

# Cultural Juxtaposition in R.K Naryan's novel

## *The Guide*

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**Abstract**— R K Narayan is one of the celebrated novelists of that era. His novel *The Guide* won the Sahitya Academy Award. The main objective of the paper is to discuss about the mixing of Indian and western culture. Indian is a country where logic and belief sit side by side. The novel maybe inspired by an incident in Mysore. Here acute drought completely dried up Krishna Raja Sagar. Some religious chanting took place for rain. The novelist combined the enforced sainthood with that incident. The novel has two layer of narrative. The third person narrative starts with Raju when he came out of jail. The first person narrative is Raju's recollection of past life to Velan. The novel *The Guide* has myth and reality blended in the plot. The life of Raju closely follows the concept of Chaturasham. Rosie who is an educated woman still carries some Indian values and Raju's mother carries traditional Indian rules. The two place village Mongal And town Malgudi shows two India in a single globe. While Malgudi is a commercial town with money sharks, Mongal is a place where ever a poor pays homage to a spiritual man with blind faith. The novelist juxtaposes both the sides into one pattern to portray real India in his novel.

**Keywords**— *Indian, Western, Culture, Religious, Traditional, Indian Rules.*

R.K Narayan is one of the distinguish writer in history of Indian English novel ever appear. He got the Sahitya Akademy award for *The Guide* in 1958. He was also awarded by Royal Society of Literature with AC Benson Medal in 1980 and Padma Bhusan also. The novelist was invited by Rockefeller foundation from USA to visit Berkley and write a novel. In his book *My dateless diary an American journey* the novelist praises a smart witty guide in America. Part of Raju's character is conceived by the memory of that guide. In his another book *My Days* the novelist comments that he was musing about enforced sainthood. The present novel is related to this thing.

The objective of this paper is to explore the juxtaposition of Indian theme and western theme. India is a land of belief and logic. Both runs parallel. Sometime belief rules over logic. The belief represents Indian culture and logic represents sophisticated western culture. The novel maybe

inspired by an incident in Mysore. Here acute drought completely dried up Krishna Raja Sagar. Some religious chanting took place for rain. The novelist combined the enforced sainthood with that incident. The novel has two layer of narrative. The third person narrative starts with Raju when he came out of jail. The first person narrative is Raju's recollection of past life to Velan. The novel *The Guide* has myth and reality blended in the plot. The life of Raju closely follows the concept of Chaturasham. In these four stages Rajus Bramhacharya is related to his life at Malgudi station. His Grahasthya starts with his relationship with Rosie. His Banaprastha starts when he is jailed. Raju's ultimate Sannyas comes when Raju becomes a spiritual leader in Mongal. The character of Rosie is also built in terms of myth and reality. She ultimately becomes an independent woman although she retains many of tradisonal features of an Indian wife. Similarly Raju shows a transformation which is similar to the story of Ratnakar. Both the town Mongal and Malgudi represents the Indianness and Westernness.

The opening scene presents the exposition of the plot. Raju has come out from the jail and he has take shelter in a lonely place. Ironically Raju is mistaken as a holy man by a villager from Mongal. The man psychologically associates Raju with this deserted place. The novelist hints that the man Velan becomes excited by the high position of Raju 'sitting crossed legged' as if it were a throne. A.V. Krishna Rao observes that

"The influence of temple on the democratic consciousness is so profound and efficacious that it results in the ultimate transformation of Raju. It enables the establishment of the identity of the mask and the man" (170-171)

The surroundings the river, the tree with chattering birds and monkey, an ancient shrine create the conception of a holy place. Raju's rambling talk convinces Velan that Raju is a Yogi separated from the domestic life. The novelist also implies the idea that Indian people like Velan are emotionally attached to their religious and spiritual values. The theme of 'enforced sainthood' is also hinted here. The novelist has also present two contrasting scene in the exposition. After coming out of jail Raju met a barber. This experienced man could easily identify Raju as a man coming out of jail but Velan innocently believed

