

The Female Rendition Through the Characters of Saru and Rosie: A Study of the Protagonists.

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Abstract

This paper examines the complex relationship between authors, characters, and readers within the frameworks of New Criticism and Formalism. It probes the motives behind crafting feminist characters, Rosie and Sarita, in separate novels, contemplating the balance between the author's ideology and the reader's influence on character development. Drawing inspiration from Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author," it ponders the extent to which authors can distance themselves from their works and how their inherent perspectives may inadvertently shape characters. Moreover, the abstract questions whether Rosie and Sarita, while intended as feminist and progressive, are influenced by patriarchal values and external pressures. It explores whether their actions truly reflect autonomy or if they mirror the author's subconscious biases. In contrast, Binodini from Tagore's "Chokher Bali" is presented as an independent female protagonist, making decisions based on her character rather than authorial influence.

In summary, this abstract navigates the complexities of authorship, character development, and reader interpretation, highlighting the intricate interplay between the author's intent and the reader's experience. It suggests that the author's presence within the text can occasionally compromise character integrity.

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The devadasi system, rooted in classical Indian culture, involved the marriage of women trained in classical dance to deities. These women embraced celibacy, dedicated themselves to temple duties, and honed their skills in classical dance, which they performed as part of religious rituals. Initially, devadasis were revered for their association with traditional Indian culture, but their lack of access to education left them vulnerable to sexual exploitation by men. Over time, they lost their patronage and societal standing, leading to their exploitation.

As the devadasis transitioned from temple worship to private performances, the lines between dancing and prostitution blurred. The term "devadasi" became synonymous with prostitution, highlighting how women were forced into a perverse business under the guise of religion.

Rosie, being born to a devadasi, found herself in a disadvantaged position within society. She likely bore the stigma of being an illegitimate child, a result of relationships that lacked societal recognition. It's also plausible that she grew up without a father figure. Rosie faced significant challenges in forming a respectable and legitimate relationship with a man, as she was constantly viewed as a public woman who could easily engage with anyone who flattered her – even her own husband held such prejudiced views about her.

"We are viewed as public women," she said plainly, and I was thrilled to hear the words. "We are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilized." (Narayan, 2006, p. 78)¹¹.

"You are here because I'm not a ruffian. But you are not my wife. You are a woman who will go to bed with anyone who flatters your antics. That's all." (Narayan, 2006, p.125)¹¹.

It was near impossible for her to get a man willing to marry a woman of her standing in society and yet the need for a man to support her was dire as she desperately wished for financial security and her position in society to be elevated. There was a mark of shame associated with her existence that she wanted to wash off. She couldn't live the way her mother had because she was an outsider in that world.

Rosie was entirely separated from these notions, even her name was Western such that one would imagine an English lady wearing a skirt when they heard the name. She had an MA in Economics, a feat that was unusual for any woman at that time. Dance was the art that instilled life in her & kept her away from getting into the same puddle in which her mother was. The only thing she had retained from the tradition was her love for Indian classical dance, which she regarded as art. The way she was raised had made it even more important for her to leave the shackles of her community, and the one way to do that was to marry a respectable man and have a legitimate relationship. She desired something unthinkable for devadasis and her family.

To find a man willing to marry her was one thing, but to get everything a woman generally expects out of a marriage from her husband was a bigger problem. No man would offer a woman of her upbringing the love and respect that a wife deserves because she would always be in every way beneath him, and his taking her hand in marriage would be a favour done. It is not to say that every woman who isn't a devadasi gets perfection in her marriage, but Rosie couldn't even think of wanting it because she was fully aware of how she was perceived in society.

“I belong to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers; my mother, grandmother, and, before her, her mother. Even as a young girl, I danced in our village temple. You know how our caste is viewed?” (Narayan, 2006, p.76) ¹¹.

Not every relationship is the epitome of ardent feelings; nonetheless, to live with someone for ages, one needs to share a sense of companionship at least. However, many a time what a couple lacks a feeling of fellowship despite is having an intense feeling for each other, and oftentimes this results in separation. RK Narayan narrates something like the story of Marco and Rosie in his novel *The Guide*.

Rosie, a lovely young lady who belongs to a background of Devdasis, was not suitable to marry someone with good experience, as stated by the social norms of the time. She was learned, independent, and beautiful, but still suffered and feared for her marriage. When she and her mother read the advertisement for marriage by Marco, a scholar who studied the site of ancient civilisation, they, without any hesitation or consideration, agreed to it since what the man needed was a university degree and good looks, without any restriction on the caste. This was a sudden blessing bestowed from heaven for the mother and daughter. Since the modest way of getting married was a luxury for a girl like Rosie, she did not inquire about the man and submitted to his proposal.

