

## NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE, LANGUAGE AND STYLE IN R.K.NARAYAN'S *THE GUIDE*

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### ABSTRACT

R.K.Narayan is a popular Indian novelist writing in English. His book "The Guide" (1958) got a wide acceptance abroad and Narayan was conferred the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960 for his contribution to Indian writing in English. It narrates the travails and tribulations of Raju, formerly a tourist guide, who has just been released from prison, and has taken refuge in an old temple by the river, Sarayu, Velan, a peasant, mistakes him for a priest and seeks his advice on a domestic problem. By uttering a few platitudes. Raju helps him to find a solution and soon acquires a reputation as a holy man. When a drought befalls in the district, the peasants turn to Raju for help and he reluctantly undertakes a fast to propitiate the rain gods. It is at this point that he confesses that he is an imposter, and recounts to Velan the tragicomedy of his love for Rosie the dancer, the rise and fall of his fortunes as guide, lover and impresario.

**Keywords:**-acceptance, contribution, prestigious, tribulations, propitiate impresario, confesses, trivials, conferred.

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### INTRODUCTION

Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Narayanswami Iyer (R.K.Narayan) was born in Madras (now Chennai) in 1906. His father was Rasipuram Venkatarama Krishna swami Iyer was a School Teacher in Mysore. His mother was Gnanambal was a housewife. His elder brother was a popular Cartoonist R.K.Laxman. He graduated at Maharaja college, Mysore. He married to Rajam in 1935. They had a daughter named Hema, their happiness was short lived, Rajam died with Typhoid in 1939. A number of female characters in his writings are based on Rajam. For several years after her death, Narayan could not write a novel. The three novels published during his wife's lifetime were, Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), The Dark Room (1938).

**The works of R.K.Narayan:** 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 the ordinariness of prosperity and eminence, and then his downfall. Centred in and around 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.

The poet moves on two phases- the past and the present. Raju recalls his past as he is firmly ensconced as a holy man in the dilapidated temple of Mempi hills. His recollections begin with his early childhood and help us to understand the mental make-up and motivations of the protagonist who, like Rosie and Marco, is an accomplished artist in his own way. They are Raju's musings which later assume the form of confession to his acolyte, Velan.

The crucial part of these recollections related to Rosie and Marco, who come to Malgudi. Marco is an archaeologist and his wife Rosie belongs to a family of temple dancers, known as Devadasis. Both of them are totally absorbed in their own calling and are indifferent to each other. Raju is attracted to Rosie and she becomes his mistress. Marco disowns Rosie and she comes to live with Raju, who helps her to hone her talent for dancing and Rosie (now known as Nalini) starts performing on stage.

She is a great success, but Raju starts gambling and drinking with the money that she earns. When Marco sends her court papers to dispose of a box of jewellery, Raju forges her signature and lands himself in prison for two years. The narrative commences after Raju's release from Jail.

Raju must now begin life anew as he cannot go back to Rosie, who has strained every nerve to defend him in court, but who has no love lost for him now; she does not want to have anything to do with him now. Raju also cannot bring himself to return to Malgudi and start living there as an ex-convict. During his wanderings, he comes to an old, disused temple to ponder over his future. He is mistaken for a holy man by the people of a nearby village, and he is forced to don the mantle of a saint and fast unto death where there is famine and drought in the region because this is what his followers expect from him. Raju, the former railway guide, attains martyrdom as rain clouds are seen in the distant horizon on the twelfth day of his fast.

Raju is on the vague of a transformation, of becoming a saint; But Narayan threatens the whole thing very lightly. Raju's confession made under great stress lacks the emotional intensity of such a confession: his narration is prosaic, too prosaic and leisurely, In fact Raju's tone is no different from Narayan's own. The two voices are indistinguishable. It is really Narayan's voice that we hear all the time. Refusing to exploit a situation to create Character undergoing a spiritual change, Narayan endows it with subtle humour. Here is Raju's Conversation with the American Journalist:

"Tell me, how do you like it here?"

"I am only doing what I have to do; that's all. My likes and dislikes do not count."

"How long have you been without food now?"

"Ten days."

"Do you feel weak?"

"Yes"

"When will you break your fast?"

"Twelfth day."

"Do you expect to have the rains by then?"

"Why not?"

"Can fasting abolish all wars and bring in world peace?"

"Yes"

"Do you champion fasting for everyone?"

"Yes"

"What about the caste system? Is it going?"

"Yes"

"Will you tell us something about your early life?"

"What do you want me to say?"

"Er-for instance, have you always been a yogi?"

"Yes, more or less."

It is a cheat and a fraud, a bhogi and not a yogi, that is being interviewed. It is a devastating expose of "swami hood" and the credulity of the Indian masses.

Raju feels some holiness descending on him even though he is a fake swami. His deteriorating health becomes a concern for the government and the temple where he is fasting is now a place of pilgrimage for thousands of people, who all want to see and touch the swami. Reporters gather there from all parts of the globe and there is even an American who is filming the swami's fast for people back home.

