

Landscape as a catalyst in the emergence of Rosie as a transformed woman in R.K.Narayan's *The Guide*

*(Lanskap sebagai katalis dalam kemunculan Rosie sebagai wanita yang telah
berubah dalam The Guide karya R.K. Narayan)*

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ABSTRACT

Malgudi forms the regional backdrop of all the fascinating novels of R.K.Narayan. Malgudi of his fiction is always an interface between older conceptions of conventional values and modernised views that emphasise the ubiquitousness and inescapability of change in the face of modernity. The geographical landscape of reference expands further in his middle period novels, such as *Waiting for the Mahatma*, *The Guide* and *The Painter of Signs*. The discussion tries to explore the character of Rosie, the female protagonist in *The Guide* and how landscape of Malgudi brings the essential transformation in her character. Rosie is portrayed in the novel as a multi-faceted personality. Rosie appears to be conventional after marriage with natural expectations from her husband but she becomes very progressive and modern as the novel progresses. She enters Raju's life as a tourist as Raju being a tourist guide takes the responsibility to make them visit different places of interest. Raju accompanies Marco and Rosie to the Mempi Hills where Marco immerses himself in the cave frescoes and in his academic pursuits. Rosie being a devadasi belonged to a lower caste and her family was indebted to Marco for giving her an opportunity to become his wife. Although Rosie becomes his wife but her desire as a wife is not fulfilled. Raju's care and affable nature gradually awakens the woman in her. She is imbued with nature in her visit to the Mempi hills and tries to find utmost satisfaction in observing the beautiful landscape of the Mempi hills. She is even fascinated by the king cobra dance which is appalling to anyone. She is rejected as a wife by Marco and even he disregards her talent as a classical dancer, but still, she finds happiness at the Peak House in the dense jungle high up in the Mempi Hills as she could attach herself with the silence and bliss of nature. This attachment with Raju at the Mempi Hills brings her very close to him and she decides to leave Marco. Thus, the landscape of Malgudi plays a very significant role to bring out the woman in her who could claim for her identity. Her life with Raju becomes very successful as she becomes a professional dancer, a wealthy independent woman with a successful identity of her own. Although Raju deceives her by forging her signature but she continues to

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survive as an independent individual in the midst of all instability in her life. The paper attempts to depict Rosie as a strong character, struggling with the gendered discrimination in a society for being a devdasi. This realization in her comes only when she absorbs herself in the natural landscape of Mempi hills.

