

**INDIAN ELEMENTS IN R.K.NARAYAN'S *THE GUIDE***

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/joell.64.19.102>**ABSTRACT**

Rasipuram Krishna swami Iyer Narayana swami (10 October 1906 – 13 May 2001), was an Indian writer known for his works set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. He was a leading author of early Indian literature in English along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. *The Guide* was adapted for film (winning a Filmfare Award for Best Film). He highlights social context and everyday life of his characters. He has been compared to William Faulkner who created a similar fictional town and likewise explored with humour and compassion the energy of ordinary life.

It can be said that Indianness and Narayan's writings are synonymous. India with its landscape, culture, conventions and customs becomes picturesque in his writings including *The Guide*. To a large extent, the country India is an ideal representative of the sub-continent India. But universality in *The Guide* (1958) cannot be ignored as the country India and India as a sub-continent undoubtedly symbolize many features of the world. This paper attempts at examining Narayan's creation of characters representing both sub-continental and universal elements.

Keywords: *Indian Elements, Middle Class Life, Beliefs, Values And Customs,*



INTRODUCTION

As it happens to be a fact in other writings in R.K. Narayan, sub-continental and more particularly Indian elements are present in his *The Guide*. In spite of this commonness, the role playing of the universal elements in *The Guide* deserves consideration. The fake swami represented by Raju and typical Indian woman represented by Rosie, middle class life, beliefs, values and customs, the ancient temple, the pyol school, the betel leaf shop at the railway station, gossip loving trait of the people, hospitality, the dance of king cobra and Bharat Natyam become materials to draw a genuine picture of India or Indian sub-continent. On other hand, love and sex, jealousy, money, mysterious female characters, the theme of crime and punishment, spiritual regeneration through self-negation, simultaneous presence of happiness and sorrow, pleasure and sadness from the same source but with separate implications for different persons, complexities of mind, ups and downs in an individual's life are truly universal. Raju's qualities of a universal rogue are also worth-mentioning.

Raju, the protagonist of *The Guide* belongs to a lower-middle class family. Their house is opposite to the Malgudi railway station. He starts his career with the profession of a tourist guide, Raju later plays the roles of a lover criminal and finally a fake swami. To avoid the shameful situation of facing his people, he prefers the role of swami to returning home after his release from imprisonment. This sainthood comes into his favour only for the time being. But when the situation forces him to observe fasting for bringing rain for the draught-stricken people, he faces a plight..Th novel ends with no indication about Raju's death or survival.

INDIA- THE SUBJECT MATTER OF *THE GUIDE*

In an interview when Narayan was asked whether the elements in *The Guide* had been 'transformed' by his American experiences, he referred to it as being 'totally Indian'. In his autobiography *My Days*, he explains how he conceived the idea for 'a novel about someone suffering enforced sainthood', "A recent situation in Mysore offered a setting for such a story. A severe drought had dried up all the rivers and tanks; KrishnarajaSagar, an enormous reservoir feeding channels that irrigated thousands of acres, had also become dry and its bed, a hundred and fifty feet deep, was now exposed to the sky with fissures and cracks, revealing an ancient submerged temple, coconut stumps and dehydrated crocodiles. As a desperate measure, the municipal council organized a prayer for rains. A group of Brahmins stood knee-deep in water (procured at great cost) on the dry bed of kavery, fasted, prayed and chanted certain mantras continuously for eleven days. On the twelfth day it rained, and brought relief to the countryside" (*My Days*, 167).

MALGUDI, NARAYAN'S INDIA

Narayan's India is symbolized by Malgudi, an imaginary locale in his novels. Malgudi is as significant as Hardy's wessex novels. The spirit of the place has a great influence on the characters and actions like the Egdon Heath in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. Malgudi is a "a blend of oriental and pre-1914 British, like an Edwardian mixture of sweet mangoes and malt vinegar; a wedding with its horoscopes and gold-edged, elegantly printed invitation cards; tiny shops with the shopkeeper hunched on the counter selling plantains, betel leaves, snuff and English biscuits; the casuarinas and the Post Office Savings Bank; the brass pots and the



volumes of Milton and Carlyle; the shaved head and ochre robes of the sanyasi and Messrs Binns' catalogue of cricket bats" (Walsh, *Indian Literature in English*, 73).

