

Research Article

Reclaiming the Female Body: Dance, Desire, and Agency in *The Guide*

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Abstract

This article examines how Rosie, the dancer-heroine of R. K. Narayan's novel *The Guide* (1958) and Vijay Anand's 1965 Hindi film *Guide*, becomes the site on which competing claims over the female body are staged and contested. Reading the film closely, with comparative reference to the novel, it can be argued that Rosie's dance operates as a form of embodied knowledge that resists three overlapping regimes: the reformist and nationalist politics of respectability that stigmatised the devadasi tradition, the bourgeois marital economy represented by her husband Marco, and finally the commercial and cinematic economy that converts her movement into spectacle. Drawing on feminist film theory, dance studies, and scholarship on devadasi history, this paper attempts to show that the film grants Rosie a rare cinematic vocabulary of desire while simultaneously containing her within a narrative that ultimately privileges Raju's redemption. Rosie's agency is therefore neither simply affirmed nor merely denied; it is exercised in and through the contradictions of the text.

Keywords

Devadasi, Bharatanatyam, Hindi cinema, female agency, gaze

1. Introduction

Few figures in mid-century Indian popular culture have held the imagination as durably as Rosie, the dancer who stands at the centre of R. K. Narayan's signature novel *The Guide* (1958) and of Vijay Anand's (1965) celebrated Hindi adaptation, *Guide*. Through these works, Rosie is introduced as a woman already marked by a contested inheritance—the daughter of a devadasi family, married to a scholar-husband who regards her art with distaste, and she becomes, over the course of the narrative, a wife who leaves, a lover who chooses, a star who earns, and finally, a figure who recedes while the

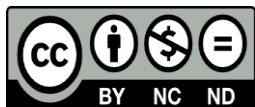
male protagonist, Raju, undergoes his improbable transformation into a holy man. It is easy to remember the film for its final movement, the rain that may or may not answer Raju's fast, and for the haunting music of S. D. Burman. Yet the emotional centre of the film lies elsewhere, in the sequences where Rosie's body moves, and in the question those sequences ask: to whom does a woman's body belong, and what happens when she insists that it belongs to her?

Critical writing on *The Guide* has traditionally gravitated toward Raju, the tourist guide who becomes a swami, and

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toward the novel's ironies of imposture, faith, and the manufacture of sanctity. The film, too, has been discussed largely as a vehicle for Dev Anand's star persona and for its unusually adult treatment of adultery in a period when the Hindi film heroine was expected to embody domestic virtue. Rosie, by contrast, has often been treated as the catalyst of the male protagonist's fall and rise rather than as a subject in her own right. Here rests the significance of this article that opens new feeds for critical thinking as it reverses the emphasis. It also takes Rosie's dancing seriously as a mode of thought, desire, and self-authorship, and it asks how the film negotiates the cultural anxieties that clustered around the dancing woman in post-colonial India.

Our argument proceeds from a simple observation: in Rosie's case the female body is never a neutral given. It is a historical object, shaped by the colonial-era campaign against the devadasi, by the nationalist recuperation of dance as a respectable classical art, and by the visual economy of popular cinema. To speak of "reclaiming" the body, then, is not to imagine a prior, unmediated state to which Rosie returns. It is to describe a series of acts through which she wrests the meanings of her own movement away from the husband, the reformer, and the spectator, only to find that each of these figures re-enters the frame in new guises. The theoretical vocabulary we bring to this process draws on several traditions. Susan Leigh Foster's (1996) account of dance as a form of corporeal knowledge, Iris Marion Young's (1980) phenomenology of gendered movement, and Judith Butler's (1988) understanding of gender as a stylised repetition of acts help me describe what dancing does. Laura Mulvey's (1975) classic analysis of the male gaze, together with bell hooks's (1992) notion of the oppositional gaze, helps me describe what watching does. Partha Chatterjee's (1989) analysis of the nationalist resolution of the women's question situates both within the history of the Indian nation.

A note on method is necessary. The novel and the film are distinct works, and the differences between them matter. Narayan's text is narrated largely through Raju's self-serving recollection, so that Rosie is always filtered through the consciousness of the man who loves, exploits, and misunderstands her. Anand's film, with its restructured chronology, its song-and-dance sequences, and its shift of emphasis toward Rosie's romantic and artistic liberation, offers her more room to speak in her own idiom, which is to say through movement and song. Therefore, we have taken the film as our primary text and draw on the novel comparatively, particularly where the adaptation's choices illuminate its ideological commitments. The article moves through five sections. The first situates Rosie within the history of the devadasi and the politics of classical dance; the second reads her marriage as a contest over the body's meaning; the third examines the film's choreography of desire; the fourth analyses the economy of the gaze in which her performances circulate; and the fifth considers

the narrative strategies by which the film contains her.

