art of dancing on a bigger platform. The artist in her remains alive and creates dimensions unforetold.

Born and brought up in a traditional family, the first responsibility (as per societal norms) of Rosie was to settle in a marital bliss which comes her way through the union with Marco, a historian, much passionate about his research work. Together they go to Malgudi, a much-renowned setting town of R.K. Narayan's fiction which develops as time changes. Society has a discotheque and Malgudi too has the same. Society has new colonies and Malgudi too has that. Youth is attracted to the Bombay film world and Malgudian Balu, a young boy, and a Financial Expert breaks the limits of his region and reaches the film city- only to return empty-handed. Rosie in *The Guide* does not opt for Bombay but engraves a zone for herself in Malgudi first. Later on, her landscape spreads hues outside.

After stepping onto the railway platform of Malgudi, Marco asked for Raju, the railway guide. It was a common factor among all the passengers who boarded a train to Malgudi because Raju was a well-known man in the area. He inherited a cemented government canteen on the platform but his interest lay in being a guide. He clearly justified his role by being an efficient guide to Marco and Rosie. The motive behind Marco's visit was an expedition for new findings on the cause of the Mempi hills. Due to obvious reasons, he was accompanied by his wife Rosie.

All through the day, Marco stayed in the caves. Clearly, Rosie was being ignored by him and expressed her keenness for going around. Raju and Gaffur, the taxi driver took her to various places. One day, Rosie demanded to see the movements of a snake so that she may dexterously work her movements of the dance like a snake. Later on, this dance of hers gained much popularity. Raju himself is finally settled, living as per the norms of life with a circle of friends and relatives, magazines, newspaper reading material at hand and above all, keenness to interact as the guide, better known as 'Railway Raju'.

As luck would have it, he comes across Rosie to attract her with the charisma of his colorful life. His charm was such that Marco accepts him as a family member. Marco was absolutely an ignorant and dull man. All that he could do was copy ancient things and write about them. Even buying a railway ticket was 'monumental' to him. R.K. Narayan depicts his mentality to save Rosie from any approach to her as a negative role: "Perhaps he married out of a desire to have someone care for his practical life, but unfortunately his choice was wrong - this girl was herself a dreamer..." (113, The Guide) Rosie needed a husband who would have supported her career. While Marco arrogantly told her that she was not a perfect dancer. Soon Rosie and Raju got intimate with each other, to the extent that Rosie quarrels with Marco. In contrast to this in Kamala Das's autobiography My Story, we find that she had no agency when she was married off at the age of 15. The love and the sexual fulfilment that she desired were not met by the man that was chosen for her. So she decided to look for it elsewhere. Even though her extramarital affairs often replicated the structural violence and indignity of her marriage, she at least found an agency in the act of "seeking" or "looking" for love elsewhere.

In the article 'Women And Infidelity: Perspectives On Cheating In A Rigged Game by Debabratee Dhar' we get acquainted with a statement that infidelity is not a social problem, nor is it a crime. It could be an indication that a relationship is no longer functional. Taking support from this, we can clearly observe the marital relationship between Rosie and Marco was no longer functional. Perhaps, a certain degree of helplessness can be attributed to Rosie who was ignored by her partner. Marco clearly prioritizes his historical expedition over Rosie. He desired somebody similar to Joseph, "That Joseph is a wonderful man' I don't see him, I don't hear him but he does everything for me at the right time. That's how I want things to be, you know. (Narayan 127) There was undoubtedly no respect he held for Rosie to discourse freely.

No wife in the 1960s, with much interest in academics and art, would be easily ready to play such a role. "A chaste woman is not only proud of herself, but of her loyal husband. The bond between the two is enduring and based on mutual respect. If a man is jealous, he will undermine his standing before his wife, and lose her adoration." (Of Marriage, Bacon) In support of this, Francis Bacon gives the example of Ulysses who valued his wife more than an immortal life. In the same vein, the woman also courts and regarding chastity.

### III. NO NUNNERY FOR ROSIE

Richik Banerjee justifies 'no nunnery' for Rosie by stating, "With Marco, as her husband, it is a forceful act for her. She suffers a lot inwardly while facing a heavy defeat on her theatre of will. Marco's need for Rosie epitomizes the cultural logic of male-infested agencies of the time having a phallic role to play in the decision of familial unity, though the perpetrator is actually a victim of his gaze, both spiritually and mentally. Marco's treatment of his servant Joseph parallels his treatment of Rosie, "I don't see him, I don't hear him but does everything for me at the right time. That's how I want things to be" (Narayan 127)"

Raju confesses, 'She allowed me to make love to her of course, but she was also beginning to share excessive consideration for her husband on the hills. (119, The Guide) Raju ironically thinks of this sentence. Secondly, her sanctity carries dubious value when she uses 'I have to respect'. Thus, forcible acceptance exposes itself. Not only this but she starts crying that after all Marco is her husband: "What husband in this world would let his wife go and live in a hotel room by herself, a husband miles away?"(120) To clear that an opinion is uttered by Gaffur: "oh, modern girls are very bold. I would not let my wife live in a hotel room all by herself..." (115, The Guide)

She continues questioning if it is not a wife's duty to take care of her husband. As Raju concludes; 'Her art and her husband could not find a place in her thoughts at the same time; one drove the other out'.(122) As a perfectionist she gets books on dancing. She believes that a new phase is being added to her life. R.K. Narayan, once again, saves Rosie from any negative charge. If we look closely into the events of the novel, we will find that Marco's obsession and abnormal trust are much more responsible than that Rosie's guilt. Rosie, who is young and beautiful, has a husband who does not care for his wife's emotions.

