Chapter Four:

The Guide: 

Search for Transcendence
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The search for 'roots' and identity marks R. K. Narayan's novels as distinctively culture-texts and the implication may be termed as a social variation of what T.S.Eliot recommends in his essentially Christian concept of culture: "...What is wanted is not to restore a vanished or to revive a vanishing culture under modern conditions, but to grow contemporary culture from old roots"(53).

Whereas Eliot terms tenets of Christianity as 'old roots', for Narayan 'roots' stand for the intricate, sustaining forces of tradition or the 'inherited culture' with 'endless variations' that works as the raw material for an Indian writer/story-teller.

What is to note is that, this ostensible naivety and simplicity of Narayan's art apparent in his self-chosen label of a 'story-teller' hardly indicates the layers of sophistication of his narrative art beneath the deceptive charm of story-telling. The Guide (1958), Narayan's magnum opus, is an interesting case in point. The present analysis offers to consider Narayan's problematising use of the text for the purpose of culture-study so as to establish a new angle of Narayan's fictional art which has been receiving in recent times, a multiple perspectivism in the area of post-modern literary criticism.

In fact textual politics or counter-textuality is essential to the condition and understanding of a postcolonial literary production. A problematised culture-text is a narrative mode of postcolonial literature that resists the strategic homogenisation of the cultural identity of a colonised nation, encouraged by the imperialistic fictional trend of historiography. Even though the cultural space located in Narayan's Malgudi-novels does not amply correspond to the
current trends of Indian English fiction or to the qualities of say, migrant, diasporic condition or to the trans-cultural genres of overt textual politics, of metafiction or magic-realism; his novels provide via ‘oblique angles’¹, to quote Elleke Boehmer, a prominent scope of cultural documentation. This trait in The Guide takes the form of a problematised textual narrativisation of the nation in the form of the life-story of the hero. In this novel, Narayan presents in terms of Raju’s past and present, two distinctive forms of Indian cultural reality — the normative reality that combines tradition vis-a-vis modernity/change, and the eternal, the emancipatory possibility of Indian cultural existence. The textual prioritisation of the issue of cultural reality becomes manifest in the two distinct divisions in the narrative notwithstanding the episodic structure of the plot and the deft intercession of the authorial and the autobiographical stances of narration. The major part of the story covering Raju’s past life emerges in terms of Raju’s recollection of his past to Velan and this larger part of the narrative (chapter 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10), almost double the other (Chapter 1, 4, 6 and 11), encompasses the normative cultural reality liable to be experienced by an average Indian like Raju and the scenario is set in Malgudi which Narayan believes to objectify his sense of social milieu. This part of the narrative convincingly traces the extent of growth in Raju so far sanctioned by the normative standards of India’s cultural reality. Raju’s career-graph from his boyhood through his maturity in a rapidly urbanising society as a railway guide, his consequent show-business with appearance and role-playing, his moral laxity in his affair with Rosie and his consequent incarceration — all correspond to a hybridised social reality to which both tradition and modernity or change lay equal claim. Now, this kind of cultural existence as embodied in Raju’s past, ranging from his upbringing upto his crime and imprisonment, is quite in tune with the kind of life in a colonial world where a rapid sweep of urbanisation trammels up the ‘old ways of life’ and such a standardised cultural reality very much conforms to the ‘orientalist’ interpretation of a subaltern or marginalised life of the ‘other’.

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But what seems to be most important is that, the writer far from being content with such conferred cultural designation, explores the possibility of an emancipatory prospect of Indian culture that shows the capability for growth and regeneration. If the larger part of the story (ie, Raju’s past life) forms the text, Raju’s later life following his release forms the counter-text. Narayan’s use of this counter-text in his treatment of Raju’s transformation and ultimate transcendence of ‘self’ underscores his deliberate use of a subversive textual strategy to resist the monologic stereotyping bias of the West to treat the question of cultural identity in colonised nations like India with the perpetuating images of colonialist intention like poverty, drab and sordid existence, corruption and immorality. In other words, through the counter-text, Narayan as if interrogates the drab and sordid contemporary reality in search of an intrinsic Indianness of a higher form of culture that images the spiritual/philosophical substrate of the Indian nation. If the standardised contemporary reality in the text shows the extent of depravation and degradation in Raju, the counter-text projects in Raju a teleologic movement intended to initiate the readers to the mystique of Indianness, of the sublime cultural existence of eternal India. The main text, dealing with Raju’s past, posits the vision of standardised, contemporary Indian culture to which the counter-text offers an answer with a transcendent prospect. The textual policy used by Narayan here in dealing with two distinctly different yet strategically connected phases of Raju’s life, seems to validate a well-known adage – ‘Study the past if you would divine the future’.

