

## **Exploration of Patriarchy with reference to the woman characters in R.K. Narayan's novel *The Guide*.**

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### **I. Introduction**

Colonial power and the capitalist economic system had a tremendous impact on indigenous women's lives. In pre-colonial times, indigenous men and women often had different, but valuable roles in society. But in European culture, men were seen as superior to women. In the chapter "The Psychology of Colonialism: Sex, Age and Ideology in British India" of his book *The Intimate Enemy*, where Ashis Nandy explores the psychological costs of colonialism faced by both the ruler and the ruled, with particular reference to the Indian subcontinent in the past two centuries, he talks about how British in India structured their imperial hegemony on the polarity- the ideal of masculinity versus femininity. Although, India too had its myths about good and bad androgynes and its ideas about valuable and despicable androgyny, under the influence of British stereotypes the balance among the three elements of Hinduism - purusatva (the essence of masculinity), naritva (the essence of femininity) and klibatva (the essence of hermaphroditism) was altered. This was done so that the masculine and aggressive aspects could be asserted against the "virility" of the British culture. As colonial policies and practices tried to end indigenous beliefs, customs, language and culture, this led to the downfall of the indigenous women's role and position in the society. This continued even after colonized nations like India attained freedom in the twentieth century.

Patriarchy is described as a society where the supreme authority is vested in the hands of males of the family, due to which a kind of hierarchical and hegemonic relationship is formed between the two biological sexes over time. But, it is observed that such a system is not biological but a social construction. Females are considered as mere sexual objects and their wishes, feelings and desires are not taken into consideration. They have to undergo a lot of misery and exploitation in different fields and phases of life. This paper is an attempt to analyze how R.K. Narayan portrays such a patriarchal system in the novel *The Guide*. If observed carefully, one finds that the submissiveness of women and their act of giving themselves away to be controlled in the hands of the males is equally responsible for empowering the already existing system of patriarchal dominance. It is a system where males hold the authorial power of the family as well as society. Gulnaz Fatma says that as per standard sociological theory, "patriarchy is the result of sociological constructions that are passed down from generation to generation." The term signifies oppression of women by men, usually older men. Patriarchy literally means "the rule of the father" and comes from the Greek word '*patriarkhēs*', "father or chief of a race". Sociologist Sylvia Walby has composed six overlapping structures that define patriarchy and take different forms in different cultures and different times: 1) the state, where the women are unlikely to have formal power and representation. 2) the household: Women are more likely to do housework and raise the children, 3) violence, where women are more prone to being abused, 4) paid work: Women are likely to be paid less, 5)sexuality, women's sexuality is likely to be treated negatively, 6) culture where women are misrepresented in media and popular culture. Women have suffered two levels of suppression: 1) colonial and 2) patriarchal. Suppression, ill-treatment and exploitation of women in a patriarchal society have always prevailed as a subject matter in Indian fiction since the beginning. Narayan, in the novel, depicts such a society where males have an oppressive and dominating attitude towards women.

R. K. Narayan, who along with Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand formed the holy trinity of Indian English Literature, was also one of the most popular Indian novelists and a postcolonial writer. His masterpiece, *The Guide* (1958), which brought the author the 1960 Sahitya Akademi Award for English has abounding postcolonial elements. The novel was written between 1956 and 1958 when Narayan was in the United States. It is in the form of an autobiography. Raju, the hero of the novel, starts his youth by taking up his father's job as a food vendor in the railway station after his death. Then life goes on to make him a tourist guide who is also a

skilled manipulator and earns him more than what he deserves, a dancing girl's manager who then turns a swindler for her as well. After being freed from prison, Raju at last dies as a martyred *swami* (the ascetic who was obliged to undertake a twelve-day fast to end a drought that threatened the district with a famine). The story followed Raju along a curiously woven time sequence and the author skillfully makes use of the flashback technique in the novel. *The Guide*, one of the best novels in English language, became a bestseller in the West as well as in India. The enormous success of the novel resulted in the film version and Dev Anand produced it in Hindi and Pearl S. Buck in English. *The Hindi Guide* (as it was titled), was directed by Vijay Anand, with music by S. D. Burman. The film won Narayan the Film Fare Award for the best story.

In the portrayal of a society in South India prevailing in the latter half of the twentieth century (as the book was published in the year 1958), although Narayan made an attempt to create female characters who are not passive and refuse to swallow their sufferings without any complaints unlike the female characters in various other Indian novels, they are still women who were trapped in a patriarchally conventional world where they were bound by responsibilities and obligations to serve the family and males. Rosie, the female counterpart of Raju in the novel, agrees to get married to Marco as her mother sees this as the only way for Rosie to rise in her societal position. The desires and emotions of women are crushed by men, sacrifice being made as an inherent quality in them, which is actually an imposition through manipulation. It is so ideologically manipulative and this manipulation is exercised so much and in so many different aspects everyday with them while they're growing up that it is internalized in them without their knowledge. They end up compromising their space, body, voice and rights and also start exercising the same in the next generation.

