



## Thematic Concerns in R.K. Narayan's 'The Guide'

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The Indian English novel of the 1930s was deeply influenced by the epoch making political, social and ideological ferment caused by the Gandhian movement. However, the most significant event in the history of Indian English fiction is the arrival of great writer like R. K. Narayan. He virtually revolutionized the Indian English fiction during the Gandhian era. R. K Narayan in his own way has explored all the various possibilities of Indian English fiction.

The fictional art offers an interesting compromise between Didactic and Aesthetic values in R K Narayan's 'The Guide'. M K Naik observes:

**Narayan's delicate blend of gentle irony. And sympathy, quiet realism and fantasy stands poles apart.**

Narayan's little dramas of middle class life are enacted in Malgudi, an imaginary small town in South India which comes to be felt as a living ambience in his fiction. Malgudi is the core of Narayan's work. Narayan's art, however reached its maturity in three novels: 'The Financial Expert', 'The Guide', and 'The Man Eater of Malgudi'. His novel deals with the Gandhian freedom struggles. His main aim here is to depict the freedom struggle of 1942.

R K Narayan was born at Rasipuram in South India in 1906. Though his mother-tongue was Tamil, his father had settled in Mysore. He had his education entirely in South India, and therefore his thoughts and feelings are all of India. Choosing journalism as his career, he wrote for newspapers and journals. He crossed the Indian shores for America in the fifties. He received no inspiration there. He never wrote to achieve fame nor his aim had been to interpret India to the west. He viewed and recorded Indian life artistically.

Narayan published his first novel in 1935, 'Swami and Friends'. The famous 'Malgudi' appeared first in this novel. Then followed two other novels 'Bachelor of Arts' (1936) and 'The Dark Room' (1938). After the end of the war, his another novel 'The English Teacher' was published. It was followed by 'Mr Sampath' (1949), 'The Financial Expert' (1952) and 'Waiting for the Mahatma' (1955). 'The Guide' (1958) was the consequence of an American tour organized by the Rock Feller Foundation. He wrote short stories under the title 'An Astrologer's Day' and 'Lawley Road'. 'The Man Eater of Malgudi', was successful from the point of view of characterization which appeared in 1962. His eleventh novel 'The painter of Signs' came out in 1976.

Narayan won Sahitya Academi Award for 'The Guide' in 1960 and four years later he was awarded 'Padma Bhushan'. The University of Leeds awarded him honorary D. Litt in 1967. In 1980, he was awarded 'Benson Medal'.

In his domestic life, he fell in love with a beautiful girl called Rajam whom he married in 1935. But his married life was short as she died of typhoid in 1939. In the year 2001, at the age of 94, he passed away.

**The ideal of asceticism runs through Indo-fiction as a recurrent and compulsive motif.**

**Meenakshi Mukherjee**

R K Narayan's 'The Guide' is a mixture of themes, materialism and spiritualism, greed and detachment, selfishness and self-sacrifice, marriage and sex, roguery and sainthood, ignorance and knowledge are blended together in the novel. To some the novel appears to be loneliness of man in the crowded world. As we find in the end, all the major characters are lonely and separated from others. Raju's mother is separated from her only son and longs to see him. Raju passes through a phase of solitude before his death. Marco is destined for the secluded life of a scholar. Rosie shoots into fame as a dancer, but is forced to settle down alone in Madras. Sex has no place in their married life for they are both obsessed by their ambitions. Rosie is grateful to Marco for having raised her from the low status of Devdasi, but he can never accept her as his equal, though he stooped marry her. In spite of her post-graduate degree, she cannot appreciate his devotion to her profession. She expects him to appreciate her art which he fails to do. Each being centered in their own pursuits, they drift apart until Raju enters their life driving a wedge between them. But she



loves her art more than anyone, and need Raju only to promote her talent. As she won an abiding laurel and place in the field of art, she abandons Raju.