Raju’s later childhood, his upbringing under the care of a patriarchal father, his observance of the gestures of adulation and later his learning in an indigenous pyol school – all correspond to the codes of individual response to the way of life formulated by tradition and community-consciousness: “I washed myself at the well, smeared holy ash on my forehead, stood before the framed pictures of gods hanging high up on the wall, and recited all kinds of sacred verse in a loud ringing tone”(11). Raju’s world at this stage is chiefly based on tradition where
even the daybreak is associated with a kinship between human life and the pure, untarnished natural world: "An eccentric cockerel in the neighbourhood announced the daybreak when probably it felt that we had slept long enough. It let out a shattering cry which made my father jump from his bed and wake me up" (11). Raju's education received from his father on the pyol of his house, reminds us much of the traditional, indigenous method of learning the three R's as depicted in the immortal Bengali novel *Pather Panchali* (1929) by Bibhutibhusan Banerjee where Apu receives such experiences in the *pathssala* of Prasanna pundit who simultaneously runs a grocery shop as does Raju's father. As a reluctant sort, Raju would look fervently for a break while he is set to task by his father:

> The modern notions of child psychology were unknown then; the stick was an educator's indispensable equipment. 'The unbeaten brat will remain unlearned', said my father, quoting an old proverb. He taught me the Tamil alphabet. He wrote the first two letters on each side of my slate at a time. I had to go over the contours of the letters with my pencil endlessly until they became bloated and distorted beyond recognition. [...] the slate pencil screeched as I tried to drive it through and my father ordered, 'Don't make all that noise with that horrible pencil of yours. What has come over you?' Then followed arithmetic. [...] numbers did give me a headache. While the birds were out chirping and flying in the cool air, I cursed the fate that confined me to my father's company. [...] as if in answer to my silent prayer, an early customer was noticed at the door of the hut shop and my lessons came to an abrupt end. (12-13)

But the introduction of railway in Malgudi, symptomatic of an emerging social change, makes inroads of modernity into Raju's traditional world even at this early stage of his life. Narayan's treatment of the urbanisation of Malgudi with the introduction of railway, is much reminiscent of the mechanisation of
collieries in Erewash valley in Lawrence's *The Rainbow*. The throbbing of engines at work in the collieries, 'the shrill whistle of the trains' announce, as Lawrence writes, 'the far-off come near and imminent'(8). The mechanisation of collieries stands for the activities of the other world, the sweep of industrialisation that tends to trammel up the rural privacy and solitude. The Brangwens notice how the 'building of a canal across their land made them strangers in their own land'(8). Krishna Sen has rightly termed railway as the 'main signifier of an alien culture' that brings to Malgudi the outside world with its modernity, hybridity, elements of change, transience and other 'connotations of mobility'(112). What is interesting is that, the moral degradation which becomes prominent in Raju later on, seems to be a trapping for Raju who, even as a boy, picks up vulgar terms from the workers of the railway track and this experience urges his father to send Raju to a *pyol* school to avert further moral degradation. The *pyol* schooling in the novel, is a further extension of the stronghold of tradition even in a rapidly urbanising space in Malgudi life where religious conversion through education in missionary schools poses a threat to traditionalists like Raju's father. Inspite of Raju's fascination for the fashionable Albert Mission School, Raju's father's allegiance to indigenous form of education betrays not only a traditionalist's love for 'roots' but also a disquieting awareness of the colonial presence and its so-called civilising motives: 'I don't want to send my boy there; it seems they try to covert our boys into Christians and are all the time insulting our gods'(25). The father's apprehension of religious conversion (as some hidden agenda of the-then English Education system) bears testimony to a distinctive form of social reality in colonial India where the secular intent of the British Government behind the introduction of English education had to 'steer clear', in the opinion of Dr. R.C.Majumdar, 'of the Christian zeal of the missionaries'(813). Narayan's own experiences as a student of Lutheran Mission High School as recorded in his memoir *My Days*, also endorse this tendency in the Pre-Independence missionary institutions in India:
The Teachers were all converts, and, towards the few non-Christian students like me, they displayed a lot of hatred. [...]. The scripture classes were mostly devoted to attacking and lampooning the Hindu gods, and violent abuses were heaped on idol-worshippers as a prelude to glorifying Jesus. (12)

