

## CONVERGING GENRES: R.K. NARAYAN'S *THE GUIDE* FOR THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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### Abstract

R.K.Narayan is one of the first writers in India who tried English for creative endeavour and who could succeed well. He has more than fifteen novels and hundred and odd short stories in English. His novels, short stories, essays, memoirs, travel writings, are popular among readers not only in India but also out-side India. They have been prescribed in schools and colleges. They are also used as pleasure reading. One striking feature in his writing is the use of English language by the writer that facilitates the learner to learn the language just by reading his writings. Many students feel that they learned their English through R.K. Narayan's writings. R.K. Narayan's novel, *The Guide* has been made into a film in Hindi which is as popular as the novel and provides an opportunity for appreciation and interpretation through discussion, particularly when multimedia is an easy access to many Indian classroom. The multi thematic novel covering issues related to gender, philosophy and society and culture provides a lot of scope for multiple interpretation and discussion. Taking the idea of Howard Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences, I would like to discuss how the novel and the film can converge with tasks for use of multiple intelligence and strategies for enhancing language education. I would like to argue that this kind of convergence of different genres such as fiction, film, philosophy, sociology and culture and tasks converging all these forms provide greater opportunity for language learning and has been proved to be effective in the language classroom.

**Keywords-** Genre, R. K. Narayan, Convergence, Fiction, Language Skills

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is a good sign that departments of English in India have been revamping their syllabi. There are attempts to shed away their colonial lineage and make them inclusive as well as interdisciplinary. One notices the inclusion of many India writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, A.K. Ramanujan, R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Manoj Das, Ruskin Bond, Mahasweta Devi, Bama, Limbale and others. Inputs from other disciplines such as film, history, culture studies and sciences has been included. This is a welcome change as texts written by these writers could be a great resource for our classrooms as they have great potentials to facilitate English language education, cultural literacy and literary appreciation. Moreover, they deal with subjects that are close to the life and cultural milieu of the learners. Speaking about such texts, M.L. Tickoo points out, “such selections result in the use of literary works that are often closer to the lives and socio-cultural make-up of the student” (162). According to Braj Kachru (1984) such literature tends to “create a strong feeling of cultural identity between reader and text and helps to give them a new sense of ownership of the language.” Integration of other disciplines provides ample scope for the learner and give opportunity for broadening their outlook and critical thinking.

In spite of the colonial legacy of our syllabi, certain writers have been included in our syllabi for a long time. R.K. Narayan is one of them. In the field of Indian English literature, R.K. Narayan is one of the most popular writers in English. His novels and short stories are read widely. They can serve as suitable material for English language education and for literary appreciation. He offers us a varied body of literature stretching from short stories to novel, memoirs, legends, and essays. The themes of his writing are also varied though some critics like to club them into a few. For instance, Lakshmi Holmstrom groups them into four Ashramas of human cycle. As John Thieme sums up, “Narayan’s fiction is underpinned by these four stages, respectively known as the brahmacharya, grihastya, vanaprastha... and sanyasa” (13). When *Swami and Friends* (1935) deals with growing up a child as an adolescent, *The Bachelors of Arts* (1937) is about youth, *the Dark Room* (1938) is about predicament of women, *Waiting for the Mahatma* is about the Independence Movement and Mahatma Gandhi. His stories also deal with a variety of themes starting from the life of the underprivileged<sup>1</sup> to the middle and upper class people. More importantly they can be interpreted in many ways and can be related to different genres such as films, fables, myths and arts.

## 2. WHY RKNARAYAN?

R.K. Narayan’s short stories and novels are striking and memorable. They are also good vehicles for language education. They are written in simple and refined English. They are liked by both young and adults. They provide spontaneous pleasure to a casual reader. They also provide food for thought to an eminent literary critic. They converge many genres such as myths, philosophy and fiction. Our concern here is to discuss how they can be related to different forms such as film, fiction and education to serve as suitable resource for the development of language, cultural literacy, and literary appreciation skills in English.