that he must be a holy person. Though Raju is a false yogi but he talks about his earlier life and gives advices to Velan and other people of Mongal. Raju gave a logical answer to Velan about his problem but Velan wanted a magical solution from him. That shows the indianness in Velan. Raju started to talk about his past job as a guide. He has a feature of water Diviner instinct. As a water diviner can predict the layer of water similarly Raju can predict his tourist. But according to Velan Raju has a power that he can predict anything by seeing the face. Raju told about the first meeting between them. He made a remark the 'The girl shows no gratitude'. But on Velan's part this shows a miracle. He thinks that Raju can tell a problem by just looking at a face. In this novel Raju's father symbolizes material wealth when his mother symbolizes spirituality and tradition. Every night his mother told him the story of Devaka. The moral of the story was renunciation and spiritual happiness. Raju's mother wanted that Raju's life should follow similar spirituality but every night Raju felt asleep before knowing Devaka when he grew up Raju left the path of spirituality and his mother also left him. The concept of his mother shows the traditional rule of Indian culture followed by every mother. Velan's sister also followed the same theme. Velan brought his sister to Raju because his sister was not agree to the proposal of marriage. Raju couldn't give a practical solution to Velan's problem but his answer was metaphorical. The course of a river cannot be altered. Similarly social rules have their own course that cannot be altered. Hence Velan's sister should agree to marry. Probably she realized that she had no power to alter her destiny.

The coming of Railways shows that the village i.e rural Malgudi connects to the world. The western culture enters into the Indian culture. More over track symbolizes a fixed life with the coming of Railways. The rambling quality of the village will also be lost. The playground was captured by the tracks. It symbolizes that Malgudi was gradually taking the shape of activity and it was capturing the lands and fields of cultivation for this purpose.

"The Railway meant the undoing of Raju and his old mother- a small shop keeper's son become a Railway guide who starts living by his wits and runs into Rosie and Marco, two tourists, gets emotionally entangled, neglects his old, honest means of making a living, and brings ruin upon himself as well as a married woman" (Narasimhaiah 132)

Raju collected the nuts and bolts and treasured them beside ancient silk saris of his mother which never wore. This is a kind of symbolic pattern of the novel.

Throughout the novel Raju's mother symbolizes traditional idea. But Raju easily accepted the changing morality of his time. But in other way this co existence of traditional and modernity symbolizes Indian culture. India is a land where western ideas places side by side with traditional beliefs. Even Raju at the end of the novel accept the enforced sainthood. Raju called it 'dangerous state of affair'. He does not have any such mysterious power. He also realizes that his spiritual power will only make him responsible for many such problems which he may not solve. But he understand that 'He must play the role Velan had given him' because it will provide food without hard work.

The novelist also presented the faith and loyalty of the people of Mongal even in a very poor condition. In spite of their poverty these people are so poor that they cannot spare the peel of a banana as food. Yet this people bring various foods to Raju with a blind faith that he is a holy man. Thus Mongal becomes a contrast to Malgudi. Malgudi is a place of money sharks and commercial mind. In contrast Mongal still carries thus traditional values of Indian culture. Although it has its own ugliness. After the coming of railways Malgudi was becoming a town. The change in Raju's family implies the change in Malgudi. It is a clear hint of entering the western culture. Raju's father increased his social status by buying a 'Jutka' and going to the town every day. His financial status was reflected by his going to 'bank'. Raju's father too underwent a change. From his aggressive spirit he became artificial and apologetic. Again Raju's father was cheated to sale his Jutca. This nicely calculated transaction by the man only suggests the professionalism in commercial world without morality. Again Raju's father transformed his hut shop into a modern shop of fast food and cooked food. Raju observes that the station master was a God to his father. By these changes the western culture overshadows the Indian culture. The reformation invented by Raju as a spiritual guide in Mongal through education and discourse is another hint of western culture. The basic need of Raju was to stay in Mongal and get food without any labor. He also played the role of enforced sainthood for that reason but apart from that Raju made significant changes in the life of village people. Raju himself stoppe his schooling to join his father's business. But in Mongal he started a night school so that the village people might work in day and learn at night. Another significant approach of raju is to make the people logical and independent in thought. Raju advised them to 'recollect and reflect' their words and action. In this way Raju helped them to be their own guide and teacher. The westernize culture inside Raju guided him to make them logical rather to lead life with so called Indian values.