“A different life was planned for me by my mother. She put me to school early in life; I studied well. I took my master’s degree in economics. But after college, the question was whether I should become a dancer or do something else. One day I saw in our paper an advertisement—the usual kind you may have seen: ‘Wanted: an educated, good-looking girl to marry a rich bachelor of academic interests. No caste restrictions; good looks and university degree, essential.’ I asked myself, ‘Have I looks?’” “Oh, who could doubt it?” “I had myself photographed clutching the scroll of the university citation in one hand and sent it to the advertiser. Well, we met, he examined me and my certificate, we went to a registrar and got married.” (Narayan, 2006, p.78) ¹¹.

Their marriage was just a form of contract where both the parties tried to take benefits from each other from the beginning which also gives the impression of the most suitable decision since Rosie's desire for marriage was not for a partner but for a benefactor and as Jane Austen has articulated "*It is a truth universally acknowledged, that "a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.*" (Austen, 2022, p.7)¹

Marco had defined the picture of his wife, who was not required to be his companion but a mere partner indeed. He accepted her without any question or interrogation about her birth, which can be only because of two possibilities: either her family affair does not affect his frame of reference as a person, or he barely cares about anything about her since it will not influence his life. In his case, the latter reckons more befitting. Rosie never affected his life. He lived the way he wanted because he allowed a person into his life. It is important to give some priority to the fellow traveller in the journey of life.

Throughout the novel, RK Narayan never writes about any discussion between the couple other than a few commands from Marco and arguments between the couple that show that they lack communication, which forms the firm ground for any relationship. Rosie's passion for the dance also made him dissatisfied; it implies that her background does affect him, or else his wife's dance to a piece of classical music in a room should not have triggered him to the extent of compelling her to stop pursuing her passion. Moreover, he himself is in love with his work and research. He had not participated with his wife in any day-to-day event of life. She seemed to be a decorative piece that had no value other than accepting the fate decided by her master.

Though he had married an educated woman, her suggestions and opinions were not worthy to be heard; contemplation was never an option. His treatment resembles a father who thinks that his child is naive to understand the fundamental philosophies of life.

As Marco says, “*If it interests you, you can make your own arrangements. Don't expect me to go with you. I can't stand the sight of a snake—your interests are morbid.*” (Narayan, 2006, p.63) ¹¹.

Any structure of marriage rests upon communication, affection, and companionship between a couple. The treatment of Rosie by Marco was never per this ideology. This barricaded the growth of their marital relationship.

A person with a feeling of superiority or inferiority cannot be someone's companion. A similar study can be made of 'Maya', the protagonist of Anita Desai's novel 'Cry the Peacock'.

Both protagonists of both novels were deprived of the desire to be loved & wanted by their marital partners.

Gautama was a pragmatic, sophisticated, and rational lawyer. He had his thoughts and judgments. His ideologies and philosophies were the only applaudable acquisitions in his life, and he never needed anyone to intervene in the plans he made.

Marco and Gautama do share some similarities that led their partners to betray them. Both married women were much younger than and never respected their sentiments and perspective towards life. Gautam's treatment of Maya was like a father taking care of his daughter. He never realised that Maya stood on the same pedestal as him in the relationship that they shared. He never tried to understand that he was married to a woman who was still at the peak of her youth. It was difficult for her to be as steady as he was. However, she wasn't a halfwit but only lacked the experience that her husband had.

Gautama was so full of himself that he forgot to care that he could not force his way of life on her, which, if he did, would result in the downfall of their marriage.

‘Why do I? Why do I choose to think of you as one of those mysterious people who find such comfort in hocus-pocus, in the bogus ceremonies and childish trimmings with which we bury our dead? To me, it has always seemed the ultimate absurdity, appropriate only in that it brings a meaningless life to a similarly meaningless end. No doubt the greater percentage of those who are buried, or cremated, surrounded by the frills and flaps of pious frivolity, enjoy the vision of it while alive. Morbidity, you might say, but it is not really that. It is a belief in these frivolities. Having no greater values, they apply themselves with passion to the lesser ones, which are not values at all, of course, for values must have a standard, a criterion . . . ’

I listened to him, half-attentively, half-pensively,

(Desai, 1963, p.13)⁵.

Both Gautama & Marco failed to treat their partners well. They never had time for them & never addressed their emotional lacunae. For Gautama, Maya was always a child who never had anything substantial to convey.

Marco, on the other hand, never cared about anything in this world other than his career and passion. Despite being ardent, he failed to recognise the passion of his own wife, and his prejudice made him feel ashamed of Rosie's dancing. However, he never talked about this with her and just stated a fact that she should not call such demeaning things art anymore. Since he never cared about her and her sentiments, he failed to observe that he was losing his value in her life and making their relationship fragile.

“The word ‘dance’ always stung him. I was afraid to go on with the subject. But there, squatting on the ancient floor, amidst cobwebs and bats, in that dim lantern light, I felt courage coming back. ‘Will you permit me to dance?’ “Promptly came his reply, with a scowl, the old face was coming back. ‘Why?’ “I think I’d be very happy if I could do that. I

have so many ideas. I'd like to try. Just as you are trying to— 'Oh, you want to rival me, is that it? This is a branch of learning, not street-acrobatics.' " "You think dancing is street-acrobatics?" I'm not prepared to discuss all that with you. '" (Narayan, 2006, p.122)¹¹.

