

RAJU AND ROSIE, AN EPITOME OF RESISTANCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the theme of Expression/Resistance in the novel '*The Guide*' by R.K. Narayan. 'The Guide' is written in English by the Indian author R. K. Narayan in 1958. The novel won the Sahitya Akademi Award for English in 1960.

In the novel, the protagonist Raju, does not care to abide by the social and moral norms when it comes to Rosie. The whole society including his own widowed mother stands against him but he puts a blind eye on the severity of the chaotic situation.

Postcolonial theory is also built around the concept of resistance, of resistance as subversion, or opposition, or mimicry -- but with the haunting problem that resistance always inscribes the resisted into the texture of the resisting: it is a two-edged sword. As well, the concept of resistance carries with it or can carry with it ideas about human freedom, liberty, identity, individuality, etc., which ideas may not have been held, or held in the same way, in the colonized culture's view of humankind.

The paper deals the above mentioned concept of resistance, as shown by the prominent characters in the novel, 'The Guide'.

KEYWORDS: Resistance, Postcolonial Literatures, Theme of Expression

INTRODUCTION

Post-colonial writings are attempts at reviving the ethnic cultures, traditions, beliefs, languages etc. The post-colonial literature inculcates the pride in one's own culture and traditions. It abounds in patriotic feelings and aims at developing the national identity in the wake of colonial rule. It deals with the colonized people's response to the colonial legacy by writing back to the centre.

This paper has chosen Resistance as a tool to study R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* from the perspective of the major characters. As B. K. Das mentions, "Post-colonial theory claims that the major theme of literature from post-colonial countries can be taken as resistance to the former colonizer".

REPRESENTATION AND RESISTANCE

Two ideas that go hand in hand in post-colonial literature and theory are representation and resistance. The dynamic between the coloniser and the colonized may impose an intellectual rather than a political domination over the

post-colonial nation. While political freedom may exist, the intellectual independence is far from reality. To choose to represent an indigenous culture with the language of the empire serve as one of the form of colonization.

The theory of resistance in post-colonial literature refutes the very notion that idea of representation also connotes further subjugation. Resistance literature uses the language of the empire to rebute in dominant ideologies. In other words, the colonized nation is “Writing Back”, speaking either of the oppression and the racism of the colonisers or the inherent cultural “better-ness” of the indigenous people. Helen Tiffin expresses this point best in her essay “Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse”: “Postcolonial literatures-cultures are thus constituted in counter-discursive rather than homologous practices, and they offer field’s counter discursive strategies to the dominant discourse.”(Tiffin, 96)

The paradox of marginalization and empowerment seem to co-exist in the ideas of representation and resistance. Resistance as subversion employing colonial discourse theory is the second face of resistance. In this approach, resistance undermines the hegemony and authority of colonial knowledge production by subverting the binary thought and essentialist identities produced by colonial knowledge. Bhaba locates resistance in the spaces between colonial expectations and the native’s response, so that the disempowered can calculate strategies, ‘alter’, and ‘displace’ authority within these in-between spaces. In this model, subverting colonial authority is possible because such power is never total, nor absolute, due to hybridity, mimicry, and liminality. According to Jeffress, Bhaba provides post-colonial studies with the conceptual tools to “illuminate the way in which more material forms of opposition, struggle and protest can be seen as enabling, and enabled by modes of discursive refusal, wherein the colonial narrative does not simply fail but is transformed by the colonised in politically meaningful ways” (P29).

Resistance as subversion evokes resistance from within ‘cracks’ and ‘in-between spaces’ of colonial power by undermining colonial authority and colonial knowledge systems. It enables political struggle by discursively refusing colonial identities and binary thought processes. However, this resistance overlooks the material structures of power and collective notions of agency.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NOVEL

Narayan wrote ‘The Guide’ between 1956 and 1958 when he was in London. He won the first major award, the Sahitya Akademi Award for this novel. *The Guide* is the autobiography of Raju, who is rail road station food vendor, a tourist guide, a sentimental adulterer, a dancing girl’s manager, a swindler, a jail-bird and a martyred mystic. It follows Raju along a curiously braided time sequence. After describing the early life and education of Raju, the author shows how Malgudi became a railway station and how Raju became the owner of a railway stall and came to be tourist guide. Trying to help a rich visitor, Marco, the archeologist, in his researches, Raju is involved in a tangle of new relationships. Rosie, Marco’s wife, becomes Raju’s lover.