(Malgudi menjadi latar regional dari semua novel menarik karya R.K. Narayan. Malgudi dalam fiksinya selalu menjadi titik temu antara pandangan lama tentang nilai-nilai konvensional dan pandangan modern yang menekankan pada kehadiran dan keniscayaan perubahan dalam menghadapi modernitas. Lanskap geografis dalam karya-karyanya semakin meluas dalam novel-novel periode tengahnya, seperti Waiting for the Mahatma, The Guide, dan The Painter of Signs. Pembahasan ini mencoba mengeksplorasi karakter Rosie, tokoh perempuan utama dalam novel The Guide, serta bagaimana lanskap Malgudi membawa transformasi penting dalam karakter dirinya. Rosie digambarkan dalam novel sebagai pribadi yang memiliki banyak sisi. Rosie tampak konvensional setelah menikah, dengan harapan-harapan alami dari suaminya, namun ia menjadi sangat progresif dan modern seiring berjalannya cerita. Rosie memasuki kehidupan Raju sebagai seorang wisatawan, dan Raju yang berprofesi sebagai pemandu wisata bertanggung jawab untuk membawa mereka mengunjungi berbagai tempat menarik. Raju menemani Marco dan Rosie ke Pegunungan Mempi, di mana Marco tenggelam dalam lukisan-lukisan gua dan kesibukan akademisnya. Rosie, yang berasal dari latar belakang devadasi, termasuk dalam kasta rendah dan keluarganya berutang budi pada Marco karena telah memberinya kesempatan untuk menjadi istrinya. Meskipun Rosie menjadi istri Marco, keinginannya sebagai seorang istri tidak terpenuhi. Perhatian dan sifat ramah Raju perlahan membangkitkan sisi kewanitaannya. Ia meresapi keindahan alam saat mengunjungi Pegunungan Mempi dan menemukan kepuasan dalam mengamati pemandangan indah di sana. Ia bahkan terpesona oleh tarian ular kobra, sesuatu yang biasanya menakutkan bagi orang lain. Rosie ditolak sebagai seorang istri oleh Marco, bahkan bakatnya sebagai penari klasik diabaikan. Namun demikian, ia menemukan kebahagiaan di Peak House, sebuah rumah di tengah hutan lebat di puncak Pegunungan Mempi, karena ia dapat menyatu dengan keheningan dan kedamaian alam. Kedekatannya dengan Raju di Pegunungan Mempi membawanya pada keputusan untuk meninggalkan Marco. Dengan demikian, lanskap Malgudi memainkan peran yang sangat penting dalam membangkitkan jati dirinya sebagai seorang perempuan yang mampu menuntut identitasnya sendiri. Hidupnya bersama Raju menjadi sangat sukses karena ia berhasil menjadi seorang penari profesional, wanita mandiri yang kaya, dan memiliki identitas yang kuat. Meskipun Raju kemudian menipunya dengan memalsukan tanda tangannya, Rosie tetap bertahan sebagai individu yang mandiri di tengah segala ketidakstabilan dalam hidupnya. Tulisan ini mencoba menggambarkan Rosie sebagai karakter yang kuat, yang berjuang melawan diskriminasi gender dalam masyarakat karena latar belakangnya sebagai seorang devadasi. Kesadaran ini hadir dalam dirinya hanya ketika ia larut dalam lanskap alam Pegunungan Mempi.)

Keywords: Landscape, Indianness, Modernity, Gender discrimination, Independent individual.

Introduction

The society of R.K. Narayan portrayed in Malgudi narratives centres on the backdrop – Malgudi. This classification of a landscape as a social and cultural backdrop is very much

evident in Thomas Hardy's Wessex and William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha country and many more to name in literature. Malgudi forms the fictional landscape in Narayan's novels and it eventually determines the development of the narrative structure of his novels and short stories. Narayan's Malgudi can be considered to be the microcosm of the nation. Garaham Greene rightly observes in the introduction of *The Bachelor of Arts* that "Narayan (whom I don't hesitate to name in such a context) more than any of them wakes in me a gratitude, for he has offered me a second home. Without him I could never have known what it is like to be Indian. ... No one could find a second home in Kipling's India or Forster's India." (Narayan, 02) Here Greene has considered Narayan's portrayal of India more comprehensive and elaborate in comparison to Kipling and Forster. Malgudi becomes an epitome of traditional India, a central point that is not bounded by time and follows its own rhythm. Along with other crucial perceptions of his novels, Narayan's characters make an assessment of his time because they seem to give us some idea of Narayan's attitude to the sociological, economic and political situations and institutions of his time. He represents Malgudi as India in miniature a micro-universe with characters and complications. In a broader sense 'Malgudi' symbolises the concept of a global village- in the sense that our village itself embodies the entire globe. Harish Trivedi critically observes in his editorial to The Journal of Commonwealth Literature (2007), the 'fictional' town of Malgudi 'which possessed a charm which was hard to define and analyse', a 'created world', 'came to represent what recently was called, without undue embarrassment, the real India or even quintessential India'. (Trivedi 02) In the early novels characters adhere to the societal norms, and essentially focusses on experiencing the various stages of the colonial system of education. In *Swami and Friends* (1935) Swami and his friends develop by imbibing the values of typical South Indian village culture, there is an agitation responding to the colonial ethics and mostly against the educational curriculum; in *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) Chandran's transition is evident from the first to the second of the four ashramas of the Manusmriti; in *The Dark Room* (1938) the ill-treatment of Savitri is vividly narrated and then in *The English Teacher* (1945) the psychic experience of the protagonist is narrated in the novel. In all these early novels R.K. Narayan does not show his revolution against rigidity. Here the geographical landscape does not bring any exceptional change in the narrative structure; the cultural ethos of the place is collectively presented through the foundation of the plot and without any such comment from the perspective of the author. The geographical landscape of reference expands further in his middle period novels, such as *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *The Guide* (1958) and *The Financial Expert*