"I felt after all an understanding was coming between us—there in that lonely house, with trees rustling and foxes and animals prowling around, some light glimmering in the far-off valley." (Narayan, 2006, p.122)¹¹.

Whether it is Gautama or Marco, both were doing injustice to their wives and were falling short of the duty of a husband in some or the other way.

RK Narayan vividly discusses Rosie's betrayal in the novel without explaining her need for a companion. Thus, the novel fails to shed light on this duplicity and betrayal. The plot portrays the betrayal of Marco at first when Rosie was loyal and tried to put her mind and dedication into their partnership, and moreover, she sacrifices as much as she can. Marco never troubled himself to think about her dedication and efforts that made Rosie incomplete and insecure as a wife. However, looking through the glass of society to the parameter of being loyal to your partner is never about the emotional disloyalty or deception, and when Raju manages to fill that space within her, she accepts it for a moment; however, that is the subject of betrayal of Rosie in the story.

"After all, he is my husband. I must respect him. I cannot leave him there."

"After all, . . . After all, . . . Is this right what I am doing? After all, he has been so good to me, given me comfort and freedom." (Narayan, 2006, p.102) ¹¹.

After the heat of the moment, she felt guilty, and one question had her confessing everything to Marco, notwithstanding the repentance of Rosie, left her alone without explaining anything

to her, just like he never realised that he had contributed equally to the step of Rosie toward Raju.

Marco's disgust towards her passions and disregard towards her feelings pushed Rosie away from him because, in all important aspects, she was alone in the marriage in which Marco was absent. His cold absence in her life made her seek the warmth of companionship outside their marriage, which she found in Raju.

Raju was hired as a tourist guide by Marco to assist them throughout their visit to Malgudi. Almost immediately, he was infatuated with Rosie, and that gave way to an obsession which had him brazenly pursuing her despite her being a married woman. Just as quickly grew his dislike for Marco; he scorned his disrespect towards a divine creature like Rosie. With the excuse of comforting and consoling her, Raju took every chance to flirt with her. Rosie accepted his advances due to her own loneliness, and they started spending more time together. He was especially enchanted by her when he saw her dance like a serpent. While she danced, he had true admiration for it.

“I could honestly declare that, while I watched her perform, my mind was free, for once, from all carnal thoughts; I viewed her as a pure abstraction. She could make me forget my surroundings. I sat with open-mouthed wonder watching her.” (Narayan, 2006, p.106)¹¹.

Though he was transfixed on her performance, he also had a motive to win her love. Raju, being a manipulative man, easily figured out that the one way to win her trust and affection was to show that he didn't just love her as a man loves a woman, but rather as an adoring fan from the depths of his heart.

“I praised her dancing. I spoke out my love, but sandwiched it conveniently between my appreciations of her art. I spoke of her as an artist in one breath and continued in the next as a sweetheart.” (Narayan, 2006, p.77) ¹¹.

There were no cordial relations between husband and wife. She was unhappy with Marco because he took no interest and even looked down upon both her and her art. So, Raju stepped in to provide her with everything her husband failed to; he treated her lovingly, admired her dancing and most importantly, his presence and admiration encouraged her to start planning a professional dance career. So, despite the warnings from his mother and Gaffur, Raju wholeheartedly threw himself into wooing Rosie. With Raju, Rosie felt seen and understood and like any other person would, she put her faith in him, and their affair began. Marco remained unaware of it as he barely paid any attention to his wife. Rosie's indulgence of Raju's advances wasn't out of malice or for a desire for vengeance on the husband who had never acknowledged her. The guilt she felt throughout her affair is proof enough. She was never freely involved with Raju. Though she is involved with Raju, a feeling of betrayal remains constant in her mind that she is doing a terrible thing and going back to Marco would be the correct step.

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There might have been some sincerity in the attention Raju bestowed upon Rosie, but it wasn't genuine affection. It might be argued that he had no reason to lose everything, his shop, his image, and his mother, a woman he didn't truly love, but by his thoughts and actions

towards Rosie, Raju proved that whatever his relationship with Rosie was, it wasn't genuine love by chance.

In Rosie, he had seen a pretty damsel in distress, and he had rushed forward to provide her with a shoulder to lean on. He had no proper understanding of the person she was, and beyond flattery, he didn't know what to provide her with. He didn't know her enough to understand the turmoil in her mind regarding her betrayal of Marco, couldn't make sense of the concern she still showed for him because he assumed that her aversion towards her husband could simply be dealt with by getting involved with him.

“I found as I went on that she was gradually losing the free and easy manner of her former days. She allowed me to make love to her, of course, but she was also beginning to show excessive consideration for her husband on the hill. In the midst of my caresses, she would suddenly free herself and say, “Tell Gaffur to bring the car. I want to go and see him.”

(Narayan, 2006, p.102) ¹¹.