Again 'Snake' bars the image of Indian ideas. 'Snake' in this novel assumes different interpretation at a different aspects. Firstly, snake is associated with Rosie's subconscious mind. While watching the cobra dance Rosie made a slight movement. Raju instantly realized that Rosie nurtured a great dancer within her. Because Snake is associated with dance in Indian culture. Secondly, snake is also associated with low identity. Raju's mother calls Rosie a snake woman and a dancing woman. In a story of *Malgudi Days*, the novelist has used a popular code word in Tamil, D.G to suggest a Harold. 'Snake' becomes another symbol of enemy to Macro. He carries a stick to 'manage' snake. The novelist implies that Macro will never tolerate the sub-conscious snake in Rosie.

The reference of 'Natyashasthya' is another instance of Indian culture. 'Natyashasthya' by Bharat Muni was the oldest form of visual art in India. At one time dancers were highly regarded in society. But gradually this beautiful dancing form was abused and degraded. Bharatnatyam became Dasiatyam or sabri. It became popular in temple and temple dancers were called 'Debdasi', women dedicated to Gods and Goddess. In south India this profession was popularized by 'Chola Dynasty'. Debdasi was a euphemism for public woman. They were even abused in British era. That is why Rosie told Raju that they are not considered respectable and civilized.

Apart from this Marco's advertisement for marriage reflected his reformed mind that shows he is influenced by western culture. The advertisement itself was a change of tradition of marriage with in relation. Secondly, Marco wanted an educated woman with university degree. Thus in reality is an enlightened mind. Thirdly, he had no conservative idea of class or cast which proved that he had no prejudice about cast system. Marco's character combines binary aspects. In spite of his reformed progressive mind, Marco was possessive and superstitious about the emancipation of women and their liberty. That is why he never respected the talent and also disregarded her as wife. The novelist implies that western and traditional, one replacing the other at a time.

According to Indian tradition water is associated with faith. As a river grows dry faith gradually fades. Crocodile symbolizes the hypocrisy in Raju. As the dead crocodile emerges from water similarly Raju's hypocrisy is revealed to Velan. But the temple symbolizes hope and faith.

Rosie left Marco and came to stay with Raju. This is a solid proof of western culture. Indian women are so many devotees towards their husband that they cannot leave their husband for their personal issue. But Rosie left him to lead his dancing abilities. On the other side Raju's mother

left the house and his son because he is staying in a same house with a woman like Rosie who is previously regarded as a 'serpent woman'. For her she is an embodiment of 'Satan'. Transformation of Rosie from a simple housewife to a famous dancer symbolized by the change of name. 'Nalini' and 'Rosie' both are associated with flowers name but 'Rosie' is associated with 'Rose' which is westernized but 'Nalini' is associated with 'Lotus' that symbolizes spirituality. A Lotus is universal flower and similarly Nalini wants to spread 'Bharatnatyam' as a universal dance form. The Lotus flower is poetic because the flower has a rhythm in the beauty. Dance is also a perfect act of rhythm. The name is significant is significant in relation to Rosie's past. A Lotus is born in a muddy area. But it elevates itself from that mud. Similarly Rosie leaves behind her low life to become a famous dancer. 'Raj' is the new title of Raju after Rosie has become a renowned dancer 'Nolini'. The name suggests Raju's royal and luxurious life. That clearly shows that Raju has entered into western life style from his own race. There is an irony with the names of Nolini and Raj. While Rosie sublimated herself to a dancer by her heart but Raju is backed by money. The dancing talent of Rosie is compared by Marco as a dancer of a street spectacle. He compared a dancer with a monkey suggesting that dancing is a funny business. It is not intellectual or creative. But Raju comments that Bharatnatyam is the highest of entertainment. More over this art is not cheap. The motto of an artist is to elevate the taste of the people. Dancing, through its creative inspiration can give the best to the purpose. "Thus Raju, Rosie and Marco become the temporal symbol of Indian's cultural ethos" (Goyal 143). Marco is always busy with his study of past and Rosie with her own interest.

"While Marco is Cultural historian of the past Rosie is a cultural ambassador of the present and Raju is a cultural prophet of the future" (Goyal 143)

Here Rosie who has a western education and knowledge also shows her Indian thought. Here Rosie expresses her gratitude to Raju. With Raju's active help Rosie has been transformed as Nolini, a famous dancer. In Indian religious belief it is said that a man needs births to attain 'Moksha', the redemption. Rosie here comments that she cannot even pay Raju's debt even in seven births.