(1952). These novels mark his finest achievement. The central focus of the middle period novels is to identify the conflict that erupts when the existing values and customs depicted in the novel are questioned by the overrunning of unnatural forces. The paper attempts to locate the discussion within the middle period of his novels. In *The Guide* the narrative structure traverses from town to the village. The author here looks at India from the perspective of India and this is how he is resisting the colonial culture. The transformation of Rosie is also a deconstruction of the traditional values that encompass the biased and dogmatic society of Malgudi. She becomes a victim of male superiority; her talent remains unrecognised by her patriarchal husband but she revolts against these inadequacies of Marco. The discussion in the paper focusses on how Rosie, the female protagonist of the novel, realises her potential after viewing the cobra dance at the Mempi Hills. Nature stimulates her inner self to revolt and live for herself nurturing her passion and desire.

Malgudi-The Space And Rosie, The Female Protagonist

The novel develops against the fictional space of Malgudi. There is the description of the fictional Sarayu River and the Mempi forest. Malgudi will forever remain embedded in the Western psyche as the typical Indian small-town/village, and in the Indian consciousness as the typical South Indian small – town/village. Narayan in creating Malgudi, preloaded the space with national and traditional Indian history. It has become a place of historical significance as Mahatma Gandhi also held a public rally on the river bank during the days of anti-British rebellion. His imaginary space is inseparable from the text. Every character eventually takes a concrete shape at the backdrop of Malgudi and so nature influences and accommodates the emotional ebullience and helps in the evolution of characters. Narayan is always appreciated for his character delineation, comic vision, an element of Indianness, inter - cultural nature and a search for identity. In the discussion I would like to consider the character of Rosie and try to connect her gradual transformation with the influence of nature on her.

The character of Rosie is presented in a unique way by Narayan in the text. She is a multi-faceted personality like Raju. Being a devadasi, she does not just confine herself within the temple and its rituals rather completes her M.A. in economics. She is presented both as a conservative and confident woman. She challenges the traditional norms which states what a woman should be, and yet there is another self of Rosie that repents for failure in her marital relationship. She is married to Marco without her consent, as she being a woman, did not have

any right to think about her life. Her passion and her intense desire to pursue dance in her life was completely ignored by her husband. Marco, who willingly marries her despite knowing the fact that she is a Devdasi, later imposes strict patriarchal norms on her. Being a woman, she suffers discrimination as her passion is not recognised by her husband. He does not allow her to continue dance in public place and his malevolence internally shatters her. Being a devdasi she holds a marginalised position and so under family pressure she succumbs to her husband's dereliction of duty. Narayan's depiction of Marco and the society he represents continues with the colonial legacy. Rosie while describing the situation says:

But all the women in my family were impressed, excited that a man like him was coming to marry one of our class, and it was decided that if it was necessary to give up our traditional art, it was worth the sacrifice. He had a big house, a motor-car, he was a man of high social standing; he had a house outside Madras; he was living in it all alone, no family at all; he lived with his books and papers. (Narayan 85).