However, notwithstanding the ‘violence’ and ‘purposelessness’ (as it seems to Raju) of the pyol school, he does well there to get admission into the first standard of Board High School. But the establishment of railway with its lures of mobility and change, evokes in Raju an instinctive negotiation of the transition from the old traditional reality of living to the emerging pattern of change in behavioral norms: “…our world was neatly divided into this side of the railway line and that side” (37). This significantly shows a cultural divide. Raju, however, feels like getting beyond the barriers of tradition with an aspiration for the cosmopolitan, appropriated culture. He ruminates later: “I felt at home on the railway platform, and considered the station master and the porter the best company for man and their railway talk the most enlightened” (10). Raju’s engagement with his father’s railway stall as well as his original adobe hut-shop, coupled with his instinctive apathy for formal education, brings about as he recalls, the desired effect — “the dropping of my school unobtrusively” (43). The growing spirit of urbanisation and cosmopolitanisation of interest in the tradition-ridden life at Malgudi has its repercussions. This brings about a change in the life of quick-learning ambitious Indians like Raju. This explains his quick-changing of roles and identity, after he has stepped out of the threshold of education and this shifting of priorities is a prominent postcolonial characteristic as ably discussed by critics like Krishna Sen, Nandini Bhattacharya and O.P. Mathur. Interestingly, the craze for appropriation operates even in Raju’s father - a representative of the traditional gentry, in so far as, he opens up in addition to his old hut shop, a new stall on the railway platform to cater to the fast and varying tastes of the
urbanised passengers. A quick cataloguing of selling items undoubtedly speaks of a cosmopolitan taste:

[...]what a shop it was! [...] presently there hung down from nails in my father’s other shop bigger branches of banana, stacks of mempu oranges, huge troughs of fried stuff, and coloured peppermints and sweets in glass containers, loaves of bread and buns. The display was most appetising, and he had loaded several racks with packets of cigarettes. (41-42).

While Raju’s father fails to negotiate the mounting pressure of change or modernity and consequently retires to his old hut shop and his familiar periphery of traditional existence, Raju’s begins to show a growing expertise in handling the changing situations. For example, he runs the railway stall in an accomplished manner. Moreover, with a bid to expand his business, he starts waring magazines and the sort of things that appeal to the quick- learning lot of students. Finally, he tries an innovative plan to capitalise his railway association to the optimum level by working as a tourist-guide, since the scenic and historical attractions of Malgudi unravel to him an inexhaustible store house of Indian culture and its potentiality for commodification. To use culture as a commodity is a postcolonial sensibility and this urge in Raju gets further boost from his natural instincts; but only after he has taken the vocation of a tourist-guide seriously.

Before Raju takes up the vocation of a guide, a note of dissatisfaction is however traceable in him when he is busy with handling the railway stall: “Selling bread and biscuits and accepting money in exchange seemed to me a tame occupation. I always felt that I was too good for the task”(47-48). After his father’s sudden demise, Raju with his mother’s consent, winds up the hut-shop and whole-heartedly concentrates on the enrichment of the railway stall by developing new lines so as to vending of magazines and newspapers and
school books. Interestingly, this book-selling business also breeds in Raju an extent of enlightenment, so to speak, though it may lack the required measure of cultural motivation:

I read stuff that interested me, bored me, baffled me, and dozed off in my seat. I read stuff that picked up a noble thought, a philosophy that appealed, I gazed on pictures of old temples and ruins and new buildings and battleships, and soldiers, and pretty girls around whom my thoughts lingered. I learned much from scrap. (49).