In a patriarchal society, a woman's strength or voice is always tried to be killed. She is made to obey her husband's orders which is also perceived in the story when Rosie obeys Marco's orders and decides to stop dancing because he does not want dancers at home. The sense of patriarchal interpretation also gets infused into the minds of women who themselves have no high thoughts of their own category. Even though Rosie was aware of her capabilities and had dreamt of being on stage before she was married, it was Raju who dreamt of making her the greatest dancer and had immense faith in her talent, and not she. If not for Raju, Rosie couldn't have attained the heights in her career that she had because she never thought of taking up dance as her career after marriage. Talking about the male attitude towards women, women were never seen as someone who should be respected and whose feelings and desires should be attended to. This was the prior reason behind the split in Rosie and Marco's marriage. Marco came to Rosie only when he wanted to and never bothered about the desires and wishes of Rosie. Narayan portrayed the images of submissive and docile women like Raju's mother who is depicted as subdued, silent woman and who can never go against the men in the family and always need the help of one to put forward whatever she has to say. We see Raju's mother inviting her brother to solve the problem within the family. Here, we can see the woman being dominated by Raju as well as her brother even after her husband's death. Even though Raju has great regard, respect and immense love for his mother, it is he who should take the decisions in the house after his father's death and not his mother.

Women are so conditioned by society that they believe in these social conventions. Women experience continuous insecurity in such a male-centered and male-dominated society and therefore desires for male support. This is evident when Rosie desires for Marco's love and wants to become the mother to his child. Rosie was a well educated person and Raju was not. Yet, Rosie needed the support of Raju, a male after she left her husband. She came to Raju's door. Indian society is never easy with a woman who is divorced or has left her husband's place and come back home. Neither is it easy for the unmarried women of marriageable age as well. Even the uneducated men are considered superior to the educated women and hence, the women seek shelter and support of these men. Although Rosie has a post-graduation degree she is never corrupted with modern and materialistic desires and greed. She earns but does not hanker after money. She is a "traditional" Indian wife, and she longs for affection and care from her husband. She cannot adjust with her archeologist husband, Marco who pays no heed to her existence and emotions. Marco dislikes being disturbed by anyone, even his wife, in his studies and professional activities. Rather he longs for appreciation of his achievements from his wife. This difference in their personalities and the way they see life and want to live it, is the cause of quarrel between Rosie and Marco. When Marco left Rosie at Malgudi and took the train back to his home, she came to Raju's house for shelter. Seeing her coming to the house alone in the evening, Raju's mother was awed.

The very first question she asked was, 'Who has come with you, Rosie?' Rosie blushed, hesitated and looked at me. I moved a couple of steps backward in order that she might see me only dimly and not in all raggedness. I replied, 'I think she has come alone, mother.' My mother was amazed. 'Girls today! How courageous you are! In our day we wouldn't go to the street corner without an escort. And I have been to the market only once in my life, when Raju's father was alive.' (Narayan, 141)

Here, there is a difference in attitude as well as temperament. Raju's mother is a traditional Indian Hindu woman who has never received any public exposure. She has spent her whole life within the four walls of the house prohibited and hence is afraid to go out alone. But Rosie is a modern woman. The western influence is evident in her attitude, behaviour and temperament. She is not afraid to go out alone.

From the social point of view *The Guide* not only depicts Indian society, its customs, traditions, culture, ostentatious, superstitions and religious faith, but also presents a conflict between the traditional and modern values which are symbolised by Raju's mother and his maternal uncle on the one hand and by Raju and Rosie on the other. Raju's mother views Rosie as a 'snake woman' and a seductress, who has lured Raju into her hold. Railway Raju can be considered as a character representing the typical Indian individual in the post-independence era who was caught in between tradition and modernity. So was Marco and the whole society. The name changing of Rosie to Nalini can be symbolic of this. The same Rosie who was shunned as a devadasi by those who swore by their traditional norms, was reborn Nalini, the respected classical dancer. Raju was critical of the age-old institutional values, albeit he himself was deeply rooted in the family tradition. Rosie's caste affiliation was attacked by the general people as 'public woman' but Raju negated the prevalent mode of thinking and asserted that Rosie's caste was 'the noblest caste on earth.' But even then patriarchy was still existing. There was an instance where Raju wanted Nalini to stop talking to the artists who would wait all day to meet and talk to her. Nalini did not have control over her own life even after she became a big star. Raju had more power managing her than her being the dancer and the actual bread earner. He wanted her to get ready because his friends were visiting them. Even before getting married to Raju Rosie was expected to conform to the duties of a housewife. This is the scenario in India even now when a working woman is expected to maintain a balance between her professional and personal life while a man is not.

As being a classical dancer Nalini occupied the public domain and appeared as an empowered and liberated woman, this did not prevent her from being subjected to various constraints and implications of patriarchy and capitalism in post-colonial India. Even though she earned money in thousands and people would die to get a glance of her, at the end of the day she was to represent the traditional identity, morals and values of an Indian woman who is docile, passive and submissive. Further, nationalist discourse has deployed an image of the ideal Hindu woman as the embodiment of sacrifice, silence, suffering, humility, faith and knowledge'. Any expression of sexuality of the Indian woman was prohibited and de-legitimized, except within the parameters of Hindu marriage (Katrak, 398-399).

