



# R. K. Narayan's "The Guide": A Journey Of Transformation Of Raju

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**Abstract:** This study seeks to understand how a corrupt tourist guide Raju playing the central role in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* is metamorphosed into a saint. Conceptually-ethically, morally, lawfully-a tourist guide is not desired to misguide the tourists but in *The Guide* Raju instead of showing the right path to the tourists follows the wrong means to guide his visitors. However, things related to unethical means do not continue and consequently he gets exposed as a criminal in the context of forging Rosie's signature. His imprisonment ending to his career as a tourist guide makes a turning point in his life and the turning phase of Raju's life is the point of study in this paper. The jailbird Raju, after his release from the prison cell, is mistaken for a spiritual guide and later made to sacrifice his life to save the lives of the people. Raju's transformation from a tour guide to a spiritual leader symbolizes the search for meaning amidst societal change. This paper analyzes key character dynamics, narrative techniques, and the symbolic elements that contribute to the novel's rich tapestry, ultimately revealing how *The Guide* serves as a profound reflection of the soul of India.

**Keywords:** R.K. Narayan, *The Guide*, Indian culture, spirituality, identity, post-colonial literature, Malgudi, self-discovery, tradition, modernity.

R.K. Narayan's "The Guide" is not merely a narrative about a tour guide named Raju; it is an evocative exploration of the essence of India—its culture, spirituality, and the intricate tapestry of human relationships. Set in the fictional town of Malgudi, the novel serves as a microcosm of Indian society during a period of significant transition. As India emerged from the shadows of colonialism, the nation grappled with questions of identity, tradition, and modernity.

Narayan's storytelling is marked by a profound simplicity, yet it resonates with deep philosophical undertones, inviting readers to embark on a journey that mirrors Raju's own quest for meaning and redemption. Through his interactions with the diverse characters of Malgudi, Raju embodies the universal struggle for self-discovery, confronting the tensions between personal desires and societal expectations.

In "The Guide," Narayan masterfully weaves themes of spirituality, love, and fate into a rich narrative that captures the complexity of the human experience. This journey not only reflects Raju's transformation but also resonates with the broader cultural and spiritual landscape of India, revealing the underlying currents that shape the nation's soul. As we delve into the layers of Narayan's work, we uncover the profound insights it offers into the enduring spirit of India and its people's relentless search for meaning in an ever-evolving world.

“Material Bondage is a restriction not in location, but in conception.” “Yet no matter how extensive our journeys, through them all we remain bound in our conceptions of life: we conceive of ourselves as material beings and believe that material things will make us happy. The Bhagavad-Gita (15.08) states that we carry our basic conception of life from one body to the next.” (1)

The term Materialistic Bondage refers to a state of mind consciously or unconsciously always seeking for monetary benefits. The person who is buttoned up with materialistic bondage has the tendency that monetary benefits are the most important thing in life and such persons are found less practical as far as morality, relations values, emotions, honesty, sincerity, ethics etc. are concerned. According to human psychology this is the greatest attribute of the human beings that their longings for money-oriented attitude never die and throughout the life the human beings are in the search of capital and money only. The persons who are tied in materialistic bondage they are very far away from the spiritual freedom because their mind and soul altogether are trapped in worldly affairs and they think that materialistic pleasure is the ultimate goal of life for the pleasure but this is their psychological disadvantage because the pleasure and happiness that come from materialism are momentary and transient. “Spiritual freedom is freedom from identity itself, from whom we think we are and what we think we are entitled to. Ultimately it is freedom from being anyone at all. Just as we are innately convinced of the realness of the world, so we are convinced of our own reality as well. We believe we must exist because there must be someone to "have" experience. But as we have already affirmed, the subject is no object. And the subject, to be free, cannot be identified with any object-- neither the body nor the mind nor any of its contents.” (2)

For the spiritual freedom one must do meditation, introspection and ‘sadhkarm’. Spiritual freedom refers to that ideology which enforces that all the materialistic gains are temporary and the human beings must strive for the acceptance of all the virtues. One must indulge himself/herself in self-discovery and self-orientation. Spiritual freedom motivates us to justify the journey of the life and eventually let us take towards the final destination without any remorse and guilt, releasing us from all types of worldly bondages.

