

THE CONCEPT OF INDIANNESS IN R.K. NARAYAN'S *THE GUIDE*

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ABSTRACT

The Guide reveals the Indian way of life and also the culture and tradition of India. R.K. Narayan has used typical Indian characters and Indian atmosphere to portray Indian culture. The main characters of this novel are Raju, Rosie and Marco. R.K. Narayan has given a true social picture of India through 'The Guide'. The traits of Indian manners and customs are also reflected in this novel. Hospitality of Indians is a well known trait all over the world. Narayan has given a clear picture of India at the time of narration without idealizing the country and he has not also condemned it. The poverty of India has been reflected with a personal touch of the author. The villagers are shown as suffering from poverty and ignorance and their illiteracy has been reflected as the root cause for all their sufferings. There are as gullible and kind hearted as any Indian village habitats.

Keywords: Tourist Guide, Modern - type relationship, Illiterate habitats, Faith, Spiritual Guide.

This paper aims at annotating the concept of Indianness in the novel *The Guide* by R.K. Narayan. The task has been taken to analyse the Indian characters and Indian atmosphere as presented by Narayan in this novel to exemplify the culture and tradition of India.

In 1930's three major Indian English novelists, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao based their novels on significant themes that they discovered such as emancipation from foreign rule, East - West relationship, the communal problems and the plight of untouchables, the landless poor and the economically exploited people. Mulk Raj Anand's major novels *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) are all written as a crusade against social exploitation. R. K. Narayan also touched the social evils like casteism, inequality, injustice, gender - bias and superstitious themes and had added them into the themes of Indian novels in English through his novels *The Guide* (1958), *The Financial Experts* (1951) and *The English Teacher* (1945). The Indian Sanskrit rhythm in the syntax of English has been created by Raja Rao in almost all his novels *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), and exhibited the myths and legends of Hinduism as well.

The writings of these authors – with their narrative techniques and style – make Indian Literature in English to expand its literary landscape. They had created characters that are unique in World Literature.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswamy was born on the tenth of October 1907 in Chennai (Madras) in a Brahmin family. He was nicknamed as Kunjappa at home. Because of his father's transfer of job, Narayan's family moved to Mysore. But Narayan was left behind to the care of his grandmother, Ammani, by his parents. As all Indian grandmothers, Narayan's grandmother was also a good narrator of bedtime stories. Her influence made him to learn the art of story – telling as well as the classical tradition of India in a primary level.

Narayan himself portrays his grandmother's image and of how much talent she possessed at her old age, in his autobiography, *My Days*: "Grand motherhood was a wrong vocation for her: She ought to have been a school inspectress. She had an absolute passion to teach and mould a young mind." (1986:11). It was she who taught him Tamil alphabets as well as classical songs. This early education of Indian classical myths and tradition helped him to store everything in his mind and later helped him to add meaning to his life and work.

R. K. Narayan started writing from his childhood. He observed the life of the people around with utter care. Later, he made use of those characters in his novels. Thus, his characters have an Indian flavor and they are often drawn from middle class and lower middle class society.

Narayan had a passion for journalism and he chose journalism as his career. He wrote for newspapers and magazines. In the fifties he had been to America and naturally, nothing could inspire our author's Indian heart from abroad. He remained an Indian throughout his life. He framed characters with an Indian artistic approach for over sixty years in Indian Writing in English.

In all his Pre - Independence novels family is the matrix. Most of them were auto biographical. *Swami and His Friends* (1935) was his first novel which Narayan published because of the recommendation of Graham Greene. Narayan has written about ten novels and hundred and fifty one short stories. He chooses his characters from the middle class of South India. Like, other Regional Novelists, the locale of Narayan's novels is Malgudi and its surroundings. If one wants to appreciate the delicate humanity and culture of India, one should read Narayan's novels and this is a comment given by Margaret Parton.

The Guide (1958) has won Narayan the Sahitya Academy Award. He heard about an incident in which some Brahmins prayed to God for rain in knee-deep water for twelve days and then it rained.

This became an inspirational factor for him to develop the plot for his novel 'The Guide'. He has portrayed typical Indian character in this novels filled with Indian emotions and also symbols representing Indian tradition.

The Guide as a novel covers many sins and many virtues of its characters. The main characters of this novel is Raju, Rosie and Marco. R.K. Narayan has given a true social picture of India through *The Guide*. The protagonist, Raju, goes to the Mangala village on the Sarayu river and he stays in a temple on the river bank. There he meets Velan, a simple villager, and it was this meeting which was fated to involve him in endless trouble. It is to Velan, at a later date, Raju narrates his past life as a successful tourist guide 'Railway Raju' and a rail road station food vendor.

Once Raju, as a tourist, guide happened to meet a couple, Marco and Rosie. Marco concentrates more on other materialistic affairs and gives less attention towards his beautiful wife Rosie. Raju helped Marco in his researches at the same time he helped Rosie to realize her ambition of becoming a dancer. He becomes very close to her. He was too much infatuated by Rosie. He neglected his friend Gaffur's warning and even his mother's advice. He turned a deaf ear even to the voice of his own soul.