The ideology of Hindu nationalism and its hegemonic constructions of the ideal Hindu womanhood appear to be powerfully inscribed within the novel, in its depiction of the character of Rosie. Rosie, who belongs to a family of devadasis and is one of the original practitioners of the tradition, was called the "public women" and not considered "respectable" or "civilized." (Narayan, 252). During the colonial period, the devadasi tradition was stigmatized as an uncivilized and primitive practice that had to be eradicated from India and this resulted in the legislature prohibiting this practice and disinheriting devadasis of their traditional support systems. Further deterioration happened in post-independent India. Even though Marco marries Rosie, he doesn't appreciate her talent and refuses to permit her to practice at his bungalow. Therefore Rosie's agreeing to give up on her dream of becoming a dancer and marrying into a rich bourgeois family can be considered a way of reformation and civilizing oneself but in the process, she willingly submits herself to the patriarchal control of her husband Marco. Her marriage to Marco entails the surrender of her traditional art form as well as the enactment of the subservient role of a passive and obedient wife. Even after leaving Marco and becoming the greatest dancer in the country she says she can leave everything for Raju. Patriarchy was so ingrained in her that she forgave Raju even if he forged her signature. In her relationship with Raju, she is expected to conform to the image of the traditional Hindu wife, submitting herself to Raju's patriarchal control. Although she occupies the public domain as a classical dancer, Rosie's movements are restricted as Raju retains her 'monopoly' as her manager, decides who she should meet and who she should not thus, mediating her access to the outside world. She spent a great part of the day in her rehearsal hall with her musicians ...But I took care to see that no one saw her. I had a monopoly of her and nobody had anything to do with her. (Narayan, 188-189).

She is forced to take contracts for dance concerts even if she is tired. This also can remind the reader about Vikram Seth's famous animal fable written in the form of the poem 'The Frog and the Nightingale', where the Nightingale was overloaded with work by the frog who was making money commodifying the nightingale's voice until one day when the bird tried to draw a deep breath to sing loud and strong, a vein in it burst and it died. In the process of making her known and famous to the world, Rosie was not only commodified within the capitalist culture by Raju, but was also exoticized.

Raju really liked to parade her through the gaping crowds. After the show, there were still people hanging around to catch a glimpse of the star...(Narayan, 184).

He neither allowed Marco to meet Nalini nor he allowed Marco's lawyer to talk to her. He didn't bother to ask her about the jewellery and that is how he ended up forging Rosie's signature. Thus, Raju asserts patriarchal control over her body, sexuality, rights and liberty, exploiting Rosie's cultural and sexual value to the fullest. Rosie, as an 'authentic' artist and lover of the art form on the other hand, never aimed for materialistic success. She felt repelled by the capitalist appropriation of her art form and its reduction into merely a 'commodified cultural artefact'.

She feels like 'one of those parrots in a cage taken around village fairs, or a performing monkey...' (Narayan, 203).

## II. Conclusion

Decolonisation was aimed at ending the physical architecture of colonialism but it was not something that happened equally to all sections of the society. Thus, this paper reveals that Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami who is known to be cultivating with his stories the themes like myth, nature and childhood, also deals with such a sensitive issue of female discrimination and oppression. He goes on to criticize the social conditioning and the prevalent abusive ideas regarding females. He realistically draws the contemporary patriarchal society, underneath which his feminist outlook can be observed. He, through the representation of patriarchy, goes on to speak for the cause of women. He shows that while males always have choices, females are never offered with many alternatives. She has to make sacrifices if she goes with her wishes. Thus, over time women have become passive as the notion of patriarchy is so inherently ingrained in them that they submit to it without even realizing. Nalini had to call off her marriage with Marco when she decided to be a dancer. Men never considered the feelings of women and could always feel shameless to pursue other women, despite having a wife. But when a woman does it, she is deserted. Even though the character of Nalini is shown as empowered, it is not portrayed as a strong character. Being a male himself, these are certain gaps and implications that one can find with Narayan's characters.

Rosie, the protagonist of the novel "The Guide" by R.K. Narayan is a multifaceted personality. Her transformation from being a devdasi to an M.A. graduate in Economics is indeed remarkable. Despite being rejected by her husband for infidelity, she becomes a successful professional dancer by her dedication, patience and hard work, yet like any other typical Indian woman she regrets her failed marriage. R.K. Narayan illustrates the character of Rosie as a typical Indian woman who loves her husband notwithstanding his every fault and always feels proud of her husband. Marco ridicules her dancing skills and calls it street acrobatics and compares it to monkey dance. In spite of all these humiliations she continues to be his wife. That is, besides sheer male domination, unconscious biases are held by women themselves in a patriarchal society which assures its continuity. Hence, it is said that to end patriarchy, woman must first seize power over herself.

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