The advantage of using Narayan’s novels is that they are Indian in theme and setting. So they are close to life and experience of the learners. The Indianness of theme, native ethos and style also contribute his novels to be good materials particularly in the context when materials developers like Brian Tomlinson advocate “localization of materials”(6). The themes of his novels are close to the life and experience of the learners. So they become more accepted by the learners. The learners are not only familiar with the themes so they find them motivating and

appealing, but also they feel accepted and respected as they are drawn from their own culture and heritage. The fusion of fiction, philosophy, sociology and culture and other genres also gives scope for more in-depth analysis. Narayan's novels are interesting. They are liked by the learners as they deal with human nature. His deceptively simple and humorous narratives interest and motivate learners to read and enjoy them and offer a good reading. Narayan's employment of narrative device, like irony, humour, rich portrayal of characters provide scope for the learner to explore texts from the standpoints of these aspects. His novels deal with issues concerning many problems related to life, society and human nature. Their real like characters can be easily identified by the reader and translated into another genres such as film, art or paintings. These aspects offer us to think and respond to them. The rich vocabulary grammatical items and structural patterns could be used by the teacher to facilitate language education. In addition to all these, there is also enough scope for LSRW skills practice.

### **3. WHY THE GUIDE?**

R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* is a significant novel. It is infact the *magnum opus* of Narayan. It won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960. It has been made into a famous and popular film. We have selected the novel for a number of reasons. First, it suits the level of under graduate and post graduate students. It also suits their interest, love, youth, exploration and so on. Second, it has a lot of scope for discussion The novel presents a lot of issues related to Indian life about which students can relate to different forms of art and discuss and write. The most significant issue is relationship between ancient and the modern. It also deals with issues related to middle class life, their values, beliefs and dogmas. The issue of gender is also a dominant theme of the novel. The way Rosie has been treated by husband and later by Raju has potential for serious discussion. More importantly the fusion of different genres such as myth and fiction and philosophy gives ample scope for analysis. The theory of Karma is enunciated in the life of Raju, the protagonist of the novel. According Hinduism, an individual lives and dies according his/her karma and vasanas (deeds and desire of the present and the past birth). Raju, a tourist guide befriends Rosie, a tourist's wife, turns into an entrepreneur and then lands in jail. After his release, he becomes a Saint. This complicated gripping story line of the novel attracts young readers interest and attention.

### **4. WHY THIS EPISODE?**

The episode chosen for discussion in the class is Raju's uncle's visit to the former's house and the eventual quarrel that takes place then. This episode of the novel has been selected for discussion because it deals with a common action found in films. The episode includes the visit of Raju's uncle to the latter's house and the quarrel that takes place in the family over Rosie. We find the same kind of situation selecting a girl against parent's wish in other novel too. This will help for discussion on inter-textuality. Treatment of woman in the novel is a significant theme. This situation also is also the middle of the story and pick of its development. Film clips on it are also available.

### **5. TEACHING THE NOVEL**

#### **Some Unfamiliar Words**

**Look up a dictionary for meaning of these unfamiliar words.**

Predicament

Contempt and cynicism

Appalled  
Somersault  
Scrambled  
Snapped  
Creditable development  
Wriggled  
Frowned scapegrace

**Level :**

M.A. Strength: 40 (rural urban mixed)

Time: Two hrs.

**Tasks**

**Preparation for the Context**

**Pair**

**work**

**One of the following questions will be given to each pair. Each pair will come to the front and stand before the class. One person will answer the question his/her first language. The second person will translate that into English.**

- a. What is a typical family like in your part of India? Show the picture of a family and describe how each one is related. What is the importance/place of each member?
- b. How are young people related to their elders? Are they independent? Are they allowed to take decisions on their own?
- c. How do parents react when a son or daughter decides to marry against their wish? Can you give example of a story or film which represent such a problem?
- d. What is the status of a married woman? How is she expected to behave in her family and outside?

**Reading Skills**

**Read through the pages from 166 to 174.**

- I. **Arrange the following events in proper sequence by numbering them.**

\_\_\_ Rosie stops her practice

\_\_\_ Rosie comes and enquires about the man.

\_\_\_ Mother offers him to give some coffee.

\_\_\_ Raju tells her not to bother and asks her to continue her dance.

\_\_\_ Raju's uncle pulls him down by the collar of his shirt and starts quarrelling with him.

\_\_\_ Rosie says she will go out.

\_\_\_ Then he asks Rosie to stop her dance and go out.

\_\_\_ Mother comes running from the kitchen.

\_\_\_\_\_ Mother gets ready to go with her brother.

\_\_\_\_\_ Raju's mother and uncle go to the kitchen

\_\_\_\_\_ Raju asks his uncle to get out.