Rosie nourished a deep love and intention for Marco even after their separation. Rosie read the newspaper article where it praises Marco for his achievement. When she left Malgudi she only took Marco's book. That is a hint that she still carries the tradition of Indian woman.

During the starvation and riot the coming of food towards Raju has not stopped. It shows the blind worship of God and Swami in Indian culture. As Raju as a Swami asked a

village boy to deliver a message to the villagers of Mangal. The message was that unless the villagers stopped fighting, he would not eat anything. But the boy in fear and panic interpreted that Swami vowed not to touch food until the rain came. The whole villagers stopped fight and came to swami. It shows their blind faith towards a false swami. The American Journalist James J. Malone interviewed him. The interview with Raju was very casual. He didn't have a blind faith of the Indian people. Rather he was intrigued by the idea that fasting could bring rain. He asked Raju about his fast, about world peace and asked at last whether Raju had been a yogi from the beginning of his life. Raju answered it in a diplomatic way 'yes more or less'.

Raju's last word addressed to Velan. He says "Velan it is raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs....". Though the novelist doesn't give any hint to suggest rain, Raju's observation is less literal and more metaphorical. He means to say that as a man of sacrifice he can feel the rain of blessings enveloping his body and soul. Throughout the novel, Raju has never been interested in anything selfless and charitable. This kind of account is a direct hint of Indian culture.

R.K Narayan recounts in the early part of *My Days*, his grandmother taught him Tamil alphabets and made him "repeat a few Sanskrit slokas praising Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning" (*My Days*). The very growing up in a Tamil Brahmin family infused within him Hindu mythological structures. Significantly, Narayan notes that like education "religion, was a compulsive force in a family like ours" (*My Days*)

The most significant mythical structure associated with the novel is the sinner Ratnakar. The mention of Sita, The river Sarayu and the name Mangala In *The Guide*, all Evoke a memory of Ramayana in the Indian mind. Ratnakar keep chanting the name of Rama till he achieved the sublime state. Raju too, attempts to come to term with this newfound status. At first he welcomes it as an easy means of getting free supply of food and shelter. Gradually he gets accustomed to his new role as a spiritual guide. The real change comes at a moment of crisis when he finds that he will be forced to keep an expiatory fast for the rain to come. He is genuinely moved by the simple faith of villagers, particularly Velan who remains his stern disciple even after knowing Raju's past. The tale of the naughty God Krishna is also implied. Krishna performs several lilas (feats) and tries the patience of his bhaktas (disciples). But ultimately he rewards them with a miracle, and a darsan, a revelation of his truly godly self. All of Raju's earlier apparently immoral actions are reversed by an ultimate moment of revelation of his godly self. He sacrifices his life for the faith of the villages. Though rains may not come but Raju

becomes a Mahatma. But the novel has a realistic pattern, particularly in the character of Rosie. The myth of Sita and Savitri is related and inverted in her character. However, in spite of coming out of the marriage and living adulterously with another man, Rosie does ultimately remain faithful to her husband. When she left Malgudi she only took the book of Marco. She also performs her version of an agnipariksha( a trial by fire) because she fights Raju's case to the bitter end, pawning off her jewelry and her last possessions. But at the end she becomes independent, leaving behind her the myth of Sita and Savitri.

The novel *The Guide* instances a unique amalgam of Indian culture and Western culture. Apart from Raju and Rosie, the village Mongal and city Malgudi are presented in the same pattern. While Malgudi is the outer layer of westernized India, Mongal is the faithful mythical India with her blind faith and belief in miracle and mystery. While Malgudi is a commercial town with money sharks, Mongal is a place where ever a poor pays homage to a spiritual man with blind faith. The novelist juxtaposes both the sides into one pattern to portray real India in his novel.

"The novel also present a conflict between the Eastern and Western Culture and synthesizes the two through their assimilation which has been symbolized by Rosie's transformation into Nalini. Like Anand, Narayan points out that one has to go to the west in order to come back to the East" ( Yadav 28)

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