She is still devoted to her alienated husband and can never let Raju to take that slot. It is unfortunate that Macro has been blind to her youth and beauty. This causes the freeze in their relationship. Raju loves Rosie, but his greed, dishonesty and hypocrisy are repellent to her. The ultimate consequence is that all the three are caused to live in isolation.

It is essentially a story of a man who deceives society by passing, into a spiritual man. Raju here wears the mask of a sadhu, not because he likes it, but he is drifted into it by the circumstances. But once he is cast into the role of an ascetic he performs it with gusto because it is not only a means of livelihood for him, but also it seems to fit well in his personality. Though he started his career as a tourist guide and shopkeeper but he becomes the manager of Rosie's performances and at last in the third stage he happened to be a convict and then he plays the role of a sadhu. In all these roles, his performance is hard to beat. He is ready to play any role which is assigned to him by fate. Not even once has he deliberately tried to pass off as a holy man, but when the sainthood is thrust upon him by the people, he was not in a position to disappoint them.

In fact he longs to tell them his shady past, but he thinks that it may not be believed or it may hurt their feelings. But once he is accepted as a sadhu, he pays attention to his appearance and is careful to utter mystifying statements. The fasting that he undertakes has also been the consequences of an accidental statement he makes. When the drought overwhelms the village, the villagers indulge into petty quarrels. The fear that these rows may bring the police to the spot engulfs Raju with fear and he casually says that he will not eat until they stop fighting with one another. His words have been distorted into a message that he will not eat until it rains. Thus, Raju is forced to fast to bring rains to the village. Ironically enough, Raju who has done the role of a sadhu to gain a free supply of food, is deprived of this privilege. His disciples not only refuse to bring him food, but also keep twenty four hour vigil on him. Thus the situation has gone beyond his control. He cannot wriggle out of sainthood which he accepted to fulfill the needs of his stomach. But in a country like India, where Valmiki and Ekalavya have risen from roguery to sainthood, Raju is no rare phenomenon. The needs of his stomach are swept aside, and it is the collective faith of the people that transform him into a saint. He is no more an actor, for the act becomes the reality, the mask becomes the man. Raju's former greedy self is engulfed in the deception that he has created for himself. Thus, the novel is a study which signifies the saffron robe and portrays the psychological changes wrought by the role of a sadhu.

'Love and sex' plays a significant part. Here Rosie is described as a 'serpent-woman' fond of cobra. She stings her husband and Raju and both of them suffer the consequences. Raju flames out into passion at the very sight of her dance but his over-commercialisation brings the curtain down on their affair. Usually in R K Narayan's novel love gets bogged down in social issues. Rosie is drawn towards Raju on account of his interest in her art which finds no encouragement on the part of her husband. Marco fails to realise that his wife has desires and spirit. His cold and unresponsive nature drives her to the arms of Raju who wins her heart by flattering her. While Marco's mind is seething with ideas regarding the 'dead and decaying things' his wife seeks refuge in the bosom of Raju. Raju and Rosie are both romantic and they break the shackles of custom and tradition to enjoy their romance. After Marco deserts Rosie, Raju makes her a money-spinner. Rosie has lived art for art's sake, with her husband, Rosie has been sex-frustrated and therefore, sex has been the primary motive behind her relationship with Raju. Yet Rosie, being a Hindu wife, does her best to atone her unfaithfulness and grows repentant. Sex is reduced to mere companionship in the novel. There is no description of violent sex or physical habits. To Narayan, it is a double edged sword. Illicit love and sex cause the downfall and moral degradation of the hero and the heroine in 'The Guide'. The role of mutual understanding, in married life is also stressed by the novelist. The Indian woman is dependent on her husband but when Rosie's individuality is challenged she raised her head like a 'serpent'.

In conclusion, I will say that the novel 'The Guide' as a compromise between didactic and aesthetic values. Thus, R K Narayan teaches us even while delighting us, and instructs us while amusing it.

#### REFERENCES

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