“I could not understand whether she was pretending, whether her present pose was pretence or whether her account of all her husband’s shortcomings was false, just to entice me.”

(Narayan, 2006, p.102) ¹¹.

Raju used her love for dancing to his benefit. He realised that only by investing all her time in dance, Rosie forgot about Marco and her betrayal. Raju cunningly got around his ways to woo the lady by praising her for the dance she performed. It was entirely for selfish reasons that he very cleverly kept her to himself.

“I found out the clue to her affection and utilized it to the utmost. Her art and her husband could not find a place in her thoughts at the same time; one drove the other out.” (Narayan, 2006, p.104) ¹¹.

Truth can't stay unexposed for long. Marco, upon discovering their affair, withdrew from Rosie entirely. He wouldn't sleep beside her, wouldn't speak to her and wouldn't even eat the food she touched as if she disgusted him. None of her pleas for forgiveness could move him, not even her saying that she would quit dancing altogether. She trailed behind him, hoping for some mercy on his behalf, but to no avail.

“He returned and went about his business without worrying about me. But I followed him, day after day, like a dog—waiting on his grace. He ignored me totally.” (Narayan, 2006, p.125) ¹¹.

He finished all his work in Malgudi, took the train to Madras and left for good, leaving Rosie there alone with no means of support or survival. With no other alternative, she went to Raju for shelter. Raju welcomed her into his house and spurred by his encouragement, she began practising to become a successful dancer with fresh vigour. Rosie was caught in the haze of happiness as she finally had someone who truly valued her art and was actively supporting her with it. Raju's eagerness to help her had nothing to do with his art appreciation; he didn't even properly understand it. He was doing everything because of his entanglement with Rosie and because Marco had slighted the woman whom he considered his. He was happy about her being with him, not because she was happy doing what she loved, but because he had an outlet for his passions. They both held entirely different understandings of each other and were together because of different motivations. Rosie devoted herself to Raju because he had

supported her in dire straits and cared enough about her dancing career to part with his mother. Raju departed with his mother and went bankrupt because of his obsession with Rosie. Attaining her had held a primary position in his life while everything else took a backseat, and during this attainment, he fooled Rosie into believing that he understood the beauty and gravity of her art. When they started spending each waking moment in each other's presence, the frail base of their relationship became apparent.

“Whenever I watched her sway her figure, if there was no one about, I constantly interrupted her performance, although I was supposed to watch her from an art critic’s point of view. She pushed me away with “What has come over you?” She was a devoted artist; her passion for physical love was falling into place and had ceased to be a primary obsession with her.”

(Narayan, 2006, p.134) ¹¹.

When reality struck him and crisis came knocking at his door, Raju displayed his true motives. His idiocy left him penniless and with a criminal case on his hands. It was then that his selfish desire to become rich using Rosie's art was brought forward, as it had always been the true motivation behind his support for her. Stuck in a desperate situation because of his ignorance, he immediately commoditised that which was sacred in Rosie's life.

“I outlined to him a plan to utilize Rosie’s services and make money. The thought of her warmed me up. “She is a gold-mine,” I cried. “If I had money to start her with—oh!”

(Narayan, 2006, p.133) ¹¹.

He assumed full control over Rosie's career, organising her performances and making himself appear as the figure of supreme authority. Soon Raju was caught up in this and truly started

believing that her success was due more to his planning and support than to her talent, that out of the two of them, he was the one with the power to validate every step Rosie took.

“When I watched her in a large hall with a thousand eyes focused on her, I had no doubt that people were telling themselves and each other, ‘There he is, the man but for whom—’ And I imagined all this adulation lapping around my ears like wavelets. In every show I took, as a matter of right, the middle sofa in the first row. I gave it out that that was my seat wherever I might go, and unless I sat there Nalini would be unable to perform. She needed my inspiring presence.” (Narayan, 2006, p.147) ¹¹.

She was thankful to him for standing beside her when she was in distress. But her gratefulness made him heady with the sense of superiority, and he believed that he owned Rosie.

“I had a monopoly of her, and nobody had anything to do with her.” (Narayan, 2006, p.151)¹¹

“I felt vastly superior to everyone.” (Narayan, 2006, p.151)¹¹

“Even if I have seven rebirths, I won’t be able to repay my debt to you. ’ I swelled with pride when I heard her and accepted it all as my literal due.” (Narayan, 2006, p.148)¹¹.

Raju had always felt a sense of entitlement and ownership towards Rosie; he had always wanted to keep her only to himself. When he renamed her as Nalini, he tampered with her identity, he assumed the dominant hand over her very existence. From the moment Nalini was born, Rosie only existed for his sake while Nalini was the persona he had created, which others could access but only to the extent he wanted them to.

“I was the only one who knew her as Rosie and called her so. The rest of the world knew her as Nalini.” (Narayan, 2006, p.143) ¹¹.

Rosie was the identity of her past, which associated her with the devadasis, from where she had escaped. Adorning a new identity would be rekindling a new life in her. An identity that would associate her with her art, performance, audience, and stage.

