

## ENGLISH HONOURS

### SEMESTER- II

#### THE GUIDE

**Q 2. Elaborate Raju is a complex and tragic figure , the most interesting and moving of Narayan's heroes.**

**Or,**

**Bring out the role of Raju in the novel "The Guide."**

**Ans-** Like Tagore , Narayan was introduced to the West by a famous writer , in his case, Graham Greene, who suggested the title of his first novel and facilitated its publication in England. Greene remained a close friend and supporter of Narayan's all his life; but after the first few novels had appeared, Narayan's career was self – sustaining . People who enjoyed reading one of his humorous sketches of life in the fictional town of Malgudi were likely to continue reading his work . His works are set in the fictional town of Malgudi partly based on Mysore, but with its own characteristics . His fictional setting has often been compared to Thomas Hardy's Wessex or William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County , but Narayan claimed that he simply invented a town he could mold to the needs of his stories without needing to do research. It is a quintessential small South Indian City , big enough to have a variety of petty industries and a wide variety of characters , but small enough for people to know each other.

Narayan's Characters are either simple , complex or eccentric. In 'The Guide' , the hero is a rogue, an anti-hero with a potential for tragedy. Narayan manipulates his characters in such a way that after reaching the peak , they have a fall. 'The Guide' too is a story of Raju's birth and death, rise and fall, sin and repentance, growth from tourist guide to spiritual guide Raju's story of his childhood moves to his rise as tourist guide , to lover , to manager and eventual fall due to forgery, and onward growth into a Swami and Mahatma. Thus , Raju's story is the story of man's maturity his sacrifice and conformity to tradition, Raju's role also highlights man's journey from ignorance to knowledge, birth to death, love to altruism , materialism to spiritualism.

Raju's various roles of railway guide, lover, manager, prisoner, fake Swami and Mahatma are dynamic. Raju, the actor assumes his roles well. He is aware of the discrepancy that even when he is not being serious , he is playing a role. He experiences, observes and narrates. He plays the role of guide and lover to perfection and becomes rich. Obsession leads to his downfall. His role in the prison is short-lived and is followed by his role as swami. He confesses his guilt, but is condemned to martyrdom. He surrenders his reason to faith and seems to imply that even at the cost of his life, man cannot understand the mystery of life.

In the novel 'The Guide' Narayan portrays the influences and situations which lead to the spiritual transformation of Raju. Indeed Raju is a complex character but his complexity is best expressed by the turn of events. Starting his career as a shopkeeper, his life changes after he met Rosie. His obsession for Rosie ruins his business and relationship, and eventually he lands in prison on charge of forgery. Ironically , the jail life brings a good change in his nature as he goes through a phrase of repentance. Afterwards, owing to this change of her and demeanour, the villagers misunderstand him for a saint. Their behaviour towards him further evoke a sense of spirituality in him. His gratitude towards the villagers gives him a reason to continue his fast until death.

The complexity of the character of Raju can be well understood by the self interest inherent in him as well as his courage and strength to turn selfless. He goes through a process of self deception and self realization, owing to influence of other characters in the novel.

Raju's story does not become a tragedy because of Narayan's comic vision and method of narration tragedy. In delineating Raju's character , Narayan uses of double narration. Raju's past is narrated by Raju, and his present is narrated by the author himself. Whatever we get to know about his character is from Raju's or the author's point of view- there is no one to question or repudiate their versions.

Raju's character appears ambiguous for his detached narration. In reply to the American's question " Have you always been a yogi he replies more or less." But Raju has never been sincere in his duty to Rosie as a dancer, or as a swami ( his reluctant acceptance of the fast for the villagers ). This ambiguous answer is the secret of his character. His narrative of pre-jail days is full of irony self - judgement but not self-degradation. His descriptions of his romance are bare and viewed from outside, thus emphasising the irony of life. When Rosie becomes Nalini, his narrative is detached- he calls her 'snake-woman', " she is an adult with her own affairs". He also says , " Nalini had cleared out of the town, bag and baggage." However, Raju keeps control over his feelings and looks at life with humour and irony. His narrative is a queer combination of involvement and detachment , experience and observation , vanity and self-criticism. The result is that his life and death lose the tragic element and appear comic.

Thus, we see that Raju, the protagonist of this novel plays an important role in presenting Narayan's philosophy. His role as a guide portrays his complex interesting and potentially tragic character. All this is done from the detached, ironic and comic view -point of Raju, who narrates his own experiences which the reader accepts unquestionably. In 'The Guide' the hero Raju floats as gently as a lily pad on the surface of Indian life and yet suggests to the depths beneath. It manages to describe a saint who is neither born made but simply happens almost like the weather.

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