FAKE SWAMI AND TYPICAL INDIAN WOMAN

Traditionally, majority of the people of this sub-continent have respect for religion no matter to what degree they apply it in their practical aspects of life. So, they place the religious persons on a high ground and consider the religious personalities such as 'sadhu' or 'swami' as proper media for communicating with the spiritual world. That is, the people want to achieve the Almighty's satisfaction by satisfying of the holy persons. As a result, some persons exploit this credulity of the common people. A good example of this exploitation is *Tree Without Roots* (LalShalu) by Syed waliullah of Bangla literature. In this novel, Majeed wraps an old grave with a red cloth or 'lalshalu' and introduces it to villagers as a grave or 'mazar' of a saint. As the caretaker or 'Khadem' of this 'mazar', Mojeed earns not only livelihood but also power and fame. The uneducated, superstitious and blind believers who are simple in mind become easy victim of Majeed's falsehood.

In *The Guide*, Raju is not a caretaker of a holy grave but he himself pretends to be a holy person in whom the people of Mangala village find a real holy figure ready to devote his life for the interest of the common people. Like Majeed of *Tree without Roots* (LalShalu), Raju does not do all his activities according to a well-Knit plan. In fact, Velan creates a situation which makes Raju a Swami but he does not have a strong desire to disclose his fake identity as a swami. He rather finds it preferable to facing disgraceful circumstances by returning to his own village. However, unlike other fake swamis, Raju

transforms himself into a real holy person through his long fasting for the people of Mangala village.

Like majority of the sub continental women, Rosie is ready to abandon her desire for dancing if her husband Marco becomes kind and soft in his dealings with her in their married life. She is devoted to Marco in spite of his impotence and priggishness and she might have resisted her physical involvement with Raju if her husband had showed the least amount of kindness and consideration for her. Like the Indian women of butterfly-type, Rosie is also glamorous and charming and not very particular and respectful about chastity, virtue etc. She causes disorder in her own family life and in the life of Raju. As typical Indian women, she restores peace and harmony.

MARCO AS A HUSBAND

Though not as an ideal Indian husband, Marco does not take care of his wife's beauty and also other demands, he is neither a western type husband. Unlike many western husbands and like many of the Indian husbands, Marco cannot support Rosie's dancing for Raju in the hotel room.

THE STRESS OF FAMILY

The appreciating aspect of the Indian to put emphasis on family is also evident in *The Guide* as it is seen in other novels of R.K. Narayan. Sooth to say, "The family is the immediate context in which his sensibility operates, and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which family-relationships are treated" (*William Walsh*, R.K. Narayan)

MIDDLE CLASS LIFE

The life style of middle class Indians make an important feature of Narayan's *The Guide*. Raju himself belongs to a lower middle class family



and Rosie also comes of the same class. So the beliefs and ideas held by Raju and Rosie, and their facing various situations in their lives are certainly of those who belong to their class.

BELIEFS, VALUES AND CUSTOMS OF INDIANS

India with her age-old religious beliefs, values and customs is picturesque in *The Guide*. Indians' belief that violation of traditional beliefs, values and customs leads to disorder and conformity to these leads to order is brilliantly illustrated in Raju's rise from tourist guide to swami and to a martyr. Raju has to receive punishment for deviating from tradition, for developing an illicit affair with Rosie, for not showing respect for his mother and for deceit and crime. But later, Raju conforms to tradition, accepts the faith of the villagers and gains spiritual maturity, the chaos in his life is replaced by order, happiness and salvation of soul.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ENRICHMENT OF INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT

Indian sub-continent is rich with archaeological sites and this aspect has made this region an attractive tourist zone. The exposure of the ancient temple that had lain beneath the waters of the modern reservoir, an event which Narayan takes over in *The Guide*, served as a metonym for the notion of an archaeologically layered India, albeit one in which the different strata were coming to exist contiguously rather than in a temporal sequence, since an ancient infrastructure was now present on the surface. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, there are number of places which bear the testimony to this sub-continent being archaeologically rich. These sites are the brilliant examples of Mughal and other rules followed by Mughal Empire.