“‘Rosie’ is a silly name,” I said as a first step after two days of hard thinking. “The trouble with you is that although your people are a traditional dance family, they didn’t know how to call you. For our public purpose, your name must be changed.” (Narayan, 2006, p.142) ¹¹.

Raju believed he was the creditor of everything Rosie had in her life at the time, and naturally, she owed him every ounce of respect, obedience, and gratitude. To him, she was no more than an object that was created by and possessed solely by him. He felt he had every right to dictate/decide everything in her life, and he expected her to do his bidding without complaint. Her enjoyment with other people irked him.

“I did not like to see her enjoy other people’s company. I liked to keep her in a citadel.” (Narayan, 2006, p.154) ¹¹.

Similarly, in the case of Eliza and Higgins from GB Shaw's *Pygmalion* (Shaw, 2022) ¹² where Higgins, the phonetics professor, takes on the task to transform a poor and brash Eliza into a soft-spoken, genteel lady. For Higgins, Eliza was a worthless creature with no purpose, and by doing her the favour of teaching her and experimenting with his skills on her, he had provided her with the little value she had. He believed that without him, Eliza had no worth,

and the moment she stopped taking orders from him, the valuable version of her would cease to exist.

In this sense, both Higgins and Raju were arrogant enough to overlook the fact that the women they believed to have single-handedly 'created' were strong-minded individuals with agency over their lives. When the time came and their pretentiousness became too much to bear, both Eliza and Rosie broke away from the men who had bound and limited them. Eliza started a life independent of Higgins despite her genuine regard for him, and contrary to his belief, she had truly turned into a different girl, who couldn't just revert to what she used to be.

Similarly, Rosie left Raju when she learned of his deceitful conduct despite her tenderness towards him. She continued her career without his help and proved that she wasn't an invalid object that could only move on Raju's command. Despite the bitterness Raju's betrayal had brought between them, Rosie helped Raju throughout his case, which ultimately landed him in prison and her in Madras, away from him with a good life of her own.

RK Narayan presents Rosie as a figure of fatal attraction for a person with a feminist approach.

(Kaur, 2019)⁹. Her not-so-native name, Rosie, shows that the author tried to put the light of exoticism on her. The novel was published in 1985, and the ratio of educated women in the 1980s was lower than the average.

Narayan conscripted her character as an educated woman; moreover, she has completed her master's in economics, which was rare considering the time India was only a developing country in all aspects. Since the time of the novel is the beginning of the time when women

were promoted to higher education, Rosie's acquiring a master's in economics implied that she was a well-read woman. Unlike the customary heroines of the time, she comes from a background of Devdasis, and without getting affected by that, she overcame the shackles of the society laid for a child without a father's name. Despite being left by her husband, she never submits herself to her fate and gains success with the help of Raju. Despite Raju's betrayal, she helped him and then chose neither to be with him nor with her husband. This established the permanence and sturdiness of her character; moreover, she chose to do something that had been stated as taboo for her by her husband.

Her growth symbolises the difficulties of a woman while developing in her career and the situations they come across in her life when they choose to follow her heart. Nonetheless, despite giving her a strong personality, the text failed to establish her as a resolute woman. She is introduced as a woman who has a degree of master's degree in economics; however, she was not a working woman despite being a learned person. It can be because of the period, still she never showed any interest in working other than following her passion. She agreed to follow and take care of the demands of Marco rather than try to do something with herself, with the knowledge she had gained. She was presented as cultured by talking about the traditions and values of the old school.

“At dinner, I picked up a dish and tried to serve. She said, “No, no. Let me serve you both, and I will be the last to eat, like a good housewife.” (Narayan, 2006, p.73) ¹¹.

This projects the selective centre provided to her. Narayan constructed her character as standing in the centre; however, neither her centre seems to be achieved by her own, nor does she appear to be standing firmly there by herself. Precisely, her character is a product of a discourse that is created by a man who is modelling a centre for women. Rosie's old-school

learnings of prioritising men over women and her being financially dependent on her husband despite being a learned woman prevent her from standing in the light of feminism.

Rosie was indeed written as a righteous woman with nerve and fortitude. She exhales her charms in her decisions demanded by the time like; agreeing to marry Marco to come out from the status she is suffering from; achieving her goals with the help of Raju and then deciding not to be played by any man in the end, nonetheless, while developing a character the chosen words and statements often suggests the idea of authors' interpretation of their written character. Similarly, when Narayan discussed the part of Rosie and Marco's marriage, his words put Rosie in a passive zone where her fate is in the hands of Marco rather than critic her for choosing a guy who did not need a companion and taking this opportunity to put an end on her troubling background despite looking for a man of her age and interest.

"We had had many discussions before coming to a decision. The question was whether it would be good to marry so much above our wealth and class. But all the women in my family were impressed, excited that a man like him was coming to marry one of our classes, 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, 2006, p.79)¹¹.