**i. Discuss in pairs/groups**

- a. What do you know about Raju's family?
- b. Why does Raju's uncle interfere so much in his sister's family affairs?
- c. Why is so much opposition to Raju's relationship with Rosie?
- d. What does addressing singular mean?
- e. What do you understand by the word serpent girl?
- f. Why did Raju's uncle make fun when Rosie addresses Raju's mother as mother?
- g. Have you watched the film by the same title? How is this episode different in the film?

**ii. Discuss in pairs/groups**

**Who said this and to whom? Make use of these expressions and plan for a scene of a one act play and enact the scene.**

- a. "These are for my sister, grown in our gardens."
- b. "Wait, I 'll give you coffee."
- c. "You never told me you wrote to uncle!"
- d. "Why should she tell you?"
- e. "As if you were her master."
- f. "Who is he?"
- g. "You think you are a big man."
- h. "Don't bother about him. He must be crazy. You don't have to worry."
- i. "Now stop your music and all those gesticulations and listen to me. Are you of our family?"
- j. "You tell me to get out. Has it come to this?"
- k. "I will go away, Mother,"

**iii. Vocabulary**

**Find words which mean the following, from the paragraph and pages indicated.**

- a. Existed in different directions (p.166 para 1)
- b. Written communication (p.166 para 1)
- c. Praiseworthy (p.167.para1)
- d. Difficult situation (p.167 para 2)
- e. Not believing that something good will happen (page 168 para2)
- f. A complete list (p.170 para 2)
- g. Stopped something for sometime. (p170 para170)
- h. Turn over completely in the air (p.170 para 4)
- i. To make somebody feel very tired. (p.171 para1)
- j. Stubborn (p.173 para 3)
- k. The state of being difficult (p 173 Para 4)

**iv. Writing**

- a. Write a short note on Raju's uncle
- b. Describe the scene of Raju's uncle's visit.

- c. Work in groups and draw bubbles with dialogues to represent the scene.
- d. Raju says, “She was my property . . . I like to keep her in a citadel.” How do you respond to this statement?

**v. Listening**

- a. What should be your response if you were one of the characters. Take a role of one of the characters and write about your response and read it out to the class.
- b. Are the issues of caste, class and status still operative in our society? In what ways?
- c. The class is divided into groups of five. Each group draws a picture showing the episode and narrates it to the class showing their picture.

**vi. Language Study**

**Look up a dictionary for the following phrase and make use of them in sentences.**

- a. Mustering courage
- b. Mistook my silence for fear
- c. Groveling at the feet of

## 6. RATIONALE FOR SUCH TASKS

It is apt here to discuss the rationale for such tasks. The above mentioned tasks have been designed in such a way that learners will get an opportunity to interact among themselves using language they already have. The text will act as a stimulus for such interaction. These tasks are helpful in generating ideas for discussion that will culminate in writing practice. They are also suitable for the learners reflection on social, gender, cultural and literary issues and their response to them. These tasks help learners interpret and respond to the text instead of imposing one point of view on them. These tasks are not only helpful in learners literary appreciation but also language skills. Above all, and most importantly, these tasks give an opportunity to compare different genres such as fiction, drawing and the film and in this process translate their ideas from their first language to second language. The tasks aim at bringing together different genres together to facilitate interaction and interpretation. It can be noted that students have multiple intelligences and different styles of learning and they can be put into practice. As Gardner says, “In my view it should be possible to identify an intellectual profile or proclivities at an early age and draw upon this knowledge to the person’s educational opportunities and options” (10). These tasks facilitate to them to use their intelligence and learning strategies that culminate in language learning through language use. I have been teaching this text in my language through literature class at the M. A. level and found these tasks to be very effective.

## 7. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that genres like literature and films provide a lot of scope for language use. Learners can make use of their previous knowledge and language using a film or fiction as a stimulus. R.K. Narayan’s *The Guide* is such a text which has a lot potential for language use. It has been found very helpful in teaching language, literature and culture to students at the university level. We understand the learners not only have different learning styles, they also have a variety of interests and intelligences. Providing them exposure with different genres such as fiction, film, drawing and drama I cater to the interests of different learners. This has proved to be effective and beneficial for all students in the class.

### Note

1.His short stories such as “God and the Cobbler,” and “ Hungry Child” deal with the underprivileged class.

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