Raju grows extremely weak on the eleventh day of his fast and the doctor advises him to take some glucose and saline water in view of the grave danger to his life. Raju declines. He goes to the river usual, although he is too weak without any support. He whispers to Velan that he can feel it is raining in the hills and he falls down. The ending is ambiguous as we do not know whether Raju has fallen unconscious or he is dead. But the rumbling of clouds is heard in the distant horizon. It has been commented that the end of the guide is ambiguous. Critics have offered different interpretations. Some opine that Raju dies at the end and becomes a martyr, while others are of the view that he is saved by a glucose-saline injection and lives to enjoy his reputation as a saint.

**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 them 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."

**Narrative Technique, language and style of Narayan:** R.K.Narayan is a story-teller in the mould of the traditional Indian story-teller. In most of his novels, the narration moves forward chronologically. There is no looking backward or forward, no probing of the sub-conscious or the unconscious, as is the case with the twentieth-century novelists like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. According to Paul Varghese, "Narayan's is the simplest form of prose fiction- the story which records a succession of events. There is no hiatus between character and plot; both are inseparably knit together. The qualities the novelist attributes to these characters determine the action, and the action in turn progressively changes the characters and thus the story is carried forward to the end.

In other words, as a good story-teller, Narayan sees to it that his story has a beginning, a middle and an end. The end of his novel is a solution to the problem which sets the events moving; the end achieves that completeness towards which the action has been moving and beyond which the action cannot progress. This end very often consists either in a balance of forces and counter-forces or in death or both."

**The Guide: An Exception:** The Guide, however, is an exception in this respect. The narrative technique Narayan has followed in this novel is different from that of the other novels. In all his novels, except *The English Teacher*, *The Guide* and *The Man Eater of Malgudi* Narayan is the omniscient author writing in the third person and thus following the conventional mode of narration. In *The Guide*, however, part of the story is told by the author and part in the first person by the protagonist Raju himself. The novel begins with Raju's release from prison. From the start of the novel we feel the present, the tactful, effective presence of the idea shaping the density of the detail. Or- since this is to invert the order in which we are aware of the two things- we feel the detail, solid, convincing, natural as it is, representing and illustrating the conception – and doing so lightly, economically, directly:

Raju welcomed the intrusion- something to relieve the loneliness of the place. The man stood gazing reverentially on his face. Raju felt amused and embarrassed. "Sit down if you like," Raju said, to break the spell. The other accepted the suggestion with a grateful nod and went down the river steps to wash his feet and face... and took his seat two steps below the granite slab on which Raju was sitting cross-legged as if it were a throne, beside an ancient shrine.... Raju waited for the other to say something. But he was too polite to open a conversation.

This passage and its context put us in possession of the essential data. Raja perched in the sacred place, the peasant Velan sitting respectfully below, the ambiguity of the relationship on Raju's side, the certainty of it on the peasant's. For Raju the villager's presence is simply a wholesome break in his isolation; for the villager, Vellan, Raju also fills a vacancy but one of a more significant kind. As he sees it, Raju fits into the context of the sacred shrine, he completes it and revives it, the character that Raju presents to him is one absorbed from the stones of the temple. But it is not just the accident of the place which gives him this conviction. It is Raju's fate to be the product of other people's convictions. In his nature there is developed to the point of extremity what exists in all of us to some degree the quality of suggestibility to the desires of others. This yielding, responsive part in most of us is limited by an unyielding core of self: it operates only so far as the bias of a nature allows. But in Raju it is the centre of his nature as an influence at each phase of his odd career.

**Necessitated by the Story:** This is certainly an improvement in Narayan's narrative technique. Here, however, it is necessitated by the nature of the story. The novel begins with Raju's release from prison. Whatever happens to Raju after his release is told by the narrator, whereas whatever had happened to Raju before he was imprisoned is told in a series of flashbacks in Raju's own words and in the form of a confession to Velan who has come to regard him as a holy man.

The effect of this technique is to make the figure of the hero more sharp and real than the other characters. Also, in making the confession, Raju characterizes himself by what he reports and how he reports

it. The impression that the reader gets is that Raju's character develops because of certain events and the events, in turn, change his character till he finds himself in the role of a saint, fasting to induce rain for the drought-infested village in response to the expectations of the crowd of admirers and worshippers. In other words, character and action develop simultaneously, and both influence each other. It is in this way that the complex personality of Raju is built up, and made convincing and credible.

This interesting, novel technique keeps up the curiosity of the readers alive, regarding both the present and the past of Raju. It leads the native freshness and makes it vigorous and interesting. As Raju's present and past are cleverly jumbled, there is a constant impression of suspension and anticipation. The zig-zag narration give a piquancy to the novel without in any way confusing the reader. In this way, Raju becomes his own critic, and we are enabled "to see the action as Raju sees the earlier Raju Drunk". In this way, the present and the past are juxtaposed, each illuminating the other in this complex, original and unique technique Narayan has used in this novel.

**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".

#### 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, M.C.Catchlion. Many Universities has taken his stories and novels and included in the syllabus for UG and PG students. This kind of previlige in literature is given by Narayan to the readers. For the coming generations his works are great gifts which shows Indian culture and tradition his literature is a great treasure for the future generations.

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