2. Methodology

This article employs a qualitative approach based on close textual and audiovisual analysis of Vijay Anand's *Guide* (1965), with R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) serving as a comparative text. Selected scenes are examined through choreography, bodily movement, camera framing, editing, costume, song, and narrative structure to explore Rosie's bodily autonomy, artistic agency, and negotiation of patriarchal authority.

The analysis draws on Susan Leigh Foster's theory of dance as corporeal knowledge, Iris Marion Young's phenomenology of gendered movement, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze, bell hooks's oppositional gaze, and Partha Chatterjee's analysis of nationalism and the women's question. These frameworks situate Rosie's artistic self-expression within the historical politics of the devadasi tradition, classical dance, and Hindi popular cinema. The study considers both the emancipatory possibilities of Rosie's dancing and the narrative constraints that ultimately privilege Raju's spiritual transformation.

3. Analysis and Discussion

The Devadasi Archive and the Politics of Respectability

A Contested Inheritance

In fact, Rosie's identity as a devadasi's daughter is not incidental decoration; it is the historical condition that makes her dancing a political act. The devadasis of South India were women ritually dedicated to temple deities, whose duties encompassed singing, dancing, and participation in temple ceremony, and whose social position was unusual in that they were not bound by conventional marriage and were often literate, propertied, and trained in the arts (Kersenboom, 1987). Their relationship to patrons, including relationships that involved sexual intimacy, was understood within a framework of ritual and custom that colonial-era reformers, missionaries, and an emergent Indian middle class increasingly condemned as prostitution.

Amrit Srinivasan's (1985) influential essay on the devadasi and her dance traces how this condemnation hardened into a reformist campaign in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, culminating in anti-nautch agitation and eventually in legislation that abolished dedication to temples in the Madras Presidency. What is striking in Srinivasan's account is the double movement it describes. The reformers sought to end the devadasi's social existence while the nationalist revivalists sought to salvage her art, so that the dance was detached from the women who had sustained it and relocated to

the respectable stage under a new name, Bharatanatyam. Davesh Soneji (2012) has deepened this analysis by recovering the memories and performance practices of devadasi communities themselves, showing that the story of a “decline” and “revival” is a narrative that serves the interests of the revivalists rather than a neutral description of what happened. Thus, women who had practised the art for generations were displaced from its history even as the art itself was elevated to the status of national heritage.

Anne-Marie Gaston (1996) and Janet O’Shea (2007) similarly document the processes by which Bharatanatyam was re-configured as a classical form suited to the sensibilities of an urban, upper-caste, middle-class public. Erotic elements, particularly the *sringara* emotion that had animated devadasi repertoire, were reinterpreted as devotional allegory, and the dancer was imagined as a chaste devotee rather than a sexually autonomous professional. Dance was thus rescued by being moralised. A woman who inherited the bodily knowledge of the older tradition but lacked the respectable pedigree that the new regime required occupied an uncomfortable position: her skill was valued, but her origins were a liability.

Rosie Between Stigma and Heritage

We notice that Rosie occupies exactly this position. In both novel and film, she is described by others in terms that register the stigma of her background, and she knows it (Ali & Talukder, 2024, p. 176; Rahman & Talukder, 2024, p. 79). When her husband Marco learns of her dancing, or more precisely when he is forced to confront the possibility that his wife might take pleasure in public performance, his response draws on the reformist script: dancing is the activity of women of a certain class, and a respectable wife ought to abandon it. Marco’s disapproval is not simply personal prudishness. It reproduces, in the intimate register of marriage, the discourse that had been used to dismantle the devadasi institution. In his insistence that she cease dancing, the archaeologist who studies the dead art of ancient caves also enforces the death of a living one.

The irony is thick. Marco’s professional world is one in which the past is an object of reverent study, preserved in painted stone and catalogued with scholarly detachment. The devadasi tradition, which is the living past that Rosie carries in her body, is not admitted into that category of valued heritage because it is embodied, female, and sexual. The film is alert to this contradiction. The caves that absorb Marco’s attention are presented as chilly, silent, and indifferent to the warmth of his wife, while Rosie’s dance brings colour and rhythm into every space where it occurs. The comparison is not subtle, but it is effective: heritage that is allowed to live in a woman’s body is more threatening to Marco than heritage that has been safely turned to stone.

Rosie’s own relationship to her inheritance is ambivalent and developing, and the film is careful not to resolve it too neatly. She does not simply repudiate the stigma, nor does she

simply embrace the devadasi identity as a source of pride. She dances because dancing is what she does, because it is the knowledge her body holds, and because it is the medium through which she knows herself. When the film’s drama requires her to adopt a new name and a new public persona, “Miss Nalini,” she is in effect performing the very transformation that the revivalist project demanded of the dancer: leaving behind a compromised lineage and re-presenting herself as a refined artist for a respectable audience. What the film shows, with an irony that probably exceeds the filmmakers’ intention, is that this transformation is also a form of erasure. Rosie becomes Nalini in order to be allowed to dance, and the cost of her acceptance is the concealment of the history that produced her art.

Dance as Embodied Knowledge

To grasp why these matters, we need a theory of what dance does that goes beyond representation. Foster (1996) argues that dance is not merely an expressive supplement to some prior meaning but a way of knowing, in which the trained body acquires and transmits culture, history, and power relations. Bodies are made by the disciplines they undergo, and the dancer’s body bears the inscription of the lineage that trained it. In the context of Bharatanatyam, this means that the very posture, gesture, and rhythmic intelligence that Rosie displays are the residue of generations of women’s labour and instruction. Her dance is an archive, and one that the official archive, Marco’s cave paintings and the reformers’ legislation alike, has failed to preserve.

Young’s (1980) essay on “throwing like a girl” offers a useful counterpoint. Young argues that women in patriarchal societies often experience their bodies as objects, as things to be looked at and managed, and that this self-consciousness produces a characteristic inhibition, a tentative and constrained relationship to space (pp. 140-145). The trained dancer is, in one sense, the opposite of this figure. Rosie’s movement is expansive, confident, and spatially assertive. When she dances, she does not apologise for the room she takes up. That quality of unselfconscious spatial command is part of what the film means us to see as her liberation, and part of why her husband finds it intolerable. His objection to her dancing is, at one level, an objection to a woman who refuses the inhibited body that bourgeois respectability expects.

The Marital Economy: Rosie, Marco, and the Ownership of the Body

A Marriage of Unequal Possessions

The film’s treatment of the marriage between Rosie and Marco is among its most psychologically precise elements. Marco is not a villain in the conventional melodramatic sense. He is cultured, disciplined, and in his own way devoted to his work, and the film resists reducing him to a tyrant. What it

dramatises instead is a more insidious form of male authority, one that operates through indifference, intellectual condescension, and the quiet assumption that the wife's desires are subordinate to the husband's vocation. Rosie is educated, in the novel holding a university degree, and her marriage to Marco appears to have promised a certain respectability: an escape, through a learned husband, from the devadasi stigma (Ali & Talukder, 2024, p. 176). The bargain has a price. To be the wife of an archaeologist, she must be a particular kind of woman, quiet, decorous, and bodily reserved.

Chatterjee's (1989) analysis of the nationalist "women's question" illuminates the structure of this bargain. Chatterjee argues that Indian nationalism resolved the tension between modernisation and cultural distinctiveness by dividing social life into an outer, material domain, in which Western science and statecraft might be imitated, and an inner, spiritual domain, whose guardian was the woman. The "new woman" of nationalist discourse was educated yet chaste, modern yet traditional, and above all defined by her role in preserving the integrity of the home (pp. 623-627). Marco's household exemplifies this ideal. Rosie's education is welcomed insofar as it makes her a fitting companion to a scholar, but her embodied artistry is not. She is to be modern in mind and domestic in body.

This is the framework against which her decision to leave must be understood. Rosie's departure from Marco is not a simple act of adultery, though the film's contemporary audiences certainly saw it as one. It is a refusal of the nationalist ideal of womanhood, a decision to occupy the space that the inner/outer division had foreclosed: the public, professional, and sexual space of the dancer. Her action is all the more radical for being undertaken without the justification that Hindi cinema typically demanded of its transgressive women. She does not leave because Marco is cruel, or because she has been wrongly accused, or because she has been rescued by a hero who promises marriage. She leaves because she wants to dance.

The Language of Property

What is notable about the marital quarrel in the film is how consistently it is framed in the language of possession. Marco speaks as if Rosie's body, her time, and her talents are matters that fall within his jurisdiction. Her desire to dance is not a preference to be negotiated but a deviation to be corrected. The film underscores the point visually, placing Marco in spaces of enclosure, studies, tents, and caves, where the surrounding architecture reinforces the sense of a life organised around the contemplation of dead things. Rosie, by contrast, is repeatedly drawn toward openness, toward windows, courtyards, and landscapes in which her gestures can expand.

Butler's (1988) concept of gender as performative helps explain why these matters. For Butler, gender is "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (p. 519). Marital

respectability is a repertoire of such acts, a set of gestures, postures, and silences that Rosie is expected to repeat. Her refusal is thus a refusal of a script. By dancing, by refusing the stylised repertoire of the respectable wife, and by performing instead the stylised repertoire of the classical dancer, she displaces one regime of gendered repetition with another. The difference is that the second is one she has chosen, and one that corresponds to her skills, history, and pleasures.

Choreographing Desire

Song and the Interior Life

If the marital scenes in *Guide* explain what Rosie rejects, its musical sequences display what she wants. Hindi cinema's song-and-dance numbers have often been dismissed as interruptions to narrative, but scholars of the form have persuasively argued that they are instead one of its principal means of expressing interiority, fantasy, and emotional intensity (Morcom, 2007; Vasudevan, 2010). In *Guide* the musical sequences do something more particular. They give Rosie a sphere of expression that the dialogue largely withholds. In conversation, she is often constrained, indirect, and defensive; in song and dance, she is lucid, ecstatic, and unguarded.

The famous sequence set to "Aaj phir jeene ki tamanna hai," with lyrics by Shailendra and music by S. D. Burman, is the clearest example. Its celebrated opening gesture pairs the wish to live with a readiness for death, and the feelings it expresses are those of someone emerging from long constraint. The sequence is shot in open landscapes, in motion, with the camera following Rosie as she moves through spaces that are physically and symbolically unlike the enclosures of her marriage. What is expressed here is not a love song to Raju, though he is present in the narrative. It is a song of self-recovery. The desire at issue is first of all a desire for life, for movement, and for the possession of one's own time, and only secondarily a desire for a lover.

This distinction matters because it counters a common reading in which Rosie's transgression is essentially erotic, a story of a woman who leaves a husband for a more attractive man. The film is not blind to the erotic dimension of the relationship with Raju, and indeed treats it with a frankness that surprised its first audiences. But the structure of the sequences insists that desire and agency are intertwined. Rosie's sexual desire is not the cause of her liberation; it is one of its expressions, alongside her artistic ambition and her longing for movement.

The Dance Performances

The film's formal dance sequences, notably the performance of "Piya tose naina laage re," extend this logic. Here the choreography draws on the vocabulary of classical and semi-classical dance, with its codified hand gestures, facial expression, and rhythmic footwork, while remaining accommodated to the conventions of film musical staging. Waheeda

Rehman, who was herself trained in Bharatanatyam as a girl, brings a technical authority to these scenes that is crucial to their effect. Her gestures are precise, her expressions legible, her rhythmic sense assured. The audience is invited to recognise that Rosie is not merely a woman who happens to dance but an artist with a professional command of her form.

That recognition has ideological consequences. One of the fundamental strategies of the stigma attached to dancing women was to treat their performance as sexual availability dressed in artistic clothing. By presenting Rosie's dancing as a rigorous discipline, the film insists on its status as art and labour. At the same time, it declines to sanitise the sensuality of the form. The *sringara* tradition that revivalists had sought to spiritualise returns in the film as undisguised pleasure, in lyrics of longing and in movement that is erotically charged without being vulgar. In this sense, the film recovers something of the devadasi inheritance that the respectable stage had suppressed: the idea that a woman's desire could be an artistic resource rather than a moral danger.

Cixous's (1976) famous call to women to "write yourself" and to let the body be heard (p. 880) supplies an apt analogy. Cixous is concerned with writing, but her insistence that women have been alienated from their own bodies and must reclaim them through expressive practice resonates with the film's treatment of dance. For Rosie, to dance is to write the self in a medium that precedes language. It is a form of *écriture* in which gesture and rhythm replace the words that men have monopolised. The film's repeated cuts from Rosie's face to her hands and feet, and the lingering attention it grants to the detail of her movement, make the body itself a text that the audience is invited to read.

Desire Beyond the Heterosexual Contract

It is worth pausing on the question of what kind of desire the film allows Rosie. Hindi cinema of the 1960s generally channelled women's desire into the socially sanctioned path of courtship and marriage, and heroines who strayed from this path were punished or redeemed. *Guide* departs from this convention in important respects. Rosie leaves a marriage without having been promised another; she lives with Raju without the sanction of wedlock; she earns and controls substantial money; and she is never, in the film's moral economy, simply condemned. Her relationship with Raju is complicated, and by the end she has reason for bitterness, but the narrative does not interpret her earlier choices as errors that must be paid for in suffering.

Spectacle, Gaze, and the Market for the Dancing Body

Being Looked At

The reclamation of the body in *Guide* cannot be understood without attending to the economy of looking in which Rosie's dancing circulates. Mulvey's (1975) argument that classical

cinema organises visual pleasure around a male spectator, and that the woman on screen is coded with "to-be-looked-at-ness" (p. 11), is a familiar starting point, and it requires careful adaptation to the context of Hindi cinema. Scholars have noted that the song-and-dance sequence complicates Mulvey's model, since it allows the female performer to occupy the centre of the frame in ways that interrupt narrative flow and sometimes invite a different relation of spectatorship (Dwyer, 2014; Mishra, 2002). The dancing heroine is both an object of display and a figure of expressive power, and the tension between these functions is not resolved in any simple way.

Rosie's performances exemplify this tension. The film repeatedly stages scenes in which she dances for an audience, within the diegesis and, by extension, for us. On the one hand, these scenes apparently offer the pleasures that Mulvey describes: the woman's body presented as a spectacle, framed by costume, lighting, and camera movement for the satisfaction of onlookers. On the other, the film's attention to Rosie's skill and to her emotional investment complicates the straightforward voyeurism of the gaze. She is not simply decorative. Her dance has a form, a discipline, and an intelligence that exceed the viewer's appetite, and the film encourages us to recognise that excess.

The notion of the oppositional gaze developed by hooks (1992), though formulated in relation to Black women's spectatorship in a very different context, is suggestive here. hooks argues that marginalised spectators can refuse the position the text assigns them, looking back critically and constructing their own meanings from images designed to objectify them (pp. 115-131). For women viewers of *Guide*, Rosie may have offered precisely such an opportunity: a figure whom the narrative marks as transgressive, but whose dancing and defiance could be enjoyed on terms the narrative did not fully control. The film's genuine ambivalence about its heroine makes this kind of resistant reading available. It does not simply reproduce the male gaze; it leaves space within it.

Labour, Money, and the Commodified Dancer

The film is unusually attentive to the economics of Rosie's career. Once she begins to perform publicly, she becomes a commodity in a market, and the narrative follows the consequences. Raju, as manager and promoter, manoeuvres to turn her talent into income, and the early stages of this process register as a kind of liberation. For the first time Rosie is paid for her work, and the exercise of her art is recognised as a profession rather than a vice. In a society that treated the dancing woman's earnings as a mark of moral taint, the film's depiction of Rosie as a successful professional carries real force.

But the very mechanism that releases her also binds her. The economy of public performance is organised by men, with Raju brokering her appearances and managing her earnings, and the arrangement gradually shades into dependency and control. Rosie's success becomes the basis of Raju's lifestyle,

his gambling, and his growing arrogance. The film does not simply condemn commerce, but it is attentive to the way commercial success can reproduce, in new form, the possessive structures she had fled. The novel makes the point in Rosie's own words, as she compares herself to a caged parrot or performing monkey taken around village fairs (Rahman & Talukder, 2024), and it shows her resenting being treated as a commodity (Ali & Talukder, 2024). The film's critique here echoes concerns raised in feminist work on the commodification of women's labour in the culture industries. Mazumdar (2007) has shown how the city, the studio system, and the public sphere of Bombay cinema opened new possibilities for women while subjecting them to novel forms of surveillance and exploitation; Rosie's trajectory dramatises both sides of that process.

The Camera and the Dancer

Finally, the film's own visual strategies must be considered. Cinematographer Fali Mistry's mobile camera and the editing of the musical sequences produce a kinaesthetic experience that does not merely depict Rosie's dancing but imitates its rhythms. The camera sweeps, pauses, and glides in ways that echo her movement, and the viewer is drawn into an embodied rather than purely optical relation to the screen. This is a different kind of looking than the fetishistic scrutiny Mulvey describes. It is a looking that participates, that follows rather than fragments, and that conveys something of the dancer's own sensation of moving through space.

