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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN THE NOVEL OF R. K. NARAYAN WITH REFERENCE TO THE GUIDE

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# Search for Identity in the Novel of R. K. Narayan With Reference To the Guide

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Rasipuram Krishna swami Narayan, one of the founding pillars of Indian writing in English is an institution in himself. Born and brought up in a traditional South Indian family in 1906, Narayan is a true Indian both in spirit and thought. Much has been said about Narayan as an outstanding and unassailable story-teller.

He was born in a South Indian family of "The purest Brahmin Stock". Narayan's roots in religion and family were strengthened by his maternal grandmother who was instrumental in introducing him during his childhood to classical Indian and Tamil Cultures, languages and literature, defining the traditional Brahmin values and ways of life.

The setting of R.K. Narayan novel, *The Guide*, as in most of his novels, is *Malgudi*, a fictional town in Southern India. Raju is the Central character. He meets Rosie, a beautiful dancer and her husband, whom Raju nicknames Marco. Marco is a scholar and anthropologist, who is more interested in his research than in his young wife Rosie. Raju falls in love with Rosie when Marco discovers that Rosie has become lovers, Marco abandons her and returns to Madras. Raju becomes infatuated with Rosie. He is so obsessed with Rosie that he forgets his business, falls into debt, and loses his shop at the railway station. He loses all his money and inspires Rosie to start dancing. He becomes her manager. But he cannot forget his habit and one day caught red handedly while forging Rosie's signature to sell one of her necklaces. He stays in jail for two years.

On his release from prison Raju stops to rest near an abandoned temple, where a villager named Velan mistakes him for a holy man. Raju doesn't want to return in disgrace to his friends in *Malgudi*, and reluctantly decides to play the part of a holyman. He is happy to accept the daily offering of food which the villagers bring him. Gradually he accepts the role which has been thrust upon him, and he acts as spiritual adviser to the village community.

Raju is content with the arrangement, until a drought occurs, and to save face, he has to take up a twelve

days fast. He has taken on an unselfish task not for love or money, for the first time in his life. Despite grave danger to his health, he continues to fast until he collapses.

A central theme of the novel is the transformation of Raju from his role as a tour guide to that of a spiritual guide. The title of the novel, *The Guide* has a double meaning. As a tour guide and lover he is impulsive, unprincipled and self indulgent. After his imprisonment, after his transformation as a holy man, he is careful, thoughtful, and self-disciplined. The novel tells two stories that of Raju's relationship with Rosie, and that of Raju's relationship with the villagers as a holy man. Raju was involved in a tangle of new relationship. Rosie, Marco's wife become Raju's lover. Abandoned by Marco, Rosie realized, with Raju's help, her ambition of becoming a dancer. But Raju's possessive instinct finally betrayed him into a criminal action, and he was charged and convicted for forgery. Coming out of the Jail, he cut off all connection with the past. As he was mistaken as an ascetic he was compelled to lead a *Sanyasi* life. But nobody believed that he was anyone other than a saint.

In his essay "The Reluctant Guru" Narayan expressed his resistance to the role of an authentic exponent of the mystic East, a guru or a sage, a role of the people had foisted on him. He was very uncomfortable with that role, but he could not entirely shake it off. Rosie, though a post-graduate is naïvely corrupted with modern and materialistic values. She is a traditional Indian wife, and she longs for affection and care from her husband. She cannot cope up with the archeological interests of her husband, Marco.

Is Raju a real saint or is he a fake? This question had puzzled most readers of the novel ever since its publication. Sally Appleton in the review titled "The Ambiguous Man", which appeared in *Commonweal* Magazine, a few weeks after the novel's publication observes: "The author must decide whether or not holiness will work, the author abandons the reader to choose arbitrarily whether or not, as Raju sinks into the muddy river bed, he is dying, whether or not as

the water rises to Raju's knees, it rises because "It's raining in the Hills" or because Raju himself is sagging into it." It is not surprising that critics are divided on this question C.D. Narasimhaiah considers Raju a transformed man in the end, a saint whereas G.S. Bala rama Gupta believes that Raju is a selfish swindler, an adroit actor, and a perfidious megalomaniac. In the workds of Paranjape:

"The question is not so much whether Raju is a willing saint or not because, like all of us, everyone within the novel notices Raju's reluctance, even his unfitness for guerdom. But doesn't really change who or what he ends up becoming? So what we have here is a real problem, one that leads us to the crux of Narayan's artistry and to his relationship to Indian modernity because if Raju is a fake, Narayan is putting into doubt not just an individual but the institution of guru itself."

It was the belief of village people of Mangal that it would rain and that it would rain and thus put an end to the drought if a true Sanyasi did genuine fasting for twelve days. That was a belief prevalent among the Hindus as such in India. Whether the people had direct experience of the miracle or not. It did not lessen their faith in it. Narayan only wanted to portray such belief and rites prevailed among his people. He did not want to glorify or condemn such beliefs.

Though Raju was a fake guru, on whom Gurudom had been thrust, he seemed to grow in stature to fit its mantle. He was willing to sacrifice his life. Since the villagers believed that his fasting would bring rain he did no other alternative than continuing the fast to the twelfth day. Raju understood, that he could not correct the villagers' misconception about him. They considered him as a true sanyasi and hence his genuine fast would bring rain. Thus Raju was trapped. He had no existence other than a Sanyasi' He could have saved himself as the doctors and velan requested him to stop fasting. But once he stopped fasting what would the hundreds of people assembled there think about him? Wouldn't it be a betrayal of faith laid on him by the people? So he might have thought that it was better and nobler to die a martyr than live an ignoble life, despised by others.

Narayan wanted to tell the readers that there are many Raju or fake Sanyasis in our society. Despite being so aware of the dangers of Shaming such a series thing as being a guru. He was unable to show the villagers rejecting Raju, or velan abusing and unmasking him. He pointed out that in the struggle between tradition and modernity tradition won though in a reluctant manner. Raju's penance and his ultimate sacrifice were real no matter how painfully flawed his motives might have been earlier or how ineffectual their outcome. There was ample textual evidence to suggest that a gradual but sure alteration in Raju's inner being did take place. "In other words, the irony strength end the "Hindu" world views not weakens it, though at first it appears as if the, opposite is the case."

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