

## ARTISTIC TASTE IN R.K NARAYAN'S THE GUIDE: A STUDY



### Literature

**KEYWORDS :** Artistic, Intertextuality, Lyric, Semiotics and the Guide.

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### ABSTRACT

*Rasipuram Krishna swami Narayanswami Iyer or R.K.Narayan is considered to be one of the founding fathers of Indian English Novel along with Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. The first Indian English Novel was written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in 1904 (Rajmohan's Wife), not much significant development took place for some time in this genre, the output consisted of historical or romantic novels, the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi on the scene shifted the focus of fiction to his works and thinking, but it was actually in the period of 1930-1970 when writers like Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh and Nirad.C.Chaudhari and many others arrived, and tried their hands at various themes and evolution in this field began. The current group consists of writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, V.S.Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Chetan Bhagat and Amish Tripathi and many others, their themes and styles are experimental and have earned them name and fame. The Guide which won for Narayan huge accolades shows the novelist's skill in placing the orient into focus for occidental eyes. In this novel Narayan depicts a comprehensive picture of human activities, the comic and the tragic, the silly and the serious, the ridiculous and the sublime. Here we witness the spectacular representations of an ordinary man who eventually becomes a Mahatma as he begins to identify himself with the world and takes the terrible decision of sacrificing his life for a noble cause.*

*This paper is about R.K.Narayan and his contribution to Indian English novel (IEN) so I will discuss here, his life and works, sense and style of writing, comparison with immediate contemporaries, relevance of his work in today's world and his impressions on his readers.*

### INTRODUCTION:

The Guide is the most popular novel of R.K. Narayan. It was published in 1958, and won the Sahitya Akademy Award for 1960. It has also been filmed and the film has always drawn packed-houses.

It recounts the adventures of a railway guide, popularly known as 'Railway Raju'. As a tourist guide he is widely popular. It is this profession which brings him in contact with Marco and his beautiful wife, Rosie. While the husband is busy with his archaeological studies, Raju seduces his wife and has a good time with her. Ultimately Marco comes to know of her affair with Raju and goes away to Madras leaving Rosie behind. Rosie comes and stays with Raju in his one-room house. His mother tolerates her for some time, but when things become unbearable, she calls her brother and goes away with him, leaving Raju to look after Rosie and the house.

Rosie is a born dancer, she practices regularly and soon Raju finds an opening for her. In her very first appearance, she is a grand success. Soon she is very much in demand and their earnings increase enormously. Raju lives lavishly, entertains a large number of friends with whom he drinks and gambles. All goes well till Raju forges Rosie's signatures to obtain valuable jewellery lying with her husband. The act lands him in jail. Rosie leaves Malgudi and goes away to Madras, her hometown. She goes on with her dancing and does well without the help and management of Raju, of which he was so proud.

On release from jail, Raju takes shelter in a deserted temple on the banks of the river Sarayu, a few miles away from Malgudi, and close to the village called Mangla. The simple villagers take him to be a Mahatma, begin to worship him, and bring him a lot of eatables as presents. Raju is quite comfortable and performs the role of a saint to perfection.

However, soon there is a severe famine drought, and the villagers expect Raju to perform some miracle to bring them rain. So he has to undertake a fast. The fast attracts much attention and people come to have darshan of the Mahatma from far and wide. On the twelfth day of the fast, Raju falls down exhausted just as there are signs of rain on the distant horizon. It is not certain if he is actually dead or merely fainted. Thus the novel comes to an abrupt close on a note of ambiguity.

The last pages of Narayan's best novel, The Guide, find Raju, the chief protagonist, at the end of a lifetime of insincerity and pain. As a professional guide to Malgudi's environs, he invented whole new historical pasts for bored tourists; he seduced a married woman, drifted away from his old mother and friends, became a flashy cultural promoter, and then tried, absentmindedly, to steal and was caught and spent years in jail, abandoned by everyone.