It is an act of great courage to pursue something that often puts you in a testimony box; however, she has shown the audacity to argue for herself through her action of pursuing dance with the help of Raju. Here, her courageous attitude creates less commotion than compared to Raju's persistence in supporting her.

While showing the intimate relationship between Rosie and Raju, the author's idea tends to put Rosie considering being distracted from her notion of a virtuous woman rather than taking relief from the continuous emotional and physical ignorance and betrayal from her husband.

Indian literature's interpretation sometimes looks at women, who cultivate their ways the other way round from the definite path decided for them through the lens of covetousness, narrowness, distraction, and oblivion.

Ratna from Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man* (Dattani, 2006)⁴ was also a diligent dancer who was fighting for her career and dedicated herself to it completely and in that process she unintentionally avoided her neonate child, Dattani's words interpret her like a shrewd woman and put all the blame on her child's death on her head nevertheless, the husband sitting in the house who has nothing to do in his career and like to be drunk in that grief never cared about the child seems not a big deal in the development of the play. Throughout the performance, Ratna emerges as a negative role because she prioritises work over her family, and her husband remains a source to bring pity out of the audience rather than an insecure man and a failed father. similarly, Rosie's asking for comfort from someone else is a form of betrayal since the decision is not abiding by the rule book constructed for a wife,

She opened the door, passed in, and hesitated, leaving the door half open. She stood looking at me for a moment, as on the first day.

“*Shall I go away?*” I asked in a whisper.

“*Yes. Good night,*” she said feebly.

“*May I not come in?*” I asked, trying to look my saddest.

“No, no. Go away,” she said. But on an impulse, I gently pushed her out of the way, and stepped in and locked the door on the world. [pg- 81] ¹¹

Women in any role are least prone to the accusation of something that is incomplete or incorrect in their life and family, and the women who are a bit stronger in their approach to the choices of words and actions are most suited to the testimony box. Certain writings seem to be inspired by this school of thought.

Shashi Deshpande’s novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, deals with the theme of a rising woman in her career and her obstacles and their consequences. She projects how she developed the tendency to rely on herself; unlike the upbringing and teachings a girl receives from her childhood. The story revolves around Sarita, a doctor who has faced animosity and loathing from her mother since childhood. Her mother accused her of her life when her brother Dhruba died while playing with her, and she came back alive.

Her mother was no different from the described figure of the mother, soft and kind; nevertheless, it was not for her. The author advocated the argument that a woman imparts patriarchy from one generation to the next through the estrangement between mother and daughter. Sarita’s mother prioritised her son, and that made her speak such harsh words and give her the harsher treatment that made Sarita detest her from the bottom of her heart. “*I would be as unlike her as possible.*” ¹¹

She always spoke without considering the sentiments of her daughter, which led Sarita’s personality to be insecure and diffident. “*Looking at yourself in the mirror! I’ll give you a certificate to say that you are beautiful. Will that satisfy you?*” ¹¹ This attitude of her mother made her childhood traumatic and left a negative impact on her forever. It further grew with

time and dug a hollowness within her, filled with remorse and fear for her dead brother. Even when he was alive, the disparity of treatment she received because of his existence made her repulsive towards him. *“He called her ‘Sarutai’ now. She liked it, wondering why she had resented it once.”* Her mother’s dry and loathing attitude made her detest her gender till she observed and understood other women in her life. *“If you are a woman, I don’t want to be one.”*

Even after the death of her mother, she never agreed to forget the treatment she received from her. Despite knowing the fact that her daughter looks like her mother, she strongly objects to people saying this, *“Oh no, she’s not like her. Not like her at all.”*

Her father never showed any emotions toward her, not even when she was treated unfairly by her mother. *“He never took any interest in my school or college. He left it to her.”* Except for one time when she persisted in going to Bombay, he colluded with her in front of her mother, *“but you have got to help me. You have to go. You did it once. And because you did, I went to Bombay.”* In a family where she must live on her own from a small age, taking care of her needs and necessities ignited the fire of becoming independent. Moreover, despite all the disagreements and contradictions, Saru shares quite a few similarities with her mother. Sarita’s mother holds most of the power in her hands. In the same way, she decides on her path without giving in to her mother’s stubbornness. Her mother hated her till her last breath due to her persistence towards one incident in her life; similarly, Sarita never forgave her mother even after her death and was mournful for missing out on her mother’s death. Her mother’s treatment has already made her insecure enough to resist her own brother; furthermore, the unpremeditated love her father shows toward her brother subconsciously fills her with nihilism and antagonism against a child who died long ago but affected all her life. When she spoke out her words in front of her father she resembles the figure of a

negative woman (the defined look of a woman) who lacks humbleness and consideration as it is projected by Shashi Deshpande nevertheless, as per the “ Psychoanalysis theory of child development” of Sigmund Freud this reaction of Sarita could be an outburst of her accumulated resentment and insecurities from her childhood because of difference of treatment she received from her parents compared to her brother.

“I must show Baba something, anything, to take his attention away from Dhruva sitting on his lap.” (Deshpande, 1990, p.32)⁶.

