

Title/ Transformation of Raju in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*

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The title of R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) is apt and suggestive in the sense that its central figure, Raju, plays the role of a 'guide' during the successive stages of his career. The 'Guide' of the title is the very human Raju, ex-shopkeeper, ex-lover of Rosie, ex-tourist guide, who knows or who is turned by people desperately for rain in the midst of a drought, into a messiah. This brings the idea of a mysterious invisible force shaping human life. So, through his symbolic undertones, Narayan tries to make his readers ponder over the emphatic question-who the real guide of life can be?

Raju begins his career as a stall-keeper and soon acquires knowledge by going through journals, magazines, etc. Having an inborn gift of eloquence, Raju is intelligent, observant and a shrewd judge of human character. Soon his fame spreads and the tourists who come to Malgudi at once inquire for 'Railway Raju'. He acquires detailed knowledge about Malgudi and its whereabouts by talking with the tourists, and uses the knowledge to great advantage. In course of time, he engages a boy to look after his stall, and himself sets up as a full-fledged tourist-guide.

In course of time, Raju became the guide to a single family after being involved in an extra-marital affair with Rosie, the love-starved wife of the aged archaeologist Marco. At

first, Raju was head over heels in love with the romantic woman Rosie. However, after a period of flirtation, Raju became a different kind of man-the stage-manager spending the dancer Rosie's money lavishly. He was neither interested in Rosie, not in dance as an art form and lastly, he was landed into prison for forgery. In jail, Raju proves to be a model prisoner. He is well managed, hardworking and helpful, and as a result, he is so comfortable that when his release date comes, he goes out with fear and regrets in his heart. All prisoners should follow Raju's example and in this sense, he is a 'guide' too.

After serving a term of two years in jail, he reached a village called Mangal and chose an abandoned temple near a river for shelter. When he started making mystifying statements, people took interest in him and devotees flock to him with their gifts and offerings. Therefore, he took the role of a Mahatma and became a spiritual guide. This mental state of Raju is something similar to trance and, in this state, he was not conscious of the physical world around him. On the final day of his fast, he uttered the prayer in the knee-deep water of the river. As Raju collapsed, it was raining in the Mempi Hills.

Therefore, R.K. Narayan's title *The Guide* is suggestive and symbolic in the sense that it projects the process of transformation of a tourist-guide to a spiritual guide.