To understand Rosie, we need to delve deep into her connection with nature. In the novel she has intense and unfiltered connection with nature. When she reaches Mempi Hills she is lost in the wilderness. She is amazed to be at the Peak House Forest bungalow, in the dense forest amidst wild animals prowling at night. In one conversation she says "I am prepared to spend the whole night here ...Here at least we have silence and darkness, welcome things, and something to wait for out of that darkness". (Narayan 79) This shows how she wants to intertwine herself with nature and its blissful effects. Rosie is a connoisseur of art and she feels she can explore her love for art in the midst of nature. When she reaches the bungalow, she is extremely fascinated with the surrounding. Just like an innocent child she prances from one plant to another and her rhythmic movement brings her very close to nature. On the contrary, her husband, Marco, does not accept it or appreciate it rather like a detached observer keeps himself away from her. There is no unconditional love between them. Rosie is always disturbed and filled with sorrow as she is relegated to a secondary position in his life. Rosie although sad, does not show reluctance in adhering to traditional customs followed by married women in that era. Her connection with nature becomes more interesting when she is identified with Cobra. In one such scene Raju narrates Rosie's close observation of cobra dance: "The whole thing repelled me, but it seemed to fascinate the girl. She watched it swaying with the raptest attention. She stretched out her arm slightly and swayed it in imitation of the movement; she swayed her body to the rhythm- for just a second..." (Narayan 68) In many cultures the snake, which metamorphoses and sheds off its skin is considered to be a symbol of the mystic, mysterious, the psychic unconscious, the rejuvenation of life on earth through the seasonal

changes. The image of cobra also symbolises Lord Shiva in Hindu mythology. Rosie being a devotee of God, offers her dance to God, who protects her art and graces her majestic movements. Heinrich Zimmer identified nagas or snakes as “keepers of the life-energy in Hindu iconology”. (Zimmer 167) Narayan while associating her with King Cobra, compares her creative energy with the dance movements which she enjoys and feels satisfied to represent. She dreams of having a statue of Nataraj at home, “She’d have a bronze figure of Nataraja, the god of dancers, the god whose primal dance created the vibrations that set the worlds in motion”. (Narayan 122) When she dances for Raju to a “song from an ancient Sanskrit composition of a lover and lass on the banks for Jamuna”, she narrates the meaning of her dance to Raju – “Lover means always God” (Narayan 124-5). Later when she becomes a professional dancer, through her presentation of the snake dance, she offers herself and worships Shiva. This nature of Rosie is contrasted in the novel with Marco’s excessive thirst for academic pursuits and Raju’s inclination towards self-satisfaction.

Through the story telling technique Narayan has presented the characters from different perspectives. I have attempted here to find out how nature imbued in Rosie to recognise her ultimate satisfaction in life. While staying in the forest bungalow she is accompanied to the forest and also to other places of interest by Raju. She is completely neglected by her husband as he is engrossed in cave paintings and in deciphering its historical background. He is unconcerned of Rosie and seems to be reluctant to establish any emotional connection with her. Her relationship with Rosie is very formal unlike any husband wife relationship. As a husband he is disinterested in Rosie and does not bother anything about her. Marco is projected here as a stereotyped patriarchal husband. He is unemotional, extremely heartless and only concerned of his personal wish fulfilment. He is detached from any emotional attachment with Rosie. The observations can be ratified through these lines from the text:

I was accepted by Marco as a member of the family. From guiding tourists, I seemed to have come to a sort of concentrated guiding of a single family. Marco was just impractical, an absolutely helpless man. All that he could do was to copy ancient things and write about them. His mind was completely in it. All practical affairs of life seemed impossible to him; such a simple matter as finding food or shelter or buying a railway ticket seemed to him a monumental job. Perhaps he married out of desire to have someone care for his practical life, but unfortunately his choice was wrong – this girl herself was a dreamer if ever there was one. (Narayan 113)

Rosie’s love for art is completely ignored by Marco, she is rather treated like an object and Marco has just given her permission to stay with Raju. Rosie’s love for art is fathomed by Raju when he accompanies her in viewing different places of interest around Mempo Hills. Marco is

so unworldly that he unsuspectingly consigns Rosie to Raju's care while he studies cave paintings for weeks on end. This attitude of Marco brings displeasure in Rosie as he is more interested in cold stone walls and not in her. When Raju expresses his interest in her dance, she is overjoyed. Gradually she is drawn to him. She builds trust in Raju as she believes that only Raju accepts her as she is. Her passion, desire and inner thoughts are taken care of by Raju but Rosie appears to be quite paradoxical. The paradoxes lie in her self-contradictory statements as she at times laments for Marco's indifferent, unemotional gesture still she reiterates her responsibilities towards her husband as a conventional wife.