PYOL SCHOOL

Pyol School is a perfect example for sub-standard education received by the children in unprivileged class of the Indian sub-continent. The Pyol School has a similarity with 'Maktab' in Bangladesh. It was very popular about two decades ago and it is still found in rural Bangladesh. It is generally administered by an old 'Moulavi'. He teaches the students but his main concern is to control the naughty children rather than impart them good lessons. Though the teacher and the 'Moulavi' are respected, they are not well-paid. The shouting of the children and getting caned are two dominant characteristics of Pyol School or 'Maktab'. The foul-mouthed teacher or 'Moulavi' abuses instead of nurturing good manners in the students. The parents take individual or co-operative effort to cater to the needs of the schoolmaster or 'Moulavi' and these are typically Indian and represent typical village school or 'Maktab'.

BETEL LEAF SHOP AND THE FONDNESS FOR GOSSIPING

Almost all the railway stations in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are featured by the presence of a betel leaf shop and there cigarette is also sold. This is a gathering centre not only for the passengers waiting for the train but also a good number of neighbouring people also make it a regular habit to pay a visit to it to take betel-leaf, cigarette and most important of all to play the 'vital' role of participating in the important discussions related to home and international affairs giving main focus on the political issues. The betel leaf shop possessed by Raju's father is a typical of sub-continental context which serves as a popular gossiping centre. Raju's father being absorbed in the gossiping presents the fondness for this trait



among the sub-continental people. While being engaged apparently in a very 'important' discussion people neglect the appreciating desire for returning home timely when wives wait eagerly and patiently to have pleasure by serving the dinner to their dear husbands.

HOSPITALITY

The people of this region have a praiseworthy tradition of giving respect to the guest. They are extremely hospitable and In *The Guide*, we can see that Raju and his mother take care of every comfort of Rosie. His mother does not raise any question at first. Later on she becomes dissatisfied with Rosie and leaves home bag and baggage as Rosie continues living in her house. In the same way, Velan and other villagers of Mangala arrange the meals for the swami, not asking any question though they themselves suffer from drought.

THE DANCE OF KING COBRA AND BHARAT NATTYAM

The dance of king cobra displayed by the snake-charmers playing tune on flutes may be less importance considering the Indianness but a minute picture of India is presented by it. Bharat Nattyam, a special type of dancing is a unique cultural element of India that is of South-India.

MERRY MAKING

To ensure the maximum utilization of an opportunity for merry-making is a vital characteristic of the Indians. Their joy and happiness centre round from a big religious festival to a very minor occasion. As the fasting Raju is on the verge of collapse, a whole crowd of men, women and children gathers on the bank of the river where there is eating, drinking and merry-making.

NARROW-POLITICAL MOTIVE

The narrow political motive of the sub-continental rulers is clear in the government's special arrangement for the fasting swami and his devotees. In fact the main aim of the political rulers of this region is to accomplish the works which serve their political interests rather than the real welfare of the common people and thus they succeed to show their false patriotism and sympathy for the common people. In *The Guide*.The government deputed doctors for the fasting swami though they do nothing for the drought-stricken villagers. Getting media coverage and cheap popularity is a dominant factor in the sub-continental political strategy. In Bangladesh one can observe that the political leaders rush to any affected spot and express their deep sympathy for the affected people through different gestures. They also make a good number of promises for their relief from sufferings, but an insignificant percentage of the promises are materialized later. The news of their feeling sympathy for the people and making promises draws the attention of the media and thus comes into common people's notice and this fact helps them to achieve political purpose.

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