“His face was stubborn, the pampered child who could bear no opposition.” (Deshpande, 1990, p.186) ⁶.

She was insecure when she first met Manohar; nonetheless, she was headstrong enough to pursue him later as she desired. She blamed her mother for her being dead before letting her present in front of her as a winner in life, just like the way her mother blamed her for life when her brother died. Her mother’s hatred remained for her daughter till her death. Similarly, she never forgot her mother’s antagonism after her death.

When Sarita first met Manohar, she felt insecure about her worthiness of Manohar’s attention and love because he was a literary prodigy, and she felt he wouldn’t be interested in her. Later, when they met while she was in medical college, and was confident enough to approach him. Her desperate need for love and validation leads her to pursue a relationship with him, even going against her parents’ disapproval, to later marry him. The ease with which she decided to marry him on the belief that he loved her reflects her vulnerability and longing for affection.

She had been told by her mother that if the marriage went wrong, she couldn’t return to them, it’d be her burden to carry, and later, it did become a burden heavy enough to bring her back

to her parental home fifteen years later, with her mother dead. Her relationship with Manohar deteriorated, with him turning into a monster who inflicted pain on her during the night and come morning, he reverted to normal. She felt betrayed by the drastic change in his attitude, unsure of where it all began and how they reached this point. They were very happy as newlyweds despite their financial conditions being poor. They were both struggling together to achieve success, but they were happy in their world.

Now, when she was left to ponder on how their relationship became what it was today, she realised that while she hadn't paid attention to it before, the problem had been brewing for a long time. Manohar's bitterness and violent behaviour stemmed from societal expectations and power imbalances in their relationship.

"And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor, and he was my husband." (Deshpande, 1990, p.42) ⁶.

As she became more successful and the breadwinner of the family, she unintentionally undermined his sense of superiority as a husband. According to Simone de Beauvoir's theory in *'The Second Sex'*, her husband's role as a provider, as the man of the family, was rendered useless when his wife didn't need him for her existence and survival in the world anymore. And consequently, due to the lack of adherence to the set system that gave him validation, he lashed out on her, feeling her success was to blame for his misery.

"Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator." (Beauvoir, 1949/1956, p.641) ³.

It became especially apparent when other people pointed out how his wife was the one paying for their expenses. It made him bitter, but he wouldn't let Sarita leave her job because he knew that he was incompetent and couldn't support a good lifestyle like hers. This led to resentment and humiliation for him, causing him to exert control and dominance over her in the only way he was capable of, through sexual violence. Sarita understood that her crime was that she had dared to stand above her husband, she had dared to defy society's conventions, and that was what she was punished for.

“A wife should always be a few feet behind her husband. If he is an MA, you should be a BA. If he is 5'4 tall you shouldn't be more than 5'3 tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage...No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal but take care it is unequal in favour of the husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, God, help you, both of you.” (Deshpande, 1990, p.137) ⁶.

Sarita carries a sense of self-blame, feeling that she brought this suffering upon herself by marrying Manohar. She feels trapped in the abusive relationship, believing there is no way out and accepting her fate because of defying societal conventions. Her offer to leave her job, which had been her one desire since she was a young child, hoping that it would change her husband, shows her desperation to salvage the marriage. One might believe that she had an easy way out of the marriage because she was financially independent, and her choosing to give up her job in favour of staying with Manu indicates her willingness to be with him; but the choice is never as simple as it seems. She offers to leave her job instead of her husband because she has been socialised in a way that makes her believe that her career has no weight compared to her marriage. As is stated in Simone de Beauvoir's theory on the independent woman; she tries to salvage her marriage not out of a desire to be with Manu but because

even if she had she had substantial success as a doctor, she wasn't secure in it, still struggling with the idea that she would become a failure of a woman if she left her husband. "*There are a fairly large number of women who find in their profession a means of economic and social autonomy. There is no good reason to say they are on the wrong road; and still it is certain that they are not tranquilly installed in their new realm.*" (Beauvoir, 1949/1956, p.643)³

The description of Sarita's relationship with her mentor, Boozie, seems to insinuate that she was in some way responsible for the way her husband's bruised ego and insecurity unleashed hell upon her. She knew, as a student, the kind of reputation Boozie had, that he was known for targeting pretty girls among his students. It is implied that Saru wilfully looked away from his obvious flirting, telling herself that it wasn't harming her marriage.

"I told myself about my relationship with this man couldn't, wouldn't hurt Manu. It was just a teacher-student relationship. If he put his hand on my shoulder, slapped me on my back, held my hand or hugged me...that was just his mannerism and meant nothing. It had nothing to do with me and Manu." (Deshpande, 1990, p.91)⁶.

She seems to be an opportunistic woman who was playing along with her teacher to extract favours from him despite knowing that rumours of their affair were rampant and were probably affecting her husband.

"And I thought of the day I had said...I've got the money. Boozie is giving it to me. And he had, a little later, tried to possess me and failed. And I had turned my back on him." (Deshpande, 1990, p.93)⁶.