This is the extraordinary dimension of R.K. Narayan's depiction. Rosie is right in her way but not good in the opinion of many others. Amid multiple accusations, many support Narayan to defend all her sexual aberrations. 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).

A lacuna on the part of men troubling women is traced in Narayan's early novels as well. The Dark Room is the third novel by R.K. Narayan. There also R.K. Narayan infuses a masterly study about women. Savitri, the central figure is married to a semiliterate rich man working in an Insurance Company. When she dresses properly she becomes a cynosure of all eyes and her husband takes pride in that. Some of his complexions make him never appreciate her devotion to family. A man of irritation, he creates some cause of tiff or the other. Out of all this, one day she goes to commit suicide and her luck fails her. She was saved by some rustics who were put in a temple to serve God. There also a nice comparison is made between a weak woman and a strong woman. The village women help her go back. The writer does not consent if, after the tiffs with her husband, she would 'sulk' or not- she would go to a 'nunnery' or not. Here too Savitri is adjudged as pious and simple. Her husband has an extramarital relationship as well.

The plea of R.K. Narayan is that to same 'nunnery' for no reason, women ought to be self-defiant. In The Guide, the expression self-defiant touches the brim of self-reliance. Rosie comes to that zone of life.

Another critic, Bhagwat S. Goyal called, "Raju, Rosie and Marco become temporal symbols of cultural ethos.' He added, "While Marco's aspirations seek their fulfilment in unearthing the buried treasures of India's rich cultural part, Rosie's longing seeks satisfaction in the creative channels of classical art in midst of an ever-present live audience... Rosie is a cultural ambassador of the present, and Raju is a cultural prophet of the future." According to the critic, these are playing a very rich role in their dreams or passion. Leaving behind the practical mass-oriented approach, their appreciation for passion is supreme.

C.P. Sharma says, "Through Rosie, Narayan seems to set an example of a newly liberated woman in post-independence Indian society. She is the 1 representative of a new class of women, released from the conventional confinement of the house to join colleges and universities to acquire formal education" (Sharma 108)

The critic here points out the logic of Narayan. Thus, Rosie is a representative character. Marco marries a devadasi girl to prove his humanitarian outlook in life. This is not a weak step. A rare devoted person alone would do that. In his findings, C.P. Sharma also finds Rosie as a woman devoted to a career who has an understanding of what to do dwindling often between his duty and passion.

Harish Raizada comments Rosie, a romantic girl with an inborn passion for dancing cause a passionate, gay and thrilling life...(Raizada 130) Nevertheless, as her husband is devoted to his research, she creeps into another world when all her passion is met with. This passion of educated women is depicted in *The Dark Room* as well.

Anup C. Nair analyses the attitude of Rosie as a matter of practical needs: 'When Rosie expresses her heart's desire to earn fame by being a dancer, her mother tells her that with a background like hers, she would find it difficult to survive respectfully... Once she gets out of this atmosphere by marrying a respectable person she would be able to fulfil her heart's desire.' (Nair 70)

Anup C. Nair is the only critic to accept that Marco is made a scapegoat. Consequentially, Raju too. This is not untrustworthy in India where the nuptial bond is one of the outlets to meet the desired ends. A safety valve is a marital system but difficulties arise when bone sifts into a bottleneck and the suffers suffocate. In fact, her dignified and noble behavior brings out our sympathy. She embodies the Feminine Principle of ideal womanhood; She projects her principle of ideal women-lord, but the cause of life is not so easy for her. She dwindles badly to the extent of disturbing the lives of two men, one mother and self. In a way a sense falls on two families but no doubt. She is an achiever of the goal set for life.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

R.K. Narayan portrays the character Rosie as a typical Indian woman who loves her husband despite his entire fault and always feels proud of her husband. She appreciates her husband but her needs are more renowned herself. Thus, the settlement goes out of life.

Throughout the fiction of R.K. Narayan, the women characters have a sympathetic touch. He is the 'Mr Sympath' of modern India. In the last novel of his, *Grandmother's Tale*, Bala is an epitome of sufferance at large. Man enwraps himself in uncontrollable desires. The novel has an autobiographical element. R.K. Narayan travelled abroad. He was in regular contact with Graham Greene. He perceives what many hours thought of Bala' obviously a formative influence on him. For him, man is not all good and woman is not all bad. Rosie wants growth and the circumstances allow the circumference to move unhindered.

R.K. Narayana extends a good opinion of Rosie and allows her a fooling on humanitarian grounds. Undoubtedly, this is a safeguard for her as done by the novelist. This is the main feature of R.K. Narayan that he does not attach purely negative hues to cons a character. Their psychology and circumstances are knit into a wave which guides them to the shore. Rosie is not to face quarrels only but also have a surrounding of colour in life with the beads of dancing. No woman deserves the insult of 'Nunnery.'

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