

The Guide- A Brilliant Manifestation of Sub-continental and Universal Elements

Arif Moin Uddin Khan

Lecturer, Department of English, Satkania Government College, Satkania-4386, Chittagong, Bangladesh,
E-mail: arif.mukhan@gmail.com

Abstract

Indianness and Narayan's writings are almost synonymous. In fact, India with its landscape, culture, conventions and customs becomes picturesque in his writings including *The Guide*. Again 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 because 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 who represent both sub-continental and universal elements.

Keywords: Sub-continental, Universal, Relationship, Beliefs, Values,

Introduction:

As it happens to be a fact in other writings in R.K. Narayan, sub-continental and more particularly Indian elements are lively 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, family, 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 existence 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 possessing the qualities of a universal rogue is also worth-mentioning.

The Story in Brief:

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

India- the Source and Subject Matter of The Guide:

In an interview 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 an 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; Krishnaraja Sagar, 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. It is as significant as Hardy's Wessex novels. The spirit in 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:

Let us first consider the fact of being swami. Traditionally, majority of the people of this sub-continent have a deep 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. They 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 through the satisfaction of the holy persons. As a result, many exploit this credulity of the common people. A bright example of this exploitation is *Tree Without Roots* (Lal Shalu) by Syed waliullah of Bangla literature. In this novel, Majeed wraps an old grave with a red cloth or 'lal shalu' and introduces it to villagers as the grave or 'mazar' of a saint. As the caretaker or 'Khadem' of this 'mazar', Mojeed earns not only his livelihood but also power and fame. The uneducated, superstitious and blind believers who are also 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* (Lal Shalu), 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 turns 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 conjugal life. She is devoted to Marco in spite of his impotence and priggishness. 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 glamorous and charming and not very particular and respectful about chastity, virtue etc. She causes disorder in her family life and in the life of Raju. As a typical Indian woman, 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 not either a western type husband. Unlike many western husbands and like most of the Indian husbands, Marco cannot support Rosie's dancing for Raju in the hotel room.

Stress of Family:

The appreciating aspect of the Indian to put emphasis on family is also evident in *The Guide* as it occurs 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 and life style of middle class Indians make an important feature of Narayan's *The Guide*. Raju himself belongs to a lower middle class family. Rosie also comes of the same class. So the beliefs and ideas held by Raju and Rosie, and their facing various situation in life are certainly of those who belong to their class.

Indian Beliefs, Values and Customs:

India with her age-old religious beliefs, values and customs is pictorial 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 fake swami to a martyr. Raju has to receive punishment for deviating from tradition, for developing an illicit affair with Rosie, for showing disrespect for his mother and for deceit and crime. 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. This aspect has made this region an attractive tourist zone. To say the truth, "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 a good number of places which bear the testimony to this sub-continent being archaeologically rich. These sites are the bright examples of Mughal and other rules followed by Mughal Empire. (Thieme).

Pyol School:

Pyol School is an ideal 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 is still found in rural Bangladesh. It is generally administered by an old 'Moulavi' who

teaches the students but his main concern is to control the naughty children rather than impart them good lessons. The teacher and the 'Maulavi' are respected but not well-paid. The shouting of the children and getting caned are two dominant traits of Pyol School or 'Maktab'. The foul-mouthed teacher or 'Moulavi' abuses instead of nurturing good manners in the disciples. The parents take individual or co-operative effort to cater to the needs of the schoolmaster or 'Moulavi'. 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 where cigarette is also sold. This is a gathering centre not only for the passengers waiting for the train but 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 of Raju's father is a typical of sub-continental context which serves as a popular gossiping center. Raju's father being absorbed in the gossiping presents the fondness for this among the sub-continental people. While being engaged apparently in a very 'important' discussion people neglect the appreciating urge 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 entertaining the guest. They are extremely hospitable. 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 though 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 for the meals of the swami, not asking any question though they themselves suffer from drought.

The Dance of King Cobra and Bharat Nattiyam:

The dance of king cobra displayed by the snake-charmers playing tune on flute may be less important considering the Indianness but a minute picture of India is presented by it. Bharat Nattiyam, a special kind 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 trait of the Indians. Their joy and mirth 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 and there is eating, drinking and merry-making.

Narrow-political Motive:

The narrow political motive of the sub-continental rulers are evident 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 interest rather than the real welfare of the common people. Thus they succeed to show their false patriotism and sympathy for the common people. In The Guide. We can see the government to depute doctors for the fasting swami though they do nothing for the drought-stricken villagers. That is, getting media coverage and cheap popularity is a dominant factor in the sub-continental political strategy. In Bangladesh we 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 deep sympathy for the people and making promises draws the attention of the media and thus comes into common people's notice. This fact helps them to achieve political purpose.