Self-Identity

The man-woman relationship is questioned here as there is no reciprocation between Marco and Rosie, rather it is one sided. Rosie's feelings and her inclination is not perceived by her husband and she is completely disillusioned with his nonchalant attitude. However, this ambiguous relationship gradually draws Rosie towards dance and her desire is fulfilled by Raju. She feels her fulfilment is in worshipping her art. Raju is fascinated by Rosie's attitude and her gradual dependence on him, draws him closer to her. When their clandestine relationship is exposed, Marco is terribly disgusted but she does not become a victim of any domestic violence or extreme ill treatment. Marco's disrespect and ignorance affected her feminine self. Rosie's condition deteriorates as she becomes a victim of gender discrimination. Initially she is rejected by the society for being a devdasi and then doubly rejected by Marco for her relation with Raju. Under such circumstances, she decides to leave Marco and take shelter in Raju's house despite the societal problems. Although she comes across several obstacles, she becomes a victim of class discrimination still she moves ahead to become a dancer and this foregrounds her zeal and her transformation from an ordinary house wife to a dancer. Raju's unwavering moral support, his fight against his mother and his refusal to accept the codified laws of the society; helps Rosie to have faith on him. This finally brings transformation in her life as she decides to perform art publicly. Her public performance is a revolt against the colonial ethos that overpowered the sensibility of common people in society. This transformation is witnessed when she dreams of nurturing her passion against the backdrop of Mempi hills, in the midst of dense forest and tranquil silence. Rosie becomes an accomplished dancer and an independent woman. Though Rosie initially becomes a victim of patriarchy, a commodity for Marco, a victim of social censure as Marco forbids her to dance, only loved and fondled by Raju; but rejected and despised by his relatives for being a devadasi.

Her ultimate disappearance from Marco's life follows a different route. She transforms herself to an independent and empowered female, a successful and professional dancer having high social status. Hence, she occupies a space in the society by virtue of her talent. She eventually does not depend on any man, neither Raju nor Marco; although she repents for being disloyal to her husband. The realization to explore life and to carve a path of her own choice by dint of coming across all impediments brings the metamorphosis in her life. The topography of Malgudi, the topmost cliff on Mempi Hills, the forest with wild animals, the tranquil silence of nature, the green valley and the sparkling Sarayu excites Rosie and she understands the cry of her instinctual self. Thus, nature has a catalytic influence on Rosie which helps her to emerge as an emancipated individual. Her public performance brought affluence and glory in her life and she gets her identity as an independent individual. Gradually due to her meteoric rise, social stability, she can perceive a change in Raju. Raju becomes obsessed with as she Rosie achieves stupendous success in the dance concerts and Raju makes her work like a machine. It is only for social position and recognition; Raju becomes so determined that he tries to overpower himself on Rosie. Thus, Raju being the pivotal character in the novel diverts the action of the novel. Since status of a man in modern society is entirely based on money, Raju adopts corruption to become more powerful in the society. To bring more prosperity in life, Rosie takes the name of Nalini as a dancer as Hindu name could easily win people's heart while the name Rosie, who has got Christian connotation, could be under critical lens. In the wake of economic progress, mankind usually moves towards financial prosperity and desire for money increases exponentially keeping aside the significance of tradition, culture and social values. As the discussion moves into the deeper analysis of the socio-economic perspective of the novel besides the influence of nature on Rosie's life, several components relevant to the principles of westernization and urbanization are highlighted. C.D. Narasimhaiah in R.K.Narayan's *The Guide* espouses this in his critical perception: "There is a clash of castes, classes and interests in the persistence of time-honored customs and the old values on the one hand and the weakening modern social and moral structure on the other. All this is concretely realized in terms of interaction of characters" (Narasimhaiah 113). Raju's preoccupation with Rosie leads to his mental anxiety. He himself states: "The only reality in my life and consciousness was Rosie" (Narayan 118). He feels dissatisfied in his profession and seldom attends his shop. Altogether he is perplexed between anxieties and sense of insecurity and this is clearly perceived by Gaffur, the taxi driver. Gaffur says: "You are becoming rather stuck-up nowadays, Raju. You are not the old friend you used to be" (Narayan 115). Raju finally

