

The Guide as Postcolonial Novel/ A Novel Depicting the Hybrid Postcolonial Milieu of India

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Narayan ‘evokes a quietest Indian way of life that gives way before and so eventually absorbs the forces of history, rather than reacting destructively against them’, says Elleke Boehmer (*Colonial and Post-colonial Literature*, 2005) as reaction to the post-colonial milieu of the India presented in R. K. Narayan’s novels. The ‘forces of history’ obviously refers here to India’s colonial encounter before she achieved Independence. However, Boehmer fails to notice the hybrid characteristic of a post-colonial milieu. The traditional Indian way of life does not simply give in to or ‘absorb’ the surge of colonial forces, but keeps itself intact by transforming itself suitably according to the new developments. That is why in *The Guide* (1958), one encounters the strange cohabitation of India’s past and complex postcolonial present.

Railway is the first representative of the colonial legacy left to India. The railway brings in a spurt in activities and mobility in the hitherto peaceful town, Malgudi. Truck and railway instruments now surround the tamarind tree, symbolising the pre-colonial past. Raju recounts, “[...]our world was nearly divided into this side of the railway line and that side”. Raju’s father, sensing a bright possibility, begins running a huge shop in the railway station, and, instead, of selling tamarind and lentils, begins selling every kind of thing the travellers would demand. However, unable to cope with the fast changing world, he returns to his undisturbed past: his old shop and the old regular customers who come to gossip.

It is Raju who absorbs to his very bones the customs of the world developing around him. His first absorption is the filthy terms of abuse, used by the railway workers. The movement of the trains attracts him as do the variety of people brought to the station by them. He senses the railway gradually passing into his bones and making the 'Railway Raju' out of him. This hybrid postcolonial man always moulds himself in different packages in different situations: as the tourist guide exploiting the tourists' ignorance and curiosity, as the lover of Rosie snatching her away from Marco, as her mentor succeeding in commercialising her dancing talent, as a cosmopolitan man exploiting the government officials in sanctifying his unlawful practices like drinking, as a teacher in the jail, as the ex-jailbird seeking refuge out of law's reach and finally, as the guide of the people exposing Malgudi to the rest of the world.

Macro represents another force of postcolonial development overtaking the developing nations like India. The postcolonial era sees a spurt among the Western society in discovering the cultural heritage of the once colonised nations in Asia and South America. Rightly does Raju call Rosie's husband Marco who with thick coloured glasses, thick jacket, and a thick helmet resembles the Western traveller. The once colonised nations like India, too, respond to this postcolonial activity by taking agenda encouraging tourism by laying roads, expanding railways and engineering faster cars. The concept of the tourist guide, who unscrupulously exploits the unsuspecting guides, too, emerges at this time when the old pilgrimage turns into mere sightseeing.

The emergence of the *new woman* in the form of Rosie is a postcolonial phenomenon. Even if she belongs to the hated, and exploited, Devdasi clan, she is highly educated. Her marriage with Marco, arranged through matrimony, is a pure postcolonial practice coming into vogue in the big cities of India. Finally, her revival of the ancient dance form of *Bharat*

Natyam, represents the Indian government's endeavour of exposing India's cultural heritage in the international arena. The hated dance form, which her mother practised in the temples, is revived, purified and exalted by Rosie. The way Rosie takes herself away from Raju, her mentor, and Marco is emblematic of the emancipated *new woman* in postcolonial era.

However, it was not only the new surge of development; the old system too makes its presence felt in the postcolonial milieu of *The Guide*. Here, the traditional happy marriage between Raju's parents stands erect beside the new mode of marriage through matrimonial struck by discord; the old *pyol* school coexists with the Albert Mission School which abuses the Hindu deities; the old men's love of litigation stands side by side with the unlawful practices of Raju and his associates; and the old ways of pilgrimage to a temple stands side by side with the new Western culture of discovering the cultural heritage of a country like India. Raju, in fact, shows this postcolonial trend of vacillating between the old and the new, and in fact, it is the traditional belief in myths among the villagers, which marks the culmination of the novel. Thus, criticised he may be for this, Narayan upholds the uncontaminated past of his country by pointing out the peril of unchecked westernisation.