Up to this point of the story, there is no complication in Raju’s life which might continue towards prosperity like that of a self-established man of business. But that was not to be. Raju’s role-switching to a tourist-guide and his consequent affair with Rosie forms the staple of the text that offers a discourse on the normative part of cultural reality for an Individual like Raju. At the very outset of the story the readers encounter Raju’s retrospective analysis of his past life and its causal implications to Velan: ‘My troubles would not have started (Raju said in course of narrating his life-story to this man who was called Velan at a later stage) but for Rosie’ (9). But troubles never worry an individual out of their own accord unless and until, a person has something in his or her nature as well as character that invites troubles as it is an established truth that a man is ultimately let down by himself. Before Raju takes up a full-fledged career of a tourist-guide and a subsequent impressario for Rosie, there are clear statements regarding Raju’s natural instincts not only in Raju’s own persona, but also on behalf of the author himself. It is notable that Narayan takes precedence of Raju in unveiling the lapses in Raju’s character: “It was in his nature to get involved in other people’s interests and activities. ‘Otherwise’, Raju often reflected, ‘I should have grown up like a thousand other normal persons, without worries in life’ ”(9). Later, Raju also confesses to Velan that a major defect in his nature has been, his lack of judgement, the ‘lack of ordinary character’ in his own estimate. Now, all these traits in Raju’s character and
personality, more or less, play their part in the making of ‘Railway Raju’ out of his designated identity of a railway-stall owner though the element of destiny also has its share in Raju’s predicament. Chapter Five opens with Raju’s retrospective summing up of his predicament: “I came to be called Railway Raju. Perfect strangers, having heard of my name, began to ask for me when their train arrived at Malgudi railway station. It is written in the brow of some that they shall not be left alone. I am one such I think” (55). The tourists’ chance-enquiry of the attractive spots in Malgudi makes Raju think that he ‘had not given sufficient thought to the subject’(55). But the ‘self-regarding instinct’ in Raju, as Krishna Sen finds in his desire for self-indulgence, a prevarication of facts in order to get an easy way-out and inclination to be likeable, comes to the fore in his behaviour. Instead of revealing his ignorance, he hides it with cogent strokes of bluff to impress the travellers: “ I never said, ‘I don’t know’. Not in my nature, I suppose. If I had had the inclination to say, ‘I don’t know what you are talking about’, my life would have taken a different turn. Instead, I said, ‘Oh, yes, a fascinating place. Haven’t you seen it? You must find the time to visit it, otherwise your whole trip here would be waste’. I am sorry I said it, an utter piece of falsehood. It was not because I wanted to utter a falsehood, but only because I wanted to be pleasant”(55). This urge for being an impressario, far from the hermeneutics of traditional morality, is surely an offshoot of modernity and it moulds Raju’s career in his professional as well as personal orbit. The Essential impulse in Raju is to play the role of a mentor, a guide to others so as to satisfy his ingrained instinct for self-esteem. And in his new role of a tourist-guide also, Raju proves to be a quick-learner of his trade:

Travellers are an enthusiastic lot. They do not mind any inconvenience as long as they have something to see.[...]. I did not mind what people ate or smoked in my shop, my business being only to provide the supply and nothing more .(57)
This shows Raju gradually internalising supply-demand tactics or the theory of cash-nexus and quite naturally, his maturity in this line dominates the subtleties of traditional value-judgements like truth-falsehood or right-wrong binaries. In this modern world of quick money-making, the world envisaged by railway, Raju believes that the face-value of his business lies in prompt transaction of assignments, not in the observance of factual fidelity: “I mentioned a relic as belonging to the thirteenth century before Christ or thirteenth century after Christ, according to the mood of the hour”(58). Raju relishes in commodifying his country’s culture without any concern for values in cultural history and he prefers this new trade to the adoption of his ancestral occupation (which tradition normally recommends). When his mother chides him for neglecting his shop, Raju defends his vocation on the ground of cosmopolitan virtues that the ‘Barnashrama’ of Indian social tradition with its stratification of profession on hereditary basis, can not offer: “Do you know how well known I am? People come asking for me from Bombay, Madras and other places, hundreds of miles away. They call me Railway Raju[…] It is something to become so famous, isn’t it, instead of handing out matches and tobacco?”(59). The measure of appropriation in Raju is unmistakable in his own confession: “Even as the train steamed in at the outer signal, I could scent a customer. I had a kind of water-diviner’s instinct[…] In a few months I was a seasoned guide. I had viewed myself as an amateur guide and a professional shopman, but now gradually I began to think of myself as a part-time shopkeeper and a full-time tourist-guide” (59). Raju slowly learns to take in his stride, the whole space of Malgudi as a cultural commodity to be on sale for the outsiders. Raju reminisces:

Malgudi, I said, had many things to offer, historically, scenically, from the point of view of modern developments, and so on and so forth; or if one came as a pilgrim I could take him to a dozen temples all over the district within a radius of fifty miles; I could find holy waters for him to bathe in all along the course of Sarayu, starting, of course, with its source on Mempi peaks. (62)
Inspite of being himself a philistine in his approach to culture in general and to
the indigenous in particular ('... it was all the same to me, and the age I
ascribed to any particular place depended upon my mood at that hour and the
type of person I was escorting'), Malgudi with all its scenic and mythic aspects,
becomes in Raju's vision, an elastic space for cultural multiplicity - a
postcolonial experience of India like any other Commonwealth nation:
"Malgudi seemed to unroll a new sightseeing place each time" (71). One sees
Raju at this stage, as an intelligent and opportunistic Indian of the post-
Independence period who is out to ferret Malgudi's (India's) culture but who
himself consciously favours severance with his own cultural roots in tradition
that take into account requisite values of 'Indianness'. Raju's neglect of his
own tradition and of his mother's plan for Raju's traditional marriage with a
girl (Lalitha) indicates this growing space in him to appropriate the new order
of living ushered in by modernity in the form of being a railway-tourist guide.
Now, his over-confidence, vaulting self-esteem, showmanship, excessive
concern for others and most of all, his 'lack of ordinary character', further
boost up in him his thirst for power, money, distinction and affluence. But
paradoxically, this new interest in him serves to weaken his link with his own
indigenous cultural space which teaches for ages the adjustment of 'self' with
society and community. The intentional deviation of Raju from the standards of
indigenous culture and tradition betrays a self-delusion in him that prefers the
interests of a dynamic yet transient world (symbolised by railway and the
railway-tourists) to the assurance of a sustaining vitality (symbolised by
traditional 'ways of life'). But Raju's abnegation of his traditional 'self' and his
'lack of ordinary character' soon wreck upon him the serious trial of self-
deception in the form of his infatuation with Rosie, a married tourist girl who
comes to Malgudi with her husband. Even though Narayan characteristically
stakes utmost objectivity in delineating their first meeting in simple, matter-of-
fact mode of narration, the element of self-deception embryonic in Raju's
feelings towards Rosie, becomes prominent in the use of the image of king
cobra, a subhuman creature which has a bewitching capacity of its terrible
beauty. The fact that the first sight of Rosie has bewitched Raju, becomes symbolic when Rosie’s innocent affinity for the king cobra that generates allergic feeling in her husband, endears her to Raju without any plausible reason: “I disliked this man. He was taunting such a divine creature. My sympathies were all for the girl; she was so lovely and elegant” (64-65). This is the beginning of Raju’s infatuation: “After she has arrived I discarded my khaki bush-coat and dhoti and took the trouble to make myself presentable” (64). It is notable that initially, there is no misgiving in Raju about his feelings for a married lady or their propriety; rather his optical impression of Rosie as an illusory being, an intangible essence ironically marks once again, a self-delusion. “... she did have a figure, a slight and tender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a complexion, not white, but dusky, which made her only half-visible – as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice” (65). Raju’s momentous impression of Rosie’s instinctive response to the dance of a king cobra once again brings out the depth of his attraction for Rosie that casts a limiting effect on his power of judgement: “She stretched out her arm slightly and swayed it in imitation of the movement; she swayed her whole body to the rhythm -- for just a second, but that was sufficient to tell me what she was, the greatest dancer of the century”. Inspite of having no knowledge in the art of dancing, Raju poses like a connoisseur and considers Rosie from a momental pose ‘the greatest dancer of the century’ (68). What prompts Raju to make such a hasty evaluation of Rosie without due contextualisation of motives is, his sheer fascination for Rosie, his Moha (attachment) for Rosie to speak in terms of Hindu shastras as Amitangshu Acharya ⁴ has discussed in his article on The Guide. Acharya’s analysis seeks to establish that Raju’s experiences justify the journey of the ‘self’ from attachment (Moha) through atonement which may be termed as Prayaschitta, to deliverance (Moksha). In the context of present analysis, this self-delusion in Raju arising from his infatuation, leads to a self-deception that in a tradition-bred individual like Raju, results in some sort of aberration from the standardised codes of behaviour in his familial as well as social affiliations.