This Research Paper intends to highlight that the characters of R.K. Narayan are always full of fluidity and they easily dissolve themselves and consequentially they invite misery and failure to themselves. Moreover, while writing this Research Paper this is also taken in due consideration that ‘Raju’ the protagonist of the novel ‘The Guide’, is an ambitious young man and his ambitious nature compelled him to be hypocrite and resultant he met his tragic end voluntarily. ‘The Guide’ published in

1958 brought extra name and fame for R.K. Narayan in the comparison of his another great literary works. When we read the novel we come across that there is a swing of time and place in the novel as some time there is a description of Raju's past life in his home town 'Malgudi' where he was brought up and then grew as an adult and on the other hand we get the description of present in the village of 'Mangala' where Velan made him famous like a holy man and the villagers called him 'Swami'. From starting of the novel and till the end it is perceived that very adroitly the writer has shown him in many appearances like a shopkeeper, then a railway guide then an adorable lover, then a dance manager, then a prisoner but he did not carry or justify either of the roles even as a holy man. The character of Raju is always obsessed with the desire of getting more and more wealth rather than giving importance to the human values and relations. He always focused to derive materialistic gains resorting falsehood and dishonesty. It has been observed that since his childhood Raju was preoccupied with greed and dishonesty. His father used to run a shop and whenever Raju was sitting on the shop instead of repeated instructions by his father he did not stop eating the confectionaries. It shows that Raju was immoralist since his childhood. He was always affable for both mother and father being single child of them. He seems to be a high epitome of ambition and materialistic world. After his father's death he was the owner of the shop but he wanted to run the shop in a different way with the aim of maximum financial gain. The approach of Raju was very advance in terms of business as with the advancement of time he converted his father's shop into a Book Depot and started to have a great collection of books, magazines, journals and newspapers. His shop was very close to the railway station and it was the centre of attraction for everyone especially for the college and school going students. Raju was grabbing the opportunity of earning with both the hands. His character has been displayed very much self-centric as he does not like any one to come in his ways and wants to do his work with utter freedom without any interference. He was very ambitious to fulfill all his materialistic desires and he never missed any opportunity to turn into reality being bound with materialistic approach. To expand the materialistic exposures he was never bound to only one profession. Having a shop at railway station was sufficient to meet all his and family's needs but he did not limit to himself up to the shop only. Very soon, he realized that if he started to act as a guide then he would earn more silver coins. To serve as a guide meant someone else he needed to appoint as an assistant on his shop and he found the porter's son the most reliable and accountable fellow to hand over the charge of the shop. In the evening, he comes back and tallies the balance of the day. From here, it is very crystal clear to see Raju, as a materialistic bondage person who very wisely appointed a helping hand for his shop and he himself became a tourist guide. His mother objected his way for ignoring the shop but he did not seem to be at least attentive towards his mother's sayings. He was very much happy and delighted to be a guide as his cheap popularity was very soothing to his ears and very soon he earned the name 'Railway Raju'. The people knew him, used to ask for him and it was enough to please him but simultaneously he was very opportunist also and never missed any chance to earn money from the tourists. He had hawk eyes and assessed very early that which passenger needed what and how to approach him/her. Whenever the train arrived, he located to himself at such a place from where he was visible to every passenger and it was his endeavor to help out everyone. He always

exaggerated the things to draw the profit from the tourists. He achieved remarkable mastery as a guide and judged very soon that which tourist wanted to visit what and he assessed their paying capacity also and accordingly escorted them on their paying capacity. His way of talking and demeanor was like professionals and he was not leaving even a single stone unturned to satisfy his customers and making money.

Raju did not have even primary knowledge of guide but he resorted on hypocrisy and falsehood for making money from the tourists. In order to win the trust and favour of the tourists he exaggerated the things in his explanations of tourist spots. He befools the tourists and takes due advantage of their ignorance about the places and makes money. In his quest of money he builds cock and bull stories to lure the tourists. He never valued the emotions and focused only on materialistic pursuits. When Marco and Rosie arrived in Malgudi he was fascinated by the charming and decent look of Rosie and he observed that Marco and Rosie were not mentally united as a husband-wife. Rosie was excited to watch the dancing Cobra but Marco was little interested in that type of dance show. At the very first sight Raju fell in love of Rosie but he could not reveal his feeling since she was married. So, it was the need of hour to have the patience and wait for the right time. As he was a great observer soon he realized that instead of being husband and wife there is a very wide communication gap between Marco and Rosie and they are not tied with the knot of love and understanding and it was enough for him to play his tricks. Here onwards he always tried his level best to seduce Rosie hovering near about her. Marco was very much dedicated to his work and always busy in caves and carvings and Raju was spending quality time with Rosie and the intimacy between them grew intensively. But their intimacy was not objected by Marco but Raju's mother always warned him saying that she is a married woman but just like always he took his mother's advices very lightly. Here disguise role has been played very expertly by Raju as one side he was arranging the new sights to visit for Marco and on the other hand it was a way to keep Marco away from Rosie and to develop his friendship with her. She was mixed up with Raju and could never understand the hidden intention of Raju. Raju was taking to her at different places of her choices for her entertainment. He learnt that she had a great passion for dance and wanted to pursue her dream in dancing and on the stipulation of Raju she started to dance but not at all the idea was liked by Marco. Rosie had a great respect for her husband and never wanted to leave him but Raju loved her deeply and wanted to entice her at any cost. Completely, this was a hatred task to fall in the love of a married woman and he was creating gap also between them. He was responsible to spoil the married life of Marco. Finally, Marco went back and Rosie came to Raju's house to live with him. Rosie narrated her story to Raju how Marco left at the station saying that he had no ticket for her. Raju consoled her saying that he would assist her to accomplish the dream to become a great dancer. The materialistic aspirations of Raju flourished when he was working as dancing manager for Rosie. Rosie was such a woman who only wanted to hear her self-appreciation and her passion for stage show as a dancer never let her know that Raju was exploiting her. Rosie was like a goose for Raju that lays the golden egg. Marco had left Rosie but he could not forget her completely and this was irksome for Raju because still they were attached not detached and he was always worried that lest Rosie should leave him. That's why he did not let