Containing Rosie: Redemption, Sacrifice, and the Limits of Agency

The Return of the Male Narrative

The final movement of *Guide* is a study in narrative displacement. After the high point of Rosie's success, the story pivots decisively toward Raju. His forgery of Rosie's signature, which leads to his imprisonment, becomes the hinge on which the plot turns from her story to his. On release, he drifts to a village where he is mistaken for a holy man, and the remainder of the narrative concerns his reluctant acceptance of that role, his fast for rain, and his death. Rosie recedes from the foreground, her fate largely determined by the choices of the man whose crime has ended her career as it had been.

This structure is, to some degree, inherited from Narayan. The novel is organised around Raju's perspective and is shaped by the ironies of his self-narration; Rosie's story is told through his partial and self-interested account. But the film's adoption of the structure carries its own implications. Hindi cinema in the 1960s was strongly invested in redemptive narratives in which a flawed male protagonist achieves moral stature through suffering and sacrifice. Raju's transformation fits this template, and it carries the film's emotional climax. The cost is that the narrative's most interesting character is

pushed to the margins at the moment when the story claims its deepest significance.

It is instructive to read this displacement through the lens of the sacrificial economy that Hindi cinema so often constructs. Thomas (1989) shows how the mythology of the self-sacrificing mother and the suffering woman served to articulate national values, positioning women as vessels of endurance whose pain confers moral weight on the community. In *Guide*, the operation is inverted: it is the man who suffers and sacrifices, absorbing into his death the spiritual capital that the culture usually assigns to women. Raju's final act, in which he offers his body to the land in the form of a fast, mirrors on a grand scale the offering that Rosie has made in a smaller register. She has given up the security of a marriage, the respectability of a place in the nationalist ideal, and the stable income of a performer who obeys convention. Her sacrifices are real, but they are not narrated as sacrifices. The film grants sainthood to the man and silence to the woman.

What the Film Withholds

Reading *Guide* against the grain, we can identify the questions the final act leaves unanswered. What becomes of Rosie's career once she is separated from Raju's management? Does her art survive the scandal? Does she find a mode of professional existence that does not depend on a man's mediation? The film has little interest in these issues. It is not that it fails to care about Rosie, but that its form, the tragedy of the redeemed sinner, requires that its closing attention fall elsewhere. The consequence is that her agency, though vividly displayed, is never allowed to produce a stable outcome within the narrative. Chakravarty (1993) has argued that postcolonial Indian popular cinema was preoccupied with imagining the nation, and that women's bodies often served as the terrain on which anxieties about tradition and modernity were worked out; Rosie's story airs such anxieties without resolving them in her favour.

Reading Beyond the Frame

And yet, it would be too simple to conclude that the film neutralises Rosie. Viewers do not engage with narratives only at the level of plot; they carry away images, gestures, songs, and moods. The sequences in which Rosie dances remain among the most vivid in Hindi cinema, and they retain their power regardless of how the story ends. Viridi (2003) has argued that Hindi films have functioned as a form of social history, preserving in their images the contradictory attitudes of the culture that produced them. *Guide* preserves a moment in which the figure of the independent, artistically ambitious, sexually self-determining woman could be imagined, desired, and celebrated, even as she was being managed by the narrative.

4. Conclusion

This article has argued that Rosie's dance in *Guide* is best understood as a form of embodied agency exercised against, and within, a series of established institutions that claim authority over the female body. In the figure of the devadasi's daughter, the film condenses a history of stigma and appropriation, in which the women who carried an art form were displaced by the reformers and revivalists who made it respectable. In Rosie's marriage to Marco, it dramatises the nationalist ideal of the educated but domestic wife, and in her departure, it stages a rejection of that so called ideal. In its musical and choreographic sequences, it grants her a rare vocabulary of desire, in which the longing for life, movement, love, and artistic recognition are interwoven. In its treatment of her career, it traces the ambivalent promise of the market, which offers independence while reproducing structures of control. And in its closing movement, it demonstrates the limits of its own radicalism by displacing its heroine in favour of a male story of redemption.

None of these moments cancels the others. To read Rosie as a figure of unalloyed liberation would be to ignore the way the narrative constrains her; to read her solely as a victim of containment would be to overlook the force and originality of the sequences in which she claims her body as 'her own'. The more accurate description is that *Guide* is a text in which agency and containment coexist, and that its enduring interest lies in the friction between them. The reclamation of the female body that it depicts is incomplete, contested, and open to reversal, which is precisely what makes it historically honest. The women whose arts were harvested by the nation were never given their due, and a film that registers this fact, even in a divided and imperfect way, remains valuable.

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