Abandoned by Marco, Rosie realized, with Raju’s help, her ambition of becoming a dancer. But Raju’s possessive instinct finally betrays him into a criminal action, and he is charged and convicted for forgery. Coming out of the jail, he cuts off all connection with the past and sets up as a sort of ascetic. Once again he is caught in the coils of his own self-deception, and he is obliged to undertake a twelve-day fast to end a drought that threatens the district with a famine. In vain he tells his chief ‘disciple’ Velan the whole truth about himself and Rosie, and about the crash and incarceration. But nobody believes that he is anyone other than a saint. He has made his bed, and he must perforce lie on it. The reader is free to infer that, on the last day of the fast, he dies opportunely, a martyr. Does it really rain, or is it only

Raju's optical delusion? Does he really die, or merely sinks down in exhaustion? Has the lie really become the truth, or has it been merely exposed? The reader is free to conclude as he likes.

The Guide, one of the best novels in English language, became a best seller in the West as well as in India. The enormous success of the novel resulted in film version by Vijay Anand in Hindi and Pearl S. Buck in English. The English film was unsuccessful whereas the Hindi version was a commercial success and it won all the major awards at the Filmfare. The character of Raju was played by Dev Anand and Rosie by Waheeda Rehman.

RESISTANCE SHOWN IN THE NOVEL

Rosie, Velan, Raju's mother and uncle, Gaffur, the taxi driver, Joseph, the steward of the bungalow where Marco stayed, are all characters exhibiting the traditional Indian culture and ethos. Raju and Marco, on the contrary, bear features of Western or Modern culture and manners. Thus the conflict between tradition and modernity or influence of one over the other is evident in the behaviour and conversation of these characters throughout the novel. Some such situations where traditional or modern elements are visible in the characters are portrayed below:

It is in the Hindu customs and tradition to bow low and touch the feet of elders and venerable persons. But Raju, after his release from the prison and sitting lonely on the river steps, did not allow the villager, Velan to do so. To quote from the text: Velan rose, bowed low, and tried to touch Raju's feet. Raju recoiled at the attempt. "I'll not permit anyone to do this. God alone is entitled to such a prostration. He will destroy us if we attempt to usurp His rights" (Narayan 16).

Rosie though a post-graduate is never a modern woman. She is not corrupted with modern and materialistic values. She is a traditional Indian wife, longs for affection and care from her husband. She cannot cope up with the archeological interests of her husband, Marco. Marco dislikes being disturbed by any one, even his wife in his studies and professional activities. Rather he longs for appreciation from his wife. This difference in wave-length is the cause of quarrel between Rosie and Marco.

When Marco deserted Rosie and took train to Madras, she came to Raju's house for shelter. Seeing her coming to the house alone in the evening Raju's mother was wonderstruck. To quote from the text:

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)

The difference in attitude, as well as the temperament is seen here. Raju's mother is a traditional Hindu woman who is denied public exposure. She was prohibited and hence afraid to go out alone, whereas Rosie is a modern woman. The western influence is evident in her attitude, behaviour and temperament. She is not at all afraid to go out alone.

From the social point of view *The Guide* not only depicts Indian society, its customs, traditions, culture, ostentations, 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.

In such conflict old values have to give place to new values and thus Raju's mother leaves her home for Raju and Rosie. "The novel also presents a conflict between the Eastern and Western culture and synthesises the two through their assimilation which has been symbolised by Rosie's transformation into Nalini.

R. K. Narayan portrays a South-Indian conservative society in the village, Mangal. Though the contact of Western culture brought many changes in the village, castes and traditional occupations continue to exist. Touching the feet of the saint, making offerings in kind or prostrating before god, are other ritualistic forms. Raju's fasting to appease the rain god and bring rain to save the people is the most significant ritual in the novel.

Socially the novel brought out the transition in India from an old-fashioned way of life to a modern and urbanized one, and the character groupings roughly corresponded to these two areas. Raju's parents and uncle, and the old school master represented tradition, orthodoxy, hierarchy and conservative values. The Guide was written after India's independence and the wind of modernization had already started blowing. It was a time when the average Indian household started witnessing the changes that came in the Indian society. Though the novel was published in 1958, yet it showcased incidents much ahead of times. The live-in relationship of Raju and Rosie is one such incident in the novel. Raju seduces Rosie, Marco's wife. He begins to live with her and thus violate a major conventional order. In the novel, the protagonist Raju, does not care to abide by the social and moral norms when it comes to Rosie.

The whole society including his widowed mother too stands against him but he turns a deaf ear on the situation. "This cannot go long, Raju – you must put an end to it." "Don't interfere, Mother. I am an adult. I know what I am doing" (P153). He becomes a kind of social outcaste due to his relationship with Rosie but he refuses to reform his ways and thus faces a lot of disorder and disharmony in his own life and his surrounding society. His mother says, "I was hoping you would have the sense to do something about it. It can't go on like this forever. What will people say?" "Who are 'people'?" asked Raju (P153). Well my brother and your cousins and the others known to us". "I don't care for their opinion. Just don't bother about such things" (P154). Due to Rosie, Raju neglects his business. He even runs into debts, gets involved into litigations and is almost on the verge of ruining himself. Then Raju's mother calls her brother in order to deal with Raju.