Rosie know about the letter sent by Marco. It was mentioned in the letter that there was a box of jewelry in the custody of the bank and could be released when she had put her signature. Once again the materialistic mind of Raju worked and he copied the signature of Rosie and sent the letter back and he was thrilled to think that he would get the jewelry of a great worth. But this time the destiny was well set to go in another direction. Marco lodged a case of forgery against Raju for copying the signature of Rosie and he was summoned by the Superintendent of Police. Here, Raju was sent to jail for couple of days but that was very tormenting and harassing for him as now he was completely bankrupted. Here, the disputes became very common between Raju and Rosie and she said that she never dreamt to lead such a wretched life and she blamed Raju for their misfortune. Finally, Raju was sentenced two years' imprisonment. He was set free from jail after two years and here it was a new life set for him to play another role of guide as a holy man. His disciple Velan made him famous and treated him like a real 'Spiritual Guru'. But here also he was tightly gripped in the clutches of greed and materialism. He never disclosed his identity to anyone except Velan (to him also very late). He thought that he had earned the reputation as a holy man here and he could lead his life in the easiest way. He influenced the innocent villagers and the villagers were also impressed with his acts and moral preaches. The villagers' offerings cum eatable items were more than enough for his survival. The personal motive of him to take due advantages from the villagers was flourishing on the trust of the villagers as they were unknown to his reality and served him regularly and his prestige as a holy man was increasing day by day as he was playing this role also with great proficiency. Now, the villagers started to address him 'Swami'. Here it would be observed that how Raju in the disguise of swami lifted himself from all the worldly and materialistic affairs and transformed his soul from materialism to spirituality. There was drought in the village and the people were worried about the rain and even the river was also drying. There was no sign of rainfall and it seemed that it was going to be an acute famine. The crop wilted and the animals were dying on the daily basis. Thus, no rain created war like conditions there as there were regular clashes among the people regularly and the shopkeepers raised the prices and the villagers were very much annoyed and perplexed. They had only one ray of hope something miraculous to be performed by Swami. He always consoled the people but this time all went in vain. Raju declared that he would keep fast for the sake of the villagers but still during night he was searching for food but did not get anything and started to curse himself and even he thought that he must disclose his truth in front of the villagers but he controlled himself and later he himself announced that he would be deprived of food till it rains and it was enough for the purification and transformation of his soul from 'materialistic bondage to spiritual freedom'. Throughout the novel here only it was glanced that he was doing something of a great worth being honest and pious. The news of his extended fast spread very fast and the people thronged there to have a sight of such a holy man. The media was there for the coverage. The doctors were there to monitor his health but day by day his condition deteriorated and on the eleventh day with the help of Velan and others Raju went to the river and stood there praying and said to Velan that it is raining in the hills and he can feel the rain drops falling on his body and with that he staggered and fell down in the river.

Throughout the life Raju was not so pure and genuine as he had appeared at the last moments during his fast. From his words and actions it seemed that as he was born only to serve the humanity and the service of the villagers of Mangla was the only object of his life proving himself as a real 'Guru' or 'Swami'. At last but not the least his soul awakened and he uplifted himself from all the other objectives of the life and proved that if a man is not bound to any type of avariciousness then only the refinement of the soul is possible and a man can perform something of great significance. The continuous fast imparted him divine power and strength and he understood the importance of self-sacrifice for the humanity. The faith shown by Velan in him even after knowing the truth also enlightened the way of Raju to do noble work for the villagers. When Raju was on fast, for the first time in his life he was trying to achieve something other than lust and greed. Here the mythological belief of 'karma' can be implemented. There is a saying that 'as you sow, shall you reap' and the same took place with Raju. There was an unknown force which compelled him towards the fast and there was punishment due for his entire misdeeds. Being bound to the fast when he was entering the water and uttering the prayers then water was purifying his mind and soul and then he was no more starving and longing for any other things. He had long beard and long hair for the external look of a saint but never focused to enlighten his inner soul to be a real saint but at last his enlightened soul made the way for his soul's journey from 'Materialistic Bondage to Spiritual Freedom'.

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