brings catastrophe in his life for his extreme avariciousness. Raju's stable and organized life undergoes transformation. His uncontrolled greed and evil intentions compel him to forge the signature of Rosie for misappropriating her jewels and converting them into easy wealth. Finally, Raju is imprisoned and Rosie becomes alone in the world with no masculine figure to protect and support her or instill confidence in her distressed and lonely life. Rosie learns to manage her career herself and she moves ahead without Raju's help. For her dance becomes a form of self-expression and a way to show her devotion to God. With this ideology she does not stop at any point of time even when Raju is arrested. Rosie's emergence as a modern, independent woman is definitely a post-colonial element embedded in the text.

Conclusion

So, in R.K.Narayan's *The Guide*, there are several critical dimensions and one I tried to explore is the kinship between human world and natural world. The change in Rosie is observed after her close association with nature. Marco's rejection although shakes her conventional identity but excessive love for art brings out a new woman. In many other novels of R.K.Narayan he tries to project the new woman concept. In *The Dark Room*, Savitri revolts against her debauched husband, charges him for depravity, she leaves her family but finally she surrenders to her husband and could not be courageous enough to break the claustrophobic system of patriarchy. In *Mr. Sampath*, Shanti, the widowed actress and dancer becomes the mistress of Mr. Sampath, who is to bring name, fame and money in her life. The character of Shanti too develops at the backdrop of Malgudi and she is more matured than Savitri. Her talent gives her the opportunity to get an identity of her own. She gets a space in life, she is more independent than Savitri, she is not under the bondage of patriarchy and her disappearance at the end of the novel is also of her own will. With the publication of *The Painter of Signs*, a truly liberated new woman of India is reflected in the character of Daisy. She is presented in the novel as the director of the Family Planning Centre at Malgudi. She unlike Rosie does not change her name to a more traditional name and her mission in the novel is to control population and has no interest in marriage. Actually, Daisy behaves like a man, she spreads the message of population control maintains a balance in the socio-economic condition in the country. Unlike Rosie and Shanti, she does not suffer from any inner turmoil about transgressing the conventional role of a woman. Her presence in the stereotyped society of Malgudi, is too challenging but still she sustains her identity and progresses in her life. Narayan in an interview says "But compare my new novel *The Painter of Signs* with *The Dark Room*, that's a contrast. The new liberated

woman and the traditional housewife completely suppressed. You see a whole social change”. (Hamilton) Narayan as a novelist has always tried to understand cultural ethos of a traditional place, human relationship and not directly confronting with the social evils. Although caste, patriarchy, social hypocrisy has also been critiqued in *The Guide* and also in other novels but his profound interest is in delineating the life of the people, their significant and insignificant conversations, their interest and disinterest and all other characteristics consciously happening in Malgudi. To him Malgudi is the fictional space which is used by all his characters for their development. To the readers Malgudi has become a part of the Indian psyche. It remains a part of the true representation of India. However, to the West, Malgudi is a reflection of India. The entire oeuvre of his literary composition posits Malgudi as a fictional space, there is history and cartographical intertextuality imply a sense of history which is generic rather than spatial. Narayan himself says “Where is Malgudi? All I can say that it is imaginary and not to be found on any map...If I explain that Malgudi is a small town in South India, I shall only be expressing a half-truth, for those characteristics of Malgudi seem to be universal”. (Narayan 08)

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