His last few months have been spent in relative comfort as a holy man on the banks of a river: a role imposed on him by reverential village folk. But the river dries up after a drought and his devotees start looking to him to intercede with the gods. Raju resentfully starts a fast, but furtively eats whatever little food he has saved. Then abruptly, out of a moment of self disgust, comes his resolution: for the first time in his life, he will do something with complete sincerity, and he will do it for others: if fasting can bring rain, he'll fast.

He stops eating, and quickly diminishes. News of his efforts goes around; devotees and sightseers, gathering at the riverside, create a religious occasion out of the fast. On the early morning of the eleventh day of fasting, a small crowd watches him quietly as he attempts to pray standing on the river bed and then staggers and dies, mumbling the enigmatic last words of the novel, "It's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs...."

Characteristically, Narayan doesn't make it clear whether Raju's penance does actually lead to rain. He also doesn't make much of Raju's decision, the moment of his redemption, which a lesser writer would have attempted to turn into a resonant ending, but which is quickly passed over here in a few lines. What we know, in a moment of great disturbing beauty, is something larger and more affecting than the working-out of an individual destiny in an inhospitable world.

**THE WORKS OF R.K.NARAYAN:**1. Swami and Friends, 2.The Bachelor of Arts, 3. The Dark Room, 4. The English Teacher, 5. Mr.Sampath, 6. The Financial expert, 7. Waiting for the Mahatma, 8. The Guide, 9. The Man-eater of Malgudi, 10. The Vendor of Sweets, 11. A Tiger for Malgudi, 12. The World of Nagraj, 13. The world of Malgudi, 14. The painter of signs.

**SHORT STORIES:** Narayan edited a journal, the Indian thought, and published three volumes of short stories, Malgudi days,

Dodu and other stories, and Cyclone and other stories, An Astrologer's day and other stories, Lawley Road and other stories, Next Sunday, A Horse and two goats, Under the Banyan tree, Gods, demons and others, My Dateless Diary, and The Emerald Route, My Days. This collection of short stories being published by Bt Bound, William Heinemann, Viking Press, and Penguin Classics truly signifies the lifestyle of the people of Malgudi.

There is a kind of elemental pleasure in reading these stories in close succession, and watching Narayan people his world with tragic shopkeepers, ethical pickpockets, mean beggars, storytellers, anxious college students, and of course, the Talkative Man. For Narayan, storytelling is deeply concerned with establishing a sense of community, of people completely involved in each other.

**AWARDS:** In 1980, R. K. Narayan was awarded the A. C. Benson award by the Royal Society of Literature and was made an Honorary Member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1989 he was made a member of the Rajya Sabha (the non-elective House of Parliament in India). He received the Sahitya Akademi Award for The Guide on 1958. He got Padma Bhushan in 1964. A number of his short stories and novels have been serialized on TV (Malgudi days) and made into films Swami and friends, Mr. Sampath, and The Financial expert, and the highly acclaimed Dev Anand's classic, "The Guide" starring Dev Anand as Raju the Tourist Guide and Waheeda Rehman as Rosie.

#### LAST DAYS:

He spent his last years of his life in Chennai with his daughter and her family. Narayan died on May 13, 2001, an unassuming person; Narayan led a simple and active life till the very end, typifying his equally famous brother R.K.Laxman's concept of the common man immortalized in his cartoons. The Guide is characteristic of Narayan's fiction. It is the story of a middle-class hero who has not even completed his schooling. Narayan traces his career from obscurity to the ordinariness of prosperity and eminence, and then his downfall. Centered in and on Narayan's fictitious South Indian town of Malgudi, The Guide is thoroughly Indian, not only in its characters but also in its theme, ideas, imagery and sensibility.