They run into an argument and his uncle loses control. But Raju decides to stand by Rosie and asks his uncle to leave. His mother too leaves the house with her brother. "I went over to Rosie, put my arm around her to the shock of the two, and whispered to her, "Shut your ears to all that they say. Let them say what they like. Let them exhaust themselves. But you are not leaving. I'm going to be here, and you are going to be here. Others who don't like the arrangement are welcome to leave" (P170-171). Raju tries all means to increase his chances of actualizing that which he wants in his life. This is reflected when he tries very cleverly to make way into the heart of Rosie by giving her what her husband always denied her of. "All night I didn't sleep. The way you danced your form and figure haunted me all night" (P72).

Raju is even reluctant to play the role unwittingly given by Velan. He expressed his resistance to the role of an authentic saint, a role the people of Mangala had foisted on him. But that does not really change as to who or what he ends up becoming. It was the belief of village people of Mangala that it would rain and thus put an end to the drought if a true sanyasi did genuine fasting for twelve days and Raju was chosen to be true sanyasi. Since the villagers believed that his fasting would bring rain he had no other alternative than continuing the fast to the twelfth day. Raju understood that he could not correct the villagers' misconception about him. They considered him as a true sanyasi and hence his genuine fast

would bring rain. Thus Raju was trapped. He had no existence other than a sanyasi's. He thus resolves to fast for the goodwill of the people of the village and the resolution gives him a peculiar strength. *"I will chase away all thought of food. For the next ten days I shall eradicate all thoughts of tongue and stomach from my mind"* (P237). He could have saved himself as the doctors and Velan requested him to stop fasting. He bent close to Swami and said, *"The doctors say"*. In answer Raju asked the man to bend nearer, and whispered, *"Help me to my feet"*, (P246) and clung to his arm and lifted himself. He knew that once he stopped fasting what would the hundreds of people assembled there think about him? Wouldn't it be a betrayal of faith laid on him by the people? So he might have thought that it was better and nobler to die a martyr than live an ignoble life, despised by others.

In both the novel and movie, it is observed that against the backdrop of the then society, both showed a tremendous leap of faith. It showcased a woman as a Devdasi, who has an illicit affair. It showed Rosie, who has the resilience to push aside the man who obsess himself and ignores her emotional and carnal needs. She leaves Marco for Raju because he offers her emotional and social support. Well, it is her fornication with Raju that brings her away from the traditional family set-up as she indulges in what is known as a live-in relationship.

Rosie does not hesitate to leave even Raju, when she comes to know about his deception. *"If I have to pawn my last possession, I'll do it to save you from jail. But once it's over, leave me once and for all; that's all I ask"* (P222). This shows her strong resistance against the deeply-rooted Patriarch culture of India. She does not go back to her husband Marco or Raju, rather she decides to lead her life alone. She is quite resistant and has the courage to seek happiness of her own because she is famous dancer. Raju's following statement stands true for Rosie: *"...Neither Marco nor I had had any place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she herself had underestimated"* (P223). Through resistance, Rosie is able to establish her own identity as a dancer.

CONCLUSIONS

Socially the novel and the movie brought out the transition in India from an old-fashioned way of life to a modern and urbanized one, and the character groupings roughly corresponded to these two areas. It was a belief of the people of the Mangal village that it would rain and thus put an end to the drought if a true saint did genuine fasting for twelve days. That was a belief prevalent among the Hindus as such in India. Whether the people had direct experience of the miracle or not, it did not lessen their faith in it. Narayan only wanted to portray that such belief and rites prevailed among his people. He did not want to glorify or condemn such beliefs. He pointed out that in the struggle between tradition and modernity, tradition won though in a reluctant manner. Most of Narayan's works dealt in the genre of the theory of resistance. In his essay "The Reluctant Guru" Narayan expressed his resistance to the role of an authentic exponent of the mystic East, a guru or a sage, a role the people had foisted on him. He was very uncomfortable with that role, but he could not entirely shake it off. Going by the flimsy evidence of texts like 'The English Teacher' and 'The Guide', his audience often demanded doses of Indian spirituality and mysticism from him. Narayan confessed that he felt himself in the same situation as Raju, who was mistaken for a saint and began to wonder at some point himself if sudden effulgence had begun to show on his face.

This paper tries to discuss how a post-colonial novel acts as a representative of its respective nation and how it serves as a symbol of resistance against its coloniser through the characters in the novel and the film.

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