The only reality in my life and consciousness was Rosie. All my mental powers were now turned to keep her within my reach, and keep her smiling all the time, neither of which was at all easy. I would willingly have kept at her side all the time, as a sort of parasite. (*The Guide*, 1958:104)

His over familiarity with a married woman becomes a fatal flaw to his tragedy.

Rosie with her dream of becoming a dancer forgot her husband and the sanctity of married life and was lured towards Raju. She asked permission to her husband for becoming a dancer. In agitation, she told Marco, about her intimacy with Raju and her husband abandoned her. She went and lived with Raju in his house bearing his mother's indifference.

Raju helped Rosie in making her dreams come true. Rosie became a professional dancer. Raju played well the role of an impresario and became popular and rich. Raju was so possessive of Rosie and this possessive nature prevented him from showing the letter that came from a lawyer's firm in Madras asking for Rosie's signature on an application for the release of a box of jewellery. Raju forged her signature and mailed the document for which he was caught and sent to jail for two years.

After coming out of the jail he has been accepted as a saint by the rustics of Mangala. The villagers approached Raju to undertake a fast to please the rain God and this made him to confess his past life to Velan. Even after listening to the past life of Raju, Velan continued to acknowledge him as Swami; he took Raju's confession as a mark of humility and godliness. Instead of considering Raju as a

traitor or fake, Velan, believed that Raju is the hope to do some good to the villagers of Mangala. He persuaded Raju for a fast and Raju finally agreed to fast:

'If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?' (*The Guide* 1958: 237 -238) and that became his final decision. He slowly changed himself without his knowledge as a real sage. Sharan remarks that:

In the course of his ordeals, he changes himself thoroughly and accepts the challenges of reality. He plays his role of a holy man with a ring of sincerity and embraces death at the end of the novel. Thus, 'Railway Raju', the guide becomes a 'spiritual guide' and all his imperfection and impersonation turn into a real act of self- sacrifice. (1993:21)

Raju has no other way but to undergo the fast though unwillingly he gained strength to undergo the fast for real and this strength made him a martyr. After the twelve day Raju's health was very weak. He prayed and said to Velan, 'Velan it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up legs – He sagged down.' (*The Guide*, 1958: 247). Thus the fake swami Raju's life was dedicated to the welfare of the poor villagers of the Mangala as a divine martyr.

It is true that R.K. Narayan has proved that typical Indian thoughts and feelings can be expressed in foreign language without trying to imitate the native speakers of English. He gave his characters Indian thoughts and feelings and expressed it in his scenes and backgrounds. Indian culture and tradition is rich and varied and it is not easy to summarize through few situations or characters. But Narayan made it exuberant and all his characters share Indianness. A close reading of the novel illustrates that Raju is not very bad person thoroughly. Though he flirts with Rosie, a married woman, his heart warns him of being in an Indian society and he is not at ease and peace. In his own words he establishes his fear: "My thoughts dwelt on her golden touch. A part of my mind went on saying. 'No, no. It is not right. Marco is her husband, remember. It's not to be thought of.' (*The Guide*, 1958: 77). Rosie, besides her modern – type relationship with Raju, regards Marco as her husband. Raju's mother is portrayed as a woman born and bred up in an orthodox, conservative class of Indians.

In almost all the novels of Narayan, Malgudi is also a character. Malgudi represented Indian in many aspects. The influence of changes of modernity over India has been narrated by Narayan with the help of his fictional town. But Narayan has kept his characters within the grip of culture. The Malgudian society and its tradition represent the society and the tradition of India as a whole.

Narayan represented Indianness through symbols also in many of his novels. In *The Guide* Narayan has used symbols which represent typical Indian tradition and culture. The Temple, River,

The faith and the excessive innocence represents the old nature of Indian culture. The busy Railway Station as portrayed by the Narayan originally symbolizes the upcoming of the new culture and tradition. It represents the beginning of the modernity into Malgudi. The unwilling fast underwent by Raju is a symbol that indicates that a fake sanyasi has started his real sacrifice to the welfare of the Mangala villagers. The appearance of the swami represents the characteristics of an Indian swami as well.

The traits of Indian manners and customs are also reflected in this novel. Hospitality of Indians is a well known trait all over the world. Indians are known for their custom of hospitality and altruism. Rosie has been accepted in Raju's house after being abandoned by her husband and Raju has been easily sheltered by the villagers of Mangala with the utmost honour of a sage.

In all possible ways, the theme, the characterization, the use of language, the locale and the philosophy, the author has presented the novel as a typical Indian novel. Narayan has captured the Fauna and Flora, the caste system, the social and political conditions and also every influence that has been enforced on Indian culture and tradition. Narayan has given a clear picture of India at the time of narration without idealizing the country and he has not also condemned it. The poverty of India has been reflected with a personal touch of the author. The villagers are shown as suffering from poverty and ignorance and their illiteracy has been reflected as the root cause for all their sufferings. There are as gullible and kind hearted as any Indian village habitats.

India is glorified all over the world as a land of rich and varied heritage. Authors like R.K. Narayan have given justification for this fact through their creative writings in English. Professor Srinivasa Iyengar rightly says; "He is of India even of South India: he uses the English language much as we used to wear dhoties manufactured in Lancashire – but the thoughts and feelings, the stirrings of the soul, the wayward movements of the consciousness, are all of the soil of India, recognizably autochthonous' (1962: 359).

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