**ROSIE AND THE KING COBRA:** Raju quickly conducted a research about the king cobra with the help of Gaffur while Marco was busy deciphering episodes from the Ramayana on the walls of the Iswara Temple in North Extension. When he returned, he found Rosie "standing apart with every sign of boredom in her face." But she "looked delighted" when Raju told her about the king cobra that danced to the music of a flute. It would take those two hours to go to the place and return. Marco readily granted permission. He was absorbed in his work. It was with great difficulty that they arrived at a group of huts on the other side of the river. It was a forlorn area; Gaffur could not see anything else but a cremation ground there. A few bare-bodies children came and stood near the car as soon as it stopped, "gaping at the occupants." Their guide went to the far end of the village and returned with a man "who had a red turban around his head, his only other piece of clothing being a pair of drawers." Raju and Rosie went with the man to his house to see the king cobra while Gaffur minded his car. When they reached the man's hut, Rosie stood transfixed in a corner while he prodded the king cobra to come out of a basket. The man pulled out his gourd flute and played on it shrilly, and the cobra raised itself "and darted hither and thither and swayed." Raju was repelled but Rosie seemed fascinated by the sight. She watched it swaying in rap test attention. She stretched out her arm slightly and swayed it in imitation of the movement. She swayed her whole body to the rhythm – for just a second but that was sufficient to tell me what she was, the greatest dancer of the century.

**ROSIE: A SNAKE WOMAN:** When Raju reached home that night, he told his mother about his adventure in tracing the man with the king cobra and Rosie dancing to the music of the gourd flute, giving company to the king cobra. His mother called the dancer "a snake –woman," adding that such snake women were found in Burma. When told that Rosie was a dancer, his mother warned Raju: "Oh, dancer! May be; but don't have anything to do with these dancing women. They are all a bad sort." Raju, however, didn't protest; he ate his food in silence, "trying to revive in my mind the girl's scent-filled presence."

**NARAYAN'S ENGLISH:** Narayan undoubtedly writes English with a distinct Indian colouring, which makes its presence felt in a number of ways. One can make an extensive analysis of Narayan's use of Indianisms, which include words from Tamil, Sanskrit and Hindi, as for example, "Dhoti", "Pyol", "Jutka", "Salt" etc. Translations of Tamil expressions like "worshipping room", "dinning leaf" and "sitting plank" as well as certain coinages like "led about by a nose-rope like a bullock" and "half-arm shirt" can also be found in his works, apart from compound words like "semi-interest", "bull-calf", "dung-cake", "betel nut-spittle", "nose-screw", "stitching master", "foreign-returned people", slow-witted, "red-tapists" and collocations like "even if I have seven births, I won't be able to repay my debt to you" and "what sin have I committed to observe these harsh words". Narayan makes use of direct translations from Indian idioms and expressions such as "My professor will eat me up", "to the dust pot with your silly customs" and "The unbeaten brat will remain unlettered".

#### READERS IMPRESSION:

Social networking is a way of connecting with each other people thousands of miles away or even complete strangers can discuss about issues or people they strongly feel about. On one such site, I compared the popularity of R.K.Narayan with his immediate contemporaries and current sensation in Indian literature, the result shows that even after so many years his works are liked and read by people. Though the results can vary, and this method is not up to the mark but it gives us fair idea about the immortality of Narayan's works. His subjects and characters are universal and this appeal has carried over years and continues because time and technology can change but basic human nature remains the same and that is what Narayan captures the best.

He is one of the most loved writers by children. We find many of his stories in schoolbooks. *The Missing Mail* and *Swami's* adventures are some of them. The tele-series 'Malgudi Days' was a favorite with us during our childhood and even today kids watch repeat telecasts or youtube versions. Its title song is a rage with kids. His popularity has surpassed many of his contemporaries because of his simple language and worldwide appeal of plot and characters.

#### CONCLUSION:

Narayan's stories were appreciated by many readers, and writers and Critics from our country and abroad were E.M.Foster, Graham Greene, William Walsh, and M.C.Catchlion. Many Universities has taken his stories and novels and included in the syllabus for UG and PG students. This kind of privilege in literature is given by Narayan to the readers. For the coming generations his works are great gifts which show Indian culture and tradition his literature is a great treasure for the future generations.

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