Interestingly, Raju’s affair with Rosie which matures hereafter, receives a faint warning from his mother who as it were, tries to make her son aware of some ominous possibility: “…I had a cousin living in Burma once and he told me about the snake women there” (69). When Raju protests that ‘she is a dancer’, his mother with an exclusive devotion to tradition, curtly spells out her disapproval of this type of girls: “Oh, dancer! May be, but don’t have anything to do with these dancing women. They are all a bad sort” (69). Raju’s powers of sycophancy which are schematically applied apparently to tackle awkward situations between a dissenting couple like Rosie and Marco, but actually to draw Rosie’s attention and love, are aided by the widening rift between Rosie, a lively wife and a promising danseuse and her husband Marco, an uninteresting academician. Raju’s flattery drags Rosie within his fold and he capitalises the chance cleverly. The description of Raju’s trip to Peak House with the couple and their stay for the night to watch prowling games, is strewn with flashes of Raju’s romantic passion for Rosie and the charm she has begun to cast over him. Raju’s reminiscences to Velan contain a ratiocinative account of the moments glowing with passion and desire. For example, a simple touch of Rosie at dinner table seems to enkindle Raju’s passion – “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” (77). Raju’s stay at the Peak House and his alternate stints of accompaniment to Marco and Rosie, maintain the professional transparency of his role but his proximity with Rosie is finally rewarded with his knowledge of Rosie’s loneliness and her devdasi-origin which in turn reveals to his nature, just another chance to pose as a true sympathiser to her neglected self and talent. Raju’s self-chosen role of an active sympathiser wins Rosie’s confidence but paradoxically, he is further ensnared by self-deception of which he is probably unaware. Marco’s retirement to the caves for his study of sculptures there, leaves Rosie in charge of Raju and her decision to come back to Malgudi offers Raju further scope (to pursue his goal) that he grasps
right in earnest. A whole day's outing at Malgudi and the providence of 'common pleasures' that seemed to have been 'beyond her reach' for all these years of married life, have an enlivening effect on the thawed soul of Rosie. The day-long proximity with Rosie, ecstasy of shared feelings, the fascinating looks of Rosie create natural emotional oedema in Raju whose ardent spirit flickers at the appropriate call of carnal gratification on a momentary fit of passion as he leads Rosie to her hotel-suite at about midnight: "...on an impulse I gently pushed her out of the way, and stepped in and locked the door on the world" (89). One sees that love's labour is rewarded though this supreme act of individualism on Raju's part, dialectically points to a simultaneous lapse in the normative codes of traditional behavioral pattern and sexual morality that confers a dignified status and religious insularity on a married woman in the male-dominained Indian society. Our Shastras also recommend: "Matribat Parareshu" (one should regard another man's wife as mother). Therefore, what Raju has done, though of course in implicit connivance with Rosie, is an instance of romantic love in tune with the rapid reorienting of outlook and social change in modern India. But his affair with Rosie and consequent satiety of lust is nothing but an instance of adultery and spiritual as well as moral degradation in him. Raju's fall from the norms of traditional morality is duly contextualised in terms of his brief exchanges with his mother and Gaffur, the taxi driver, whom Raju constantly engages for his trips with Marco as well as Rosie. During his busy schedule for the day, Raju comes home only 'to change', for washing and 'grooming' and to arrange for another set of dress for the next day. Raju has no time to bother about his mother's 'information' and 'enquiries': 'I brushed everything aside'. When her mother's heart senses some waywardness in Raju and asks questions (like 'Becoming a dandy?' or 'why are you always on the run now?'), Raju has neither the courage to face her, nor the power to detect if there is something wrong in his activities: "I gave her some excuse and started out again" (87). The next wake-up signal comes from Gaffur, Raju's dear old friend who views Raju's hob-nobbing with Rosie with natural aversion and alerts Raju: 'She is a
married woman, remember’ (88). Here too, Raju’s vanity, self-esteem and hypocrisy blur his self-realisation giving credence once more to the old maxim: ‘the sermon is of no avail to the devil’. He is not in a position to identify the truth in Gaffur’s caution. On the contrary, he checks his genuine will-wisher with an instinctive insolence of a showman that finds no scruple even in transacting a blatant lie for practical purposes: ‘You are unhealthy- minded, Gaffur. She is like a sister to me’, I said, and tried to shut him up” (88). It is in the fitness of things that Raju becomes wary of Gaffur’s disturbing presence in his outing with Rosie: “I had dismissed the car at the cinema. I did not want Gaffur to watch my movements”(88). This conscious abnegation of the traditional codes of behaviour, the familial as well as community-consciousness in the exclusive pursuit of self-gratification in Raju, may now be read as a deviation from his indigenous traditional culture. It is not unnatural that the growing entanglement with Rosie has a limiting effect on Raju’s vocation as well as his familial/social identity. The railway-guide virtually becomes the guide of a single family, of Marco and Rosie in particular. But here too, Raju, who has made role-playing a stock-in-trade in his character, proves extremely handy to a dreamer like Rosie by caring for her dancing-career. Raju shows the ability to prove his indispensability also to Marco by taking entire charge of his affairs — his to and fro journey from the peak house to the caves, his stay at the peak house, the engagement of Gaffur’s car for his trips and so on. By providing these services to Marco, an impractical scholar to whom ‘all practical affairs of life seemed impossible’, Raju wins his confidence and his abnormal capacity for trust which he misappropriates by furthering his affair with Rosie:

He never stinted any expense as long as a voucher was available.[...].He paid me my daily rate and also let me look after my ‘routine jobs’. My so called ‘routine-jobs’ now sounded big, but actually reduced themselves to keeping Rosie company and amusing her. (113-114)
But it becomes gradually noticeable that despite Raju’s unstinted effort to appropriate this new role which has been assigned to him more by choice than chance, Raju fails to quell those disturbing experiences that self-deception and its subsequent commissions and omissions accrue as their dividends: “I was in an abnormal state of mind” (115). Rosie never shows in the story any quality of ‘higher love’ so to say, that can inculcate an ennobling or a sublimating effect in the character of a ‘true lover’. Indian cultural life is seen to have celebrated the social homogeneity of human relations and such a perspective may allow only that form of ‘love’ which instead of concentrating one’s sensibility, teaches sacrifice and tolerance for social morality and community attitudes. The point may be illustrated by a quotation from Srikanta, a novel by famous Bengali novelist, Saratchandra: ‘True love not necessarily always polarises souls; it often sends them apart.’ However, India’s traditional culture may have allowances for love in terms of a reciprocity of feelings and mutual purity. But it does not approve the gross corporeality and self-centeredness in the name of love. Raju’s love, with a strong Westernised bias for individualism and consumerism, dooms him to a social apathy, a community-indifference and above all, a spiritual thraldom from which moral degradation is afoot. This is, what exactly happens with Raju, as he later confesses to Velan: “I was losing a great deal of my mental relaxation. I was obsessed with thoughts of Rosie. I revelled in memories of the hours I had spent with her last or in anticipation of what I’d be doing next”(115). This kind of psychic unrest in Raju, if it is symptomatic of a depression, shows reactions in conformity with the law of psychology in the form of a recompensative urge known as ‘puran prayasa’. Such an urge is noticed in Raju when he makes a desperate bid to make himself more and more attractive to Rosie by spending more for his dresses and Rosie’s cosmetics. The steady rise in Raju’s expenses, coupled with his growing dandyism, is managed by his selfish application of his father’s parsimonious savings, his utter negligence to his main source of income (the railway stall which he visits only to draw cash from the caretaker boy) and above all, by his growing insensitivity to familial obligations and duties. It seems that the
Westernised pull of extreme individualism in Raju’s passionate obