

R.K. NARAYAN'S 'THE GUIDE' IS A STORY OF POLY-GUIDE

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ABSTRACT

Today, R. K. Narayan is a writer of great eminence. Though he dies a few years ago, people still have read his novels interestingly. One such a great novel is *The Guide*. It has many facets. In this paper, I have taken the theme, Raju as a Poly-guide --Tourist guide, Rosie's guide, Prisoners' guide and finally a Spiritual guide. Railway Raju acquired the status of a saint, a martyr for the cause of the common people. Raju is the protologue of Narayan's conception of human infallibility.

Keywords: Acrobatics, altruist, didacticism, distortions, drought, egotism, fatigue over soul, flashback, fleece, forgery, gusto, indianness, martyr, materialistic, mistress, non-chalance, picaro, poly-guide, possession, saviour, scamp, sentiments, technique, transformation, versatile, vigorous and whims.

Introduction

Among all the Indo-Anglian novelists, R. K. Narayan is regarded as the greatest. He alone, has been included in the "Writers and their works" series published by the British Council, London. He has written fifteen novels and One hundred and fifty short stories. The locale of most of his novels is Malgudi with its simple people and their ways. Belonging to a middle class family, Narayan knew it intimately. Narayan's heroes are average human beings and do not possess extra-ordinary capacities but due to their original state. They are controlled by the events and are helpless creatures tossed by their fortunes and desires. His women characters are either wedded partners, the typical Hindu house wives suffering throughout the life but always faithful to their homes and husbands or they are the glamorous charming seductress, the butterfly type of women who are often cause discord within the family. Human relationships play a major role in his novels. As a versatile novelist, Narayan has written on different themes with different viewpoints but still remaining on the grounds of reality. He deals with the theme of love, money, sex and family perfectly. His technique is complex, original and unique. As a skilful writer he maintains the curiosity of the reader alive till the end. In the words of Graham Greene, "Mr. Narayan's light, vivid style, with its sense of time passing of the unrealised beauty of human relationships so often recalls Chekhov". To express his views Narayan uses simple and

appropriate words. His language does not copy any other Indian Anglian novelists. To represent typical Indian Culture in its true colour, Narayan has also used some symbols. But this should be kept in mind that his symbols like his language are also simple. Keeping all these qualities, R. K. Narayan wrote a beautiful novel “*The Guide*”. It registers an advance in the literary development of R. K. Narayan. It is the most complex of Narayan’s novels, dealing with the rise and fall of Raju, whose dual personality as a ‘tourist guide’ and ‘Swami’ or ‘Spiritual Guide’ is revealed in alternate narration. Narayan is a good story teller, and so he says nothing less and seldom more.

The Guide:

R. K. Narayan was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award in 1960 for *The Guide*, which as a mature work of art, explores the subtleties and complexities of human relationship in a simple manner. His extreme popularity had led it to translate the novel into important languages. The cinematographic technique in this novel has led to successful filming of the novel. The universal popularity of the novel is due to the universal themes and Indian symbols in a Western art form. *The Guide* is a juxtaposition of traditional India and modern culture against Malgudi, the city of his imagination. He delineates the tender humanity of India with gentle satire, good humour, keen observation and sympathy. Though not philosophical, he creates the destined impact by painting his characters in half-tones. He views them from outside from or double perspective. Thus, *The Guide* is a fine piece of art.

Novel’s story in a nutshell:

The novel deals with the life of one, Raju in Malgudi. His life is a journey of ups and downs. He begins his career as a stall-keeper. Soon he acquires a great deal of knowledge by going through the journals and magazines which he stocks in his stall. Visitors are provided with information regard Malgudi and its scenes and sights. He is always ready to help others. His fame spreads and tourists who came to Malgudi enquire for him. Thus he is called ‘Railway Raju’. His self-confidence and non-chalance pays him rich dividends and he is never worried about the many distortions in which he has to indulge and the lies he has told. He deceives lies and adopts crooked ways to fleece the unknowing tourists. Soon he sets himself as a full-fledged tourist guide.

One day a couple came to Malgudi. They are Rosie and her Husband, Marco. Raju is surprised to see Marco neglecting his beautiful wife and craving for the caves and acrobatics. Unlike Marco, Raju cares about Rosie’s whims, vigories, sentiments, tastes and temperament. Now there is a slight change in Raju’s life. From being a tourist guide, he becomes the guide to one single person. It is none other than Rosie. He spends most of his time with her. One day accidentally he seduces her and from that day onwards she becomes his mistress. Raju’s mother does not like his relation with Rosie and considers Rosie responsible for ultimate ruin of his son. Raju betrays Marco who has great faith in him. The next role which Raju plays is that of a guide and manager of a dancer. He launches Rosie as a dancer. They earn a lot of money and begin to live in a lavish style. Her husband, Marco leaves her and goes away from her. Raju turns to drinking and gambling and the gulf between Rosie and Raju is widened. At last when Raju forges the signature of Rosie on a document, Raju is tried by her husband, Marco in the court to law. Rosie spends a lot of money in defence but also firmly declares that they are parting their ways. Raju finally lands in jail for forgery. He spends two years in jail.

After coming out of jail, Raju becomes a spiritual guide. He takes in an old temple by the Saryu River, near a village Mangala. A peasant named Velan asks his advice on a family matter. Raju's advice makes Velan to relieve his family hurdle. Soon devotees flock to him with their gifts and offerings. In that year rains fail and there arises a drought in that town. Now Raju has to fast accidentally for 12 days in order to bring rains. This fasting is thrust on him by fate and he also undertakes it. In the last day of the fasting because of fatigue and hunger, Raju falls down and signs of rain are seen on the horizon. R. K. Narayan completes the novel without clearly telling whether Raju is dead or alive. The novel shows a rogue turning a saint out of compulsion. In fact, Raju's mistakes are those of men impelled by circumstances and are redeemed by his last act of martyrdom. The events leading up to the death of Raju may sound fantastic to the western reader. But in India, village saints are always expected to fast and work miracles.

All the elements of a good crime story are found in 'The Guide'. And yet the novelist turns the story into a first-rate social story. Narayan has nothing that compassion for this misguided guide. Narayan does not pass any judgement in this tragic comedy because Narayan is one of the most objective writers of today. The novel is a brilliant achievement of R.K.Narayan.

Structure and Technique:

The structure of the novel is excellent. R. K. Narayan has dealt with both the sections of past and present finely. Narayan has divided this novel into eleven chapters. The interest which has been created in first chapter is carried out till the last. The story of 'The Guide' begins from Raju's childhood to youth till the end and thus completing the course and circle of life from childhood to youth and finally the end. Narayan has shown the free spirit of childhood, experience of love in youth, unselfish concern for others, spiritual detachment and transformation from egotism to humbleness. An ordinary person becomes extraordinary and his soul merges with the over soul, good.

Narayan has also used certain devices to achieve his desired goal. The flashback technique, use of humour, wit, irony and greed for materialistic possession are used according to the purpose. In 'The Guide' part of the story is told by the novelist and other part in the first person by the hero, Raju. It has made the narration fresh, interesting and vigorous. The story starts with the release of Raju from the jail and whatever have had happened before he was imprisoned is told in a series of flashbacks in Raju's own words to Velan in a form of confession. Whatever happens to Raju after his release is told by the narrator, Narayan. Due to use of this technique, the character of the hero, Raju has become more sharp and real than only other characters. Thus the character and action which develop side by side affect each other. The suspense and curiosity and anticipation are carried till the end. The novel has a fine structure of a good beginning, middle and an end. According to Nirmala Mukherjee, 'The Guide, not only registers Narayan's skill in unifying a complex plot-structure, but also it presents a significant experiment in technique'.

Message of the Novel:

The title of the novel, *The Guide* is an apt symbolic and an evocation as it traces the career of the protagonist, Raju from railway guide to tourist guide, to a dancer's guide, to a prisoner's guide and to a spiritual guide. He helps, and teaches and guides us subtly on how to live life and now this mysterious or spiritual guide transforms him from a corrupt tourist guide to a fake Swami,

onto a genuine altruist Swami. Though successful as a tourist guide and a spiritual guide, Raju has a fallen when he is at the peak. Through Raju, the guide, Narayan points out the absurdity of man's attempt to aspire, marks insignificance and the mystery of life with all its ironies. *The Guide* has a double meaning and Raju is in a sense a double character. As a tour guide and lover, he is impulsive, unprincipled and self-indulgent. After his imprisonment and transformation as a holy man, he is careful, thoughtful and self-disciplined. A rogue and a picaro is thus transformed or metamorphosed into a saint or saviour. He may or may not have died, but he is certainly regenerated. Narayan's presentation of superstitions, rituals and faiths and beliefs point out that his novels are abounded with Indianness, but in one impart respect he deviates from Indianness. That is, he steers clear of didacticism.

Conclusion:

Bhabani Bhattacharji's, 'He Who Rides a Tiger' deals with the baked Sadhu theme. 'The Guide', also probes into the psychology of a bogus Sadhu. But as Meenakshi Mukherjee points out that, 'the superficial similarity hides a very fundamental difference. If both these novels deal with the theme of a man wearing a mask, in one the man at the end throws a way the mask and goes back where he began. In the other the man finds it more and more difficult to tear off the mask until he finds that the mask has become his face'. In Bhabani's novel, Kalo's deception is a deliberate act of revenge against society. Raju, in *The Guide*, on the other hand, drifts into the role of a Sadhu willy-nilly, and once he finds himself cast in the role of an ascetic, he attempts to perform the act with gusto, partly for the sake of self-preservation, partly because it suits his personality wonderfully. In, 'He Who Rides a Tiger', we have only a scamp at the end, but in 'The Guide' we have a saint.

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