The words she speaks seem to come from a guilty conscience; they are the words of a woman who understood that she was to blame but was stubbornly rejecting the idea that the wrong course her life took might be because of her own actions. But that wasn't the case at all.

Saru's decision to be in Boozie's good graces was because she wanted success in her life, because she realised that she could achieve that by learning from Boozie, who seemed to have it all charm, skills and looks. Saru was ambitious, and Manu was not; he apparently had no intention of ever coming out of the slump he was in and believed that his wife, with a medical degree, would change everything.

"I knew also that it was I and not Manu who would get us out of the morass we were in." (Deshpande, 1990, p.91)⁶.

"I had begun to wonder at his acceptance of our shabby way of living." (Deshpande, 1990, p.92)⁶.

"I would not stay in a dingy two-room flat in a far-off drab suburb all my life. I would not bring up any child to a life of deprivations." (Deshpande, 1990, p.92)⁶.

Success wasn't just a tool for Saru to fulfil her materialistic desires, which she could've lived without, one might argue. For a woman, success means financial security for her, and it is crucial if she is to have a separate identity from her husband. According to Simone de Beauvoir's theory on what made a woman truly independent, it's always economic freedom.

"Civil liberties remain theoretical as long as they are unaccompanied by economic freedom. A woman supported by a man is not emancipated from the male because she has a vote; if custom imposes less restraint upon her than formerly, the negative freedom implied has not profoundly modified her situation; she remains bound in her condition of vassalage. It is through gainful employment that woman has traversed most of the distance that separated her from the male; and nothing else can guarantee her liberty in practice." (Beauvoir, 1949/1956, p.641)³.

Boozie was a miracle worker in her life, and without his help, Saru wouldn't have been a successful doctor. He taught her everything apart from medical sciences; how to speak English, how to dress, how to live with elegance and whatnot. Manu was indifferent to the causes that drove his wife to the struggle in her career and why she did everything.

"He could have asked me then... Why? And I would have told him. What would I have said? But the occasion didn't arise because he never asked me. And there was, perversely, no relief in me, but contempt that he didn't." (Deshpande, 1990, p.92) ⁶.

"But funnily enough, it was not him I hated. It was Manu for doing nothing." (Deshpande, 1990, p.94) ⁶.

There was no possibility of an affair between her and Boozie because he simply wouldn't be interested in her as a woman, as he was homosexual, though he put up a very convincing act that showed otherwise. He taught her as a teacher and nothing else; the flirting was always on purpose to maintain a reputation that would lead no one to suspect him, and it was allowed by Saru not because she took some perverse satisfaction in it but because she knew that it was nothing but a front. Had Manu been doubtful of her, he could have simply asked, but he never did.

"I never revealed that to anyone. Not even to Manu for he asked me nothing. And they began then...the silences that grew between us. Just grew and grew like Jack's beanstalk." (Deshpande, 1990, p.94) ⁶.

Conclusion:

Both the characters of Rosie and Sarita were written with the notion of creating a feminist character by their respective authors, and so far, they have been read with this perspective. However, it is not necessary to look at the characters through the eyes of the authors. It is justified to look at their characters and their aim with the idea of new criticism and formalism, as an author cannot always stand in the centre ruling the text (Barthes, 1997)². As Wolfgang Iser has stated, the process of reading is "*an effect to be experienced*", not "*an object to be defined*." (Iser, 1978)⁸. Similarly, every reader's experience differs from that one another. And to acknowledge the text from a personal perspective the proposal of Mathew Arnold of the *touchstone method* must be applied so that a reader can only focus on the words written on the paper rather than the maiden intention of the author or the established notion about the writing, this active participation in reading what Iser called an aesthetic pole, therefore, while going through these two novels the gap between the words gives the glimpse of patriarchal values and mind contrary to the idea that dominates in the novel. Whether Rosie or Sarita, both are developed based on how much a woman should be feminist and progressive in a society of men. Then why are they developed like that? Is it the author's idea of the character or the reader's mind that works while experiencing the novel, or is it the ideology of the author that subconsciously slips between the words while dealing with these characters? It is difficult to say, as Roland Barthes has mentioned, that it is difficult to decipher the origin of words once written on paper (Barthes, 1977)². Further alluding to Barthes' *'The Death of the Author'*, authors should omit themselves while creating a text. However, these two texts appear to be somewhat lacking in terms of reaching there as the presence of the author's mind can be seen scattered through the text. That weakens the affirmation of the character and is the result of the author not being ready to leave the centre and has made these characters flawed. But in contrast, a character like Binodini from Tagore's *Chokher Bali*, developed on the strength of the author's subconsciousness too still

stands on the pedestal of a strong female protagonist because the right to voice the character's decisions was given in the hands of the character based on her personality traits without any interference of the author. While in the declaration, these two protagonists' decisions and actions seem to be influenced and driven by the outside world, which lessens the dedicated idea of the authors.

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