

Rosie (Narayan's novel 'The Guide') Conflicted

Character Rosie is a conflicted and enigmatic character. She is certainly naïve and innocent, believing that Raju will make her a great dancer, while at the same time she remains partially loyal to a husband who does not appreciate her artistic talent. She appears to be malleable, shaped by Raju's profit-driven schemes, but she also harbours a tremendous desire to realise her dancing potential. She even has two names. Rosie is her given name, but she adopts 'Nalini' as a dancer. At the end of the story, when Raju is arrested for forgery, she disowns him, realising that he was not a 'true friend, but merely a technician [of my success].' Although vain and obsessed with her own supposed talent, Rosie is a saint compared with Raju, a deeply scheming and duplicitous man. She may appear to be fickle and flighty, but underneath she has a strong will.

Activities Rosie is a dedicated dancer. She practices all day and performs at night, sometimes for hours at a time. She also spends a lot of time arguing with her husband, accusing him of neglecting her for his work (something she herself will do when she leaves him and devotes herself full-time to dancing).

Illustrative moments

Naive While her husband is studying temple sculpture, Rosie asks Raju to take her to see a 'cobra dance dancing to the music of a flute' (which is, of course, the famous example of Indian exoticism and illustrates Rosie's naïveté). When Raju shows her a snake-dance ritual in a grove, she sways to the music and convinces Raju that she is the greatest dancer on earth.

Conflicted Although Rosie becomes Raju's lover, she is not without sympathy. Her husband ignores her and Raju praises her as the world's greatest 'artiste.' Even after they become lovers, Rosie is stricken by her conscience. She says, 'After all, he is my husband...is this right, what I am doing? He has been so good to me, given me comfort and freedom.' A day later, she asks Raju to leave her, to allow her to be a 'good wife.'

Sympathetic A month later, however, Rosie turns up at Raju's mother's house with her trunk and asks if she can stay. She explains that Marco had disowned her, called her a 'slut' and a 'street-dancer.' Raju comforts her, just as we the reader would want him to do.

Discussion questions

The name 'Rosie' sets this character apart from the others. It is not a traditional Indian name, but one borrowed from the west. The same is true of 'Marco', her husband. What explanation can you suggest for these choices by the author?

Rosie is a dancer, or she thinks she is a dancer, or Raju convinces her that she is a dancer, or her audiences create her as a dancer. Is Rosie a 'performer', in the same way that Raju performs for his audience?