Universality in The Guide: If we are to focus on the universality in The Guide, we come across the following elements which are notable.

Love and sex, two dominant forces:

The issue of love and sex comes first. These two vital elements are the centre of human relationship, development and collapse of it. A universal touch of love is noticed in Raju's speech. While taking dinner at the Peak House, Rosie wants to play the role of a good hostage and so snatches away the dish from Raju's hand. Their hands touch and the touch makes his head reel. Raju expresses his feelings, "Oh, that touch made my head reel for a moment. I didn't see anything clearly. Everything disappeared into a sweet, dark haze, as under chloroform. My memory dwelt on the touch all through the dinner: I was not aware what we were eating or what they were saying. I sat with bowed head. I was nervous to see her face and meet her looks. I don't recollect when we finished eating and when she took away the dishes. I was only conscious of her soft movements. My thoughts dwelt on her golden touch" (68-69).

Like the universal champion of love, Raju is able to praise the beauty. So, he is fed up with Marco, the husband of Rosie, for his being indifferent to her beauty. When Raju realizes that Marco quarreled with Rosie during the

night at the hotel's room, he is upset at this and wants to cry, "Oh, monster, what do you do to her that makes her sulk like this on rising? What a treasure you have in your hand, without realizing its worth- like a monkey picking up a rose garland!" (71)

Raju's mental agony resulted from one month separation from Rosie is also identical with universal phenomenon of love. To Raju, thirty days are like thirty years. He describes his mental condition regarding his relation with Rosie. Relating his story to Velan, the older Raju enacts "the abnormal frame of mind" he experienced many years ago when he was with Rosie." (Alam, 154). Raju goes on to say "I was losing a great deal of my mental relaxation. I was obsessed with the thoughts of Rosie. I reveled in memories of the hours I had spent with her last or in anticipation of what I'd be doing next. I had several problems to contend with. Her husband was the least of them" (101).

"Everything is fair in love and war" is an oft-quoted sentence. The essence of these words is found in Raju's committing the immoral task of making an extra-marital love affair with Rosie. He goes ahead in this regard by not letting Marco's letter and the magazine containing his photograph reach the notice of Rosie. The driving force behind this attempt is love that sometimes makes one mean and selfish. Religious and moral values have no place in fiery passion which demands materialization of it regardless of all ethics. Raju's initiative and activities with a view to winning Rosie's heart is a bright instance of this fact. Rosie's being victim of cupid is of a lower degree as she is almost passive when Raju is very active and desperate.

Jealousy:

Jealousy is an essential element of human psychology. Again Jealousy emerged from the cause of love is stronger and uglier. A lover's jealousy for his rival is dominant in Raju's attempt to prevent Rosie from recalling her husband Marco. Raju leaves no stone unturned to ensure that Rosie does not come across a moment or an object that may remind her of Marco. It is Jealousy which is an important instrument in creating untiring and undaunting spirit in a lover's soul. This indomitable spirit is the mother of all the activities regardless of moral or immoral ones that drive a lover to scheme any plan in order to fulfill his/her love desire. Jealousy is the key factor in establishing a rivalry relation between a mother-in-law and her son's wife. Not justifying how far right is Raju's mother in her dislike for Rosie, we cannot rule out the function of Jealousy in it. Raju is puzzled and cannot decide what to do. His heart breaks at his mother's departure from the house. Raju has to choose one between Rosie and his mother. It is universally very difficult for anyone to decide who is to accept and who is to abandon when the acceptance of one means the refusal of another whose existence is also inevitable for decorating life with the heavenly pleasure. It is jealousy because of which Raju is on the horns of dilemma. We can compare this situation existing between Raju and her mother with that of Mrs. Gertrude and her son Paul in *Sons And Lovers* by D.H. Laurence. On the other hand, Raju is jealous of Marco who has got a nice wife like Rosie. Raju considers him unworthy of Rosie. He is a book-worm who finds more interest in dead and decaying things rather than in Rosie. Even in the jail, Raju is not free from this vice when he is informed that his ex lover has not returned to her husband. He is delighted though he himself has not got Rosie instead.

Raju, a Universal Rogue:

Raju is the typical of a rogue who is common and popular in the perspective of our sub-continent. Raju's childhood foresees his being a genuine rogue in the future. His schooling, the teacher in the school, his classmates, the railway station and the passengers of different classes all supply him various elements that constitute an ideal rogue in him.

Universal Complexities in Female Characters:

A female mind is a great mystery. One who claims to be able to read it thoroughly is most possibly one kind of impractical person. It is an object the discovery of which can be compared with the impossible tasks mentioned in the "Go and Catch a Falling Star", a poem composed by John Donne. Both Raju in *The Guide* and Pip in the *Great Expectations* of Charles Dickens have to pay a heavy price for their failure in discovering the hearts of Rosie and Stella respectively. Hundred percent discovery is not essential in this regard. But they fail to achieve the expected and necessary degree of success. These two characters show a lot of snobberies though neither Rosie nor Stella shows any clear sign of love for Raju and Pip respectively. Marco is also a victim of his failure to understand Rosie. If he could feel her pulse to a usual extent, he might not lose his conjugal peace. Through his realization of Rosie, he could make a unique world for both of them where Raju could not have a place. But Raju, Pip and Marco are not fully responsible for their failure. It is the complex disposition of female characters that brings about catastrophe in their emotional world.

Money:

Money is the centre of this materialized world. Economics includes every aspect of our mundane world. Money has both positive and negative influence on us. Sometimes it leads us to the wrong path. The motto 'Money at any cost' causes disaster not only in our religious and moral life but also in the day to day life based on worldly

affairs only. There may be difference in the means of earning it and there may be debate on the degree of its necessity in an individual's life. But it is a must in our life. The two dominant factors love and sex in Raju-Rosie relationship are replaced by money when Rosie becomes a famous dancer. They earn a huge amount of money but all is wasted by Raju as he is indulged in drinking and gambling and maintaining a lavish style of living. Now all the district officers are in the list of his friends and he is much sought after for contracts for Rosie, the dancer. Rosie does not have respite for a moment and so she feels like a circus-animal going round and round endlessly. She loves art for art's sake, but art for money's sake is not liked by her. In spite of earning enough money, there are boredom, fatigue and surfeit. Money causes a metamorphosis in the Rosie-Raju relationship. Love or sex relationship has given place to a purely money-relationship.

Crime and Punishment:

No crime goes unpunished. This is a universal truth. This is also exemplified by Raju's imprisonment for his forgery apparently and for his other sinful activities in deeper sense. Raju also undergoes the suffering from his long fasting for the welfare of the villagers of Mangala. It is a type of punishment, because he does not deliberately undertake the attempt of fasting. If he did not play the role of fake swami, he would certainly not face this fatal situation.

Spiritual Regeneration:

Through his fasting for bringing rain, Raju's spiritual rebirth takes place. Now he is beyond his self, recognizes the claims of humanity and for the first time he learns to leave and die for others. Though it is not clearly indicated whether Raju dies or not, Raju undoubtedly attains his salvation of soul. Here we can compare Raju with Raskolnikoff in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Rascolnikov commits the sin of murdering money-lender and later receives redemption.

Simultaneous Existence of Happiness and Sorrow:

In the world, happiness and sorrow prevail simultaneously. It is like "Nero Whistles while Rome burns". In the same way while the gathering is busy in eating, drinking and merry-making; Raju is on the verge of death.

Pleasure and Sadness from the Same Source:

It is ironical that pleasure and sadness sometimes originate from the same source but with separate implications for different persons. Similarly, when Raju's fasting and standing in knee-deep water becomes the cause of pleasure for the villagers, it is almost intolerable for Raju himself.

Conclusion:

The fact is that an individual plays manifold roles by representing his own self, a particular caste, society, culture, nation and all the human beings in the world. Thus the characters and events in *The Guide* become universal besides being sub-continental, especially Indian.

Though Narayan is a great regional novelist, he is never parochial. Against the back drop of Malgudi scenes and sight, Narayan studies even the little ironies of life and these ironies have always been the same regardless of age and country. Like Shakespearean plays, Narayan's novels are tragi-comedies of mischance and misdirection, and deeper studies of the human predicament that is essentially universal and true for the past, the present and may be the same in the future. To sum up the above discussion, the following lines may be appropriate:

"Malgudi, the locale of all the novels, is a metaphor of India. Whatever happens in the one happens in the other, but also the reader begins to believe, whatever happens there happens everywhere. Against the background of a single place, and amid the utter variety of human kind, the single individual engages with the one universal problem: the effort not just to be, but to become, human" (Walsh, R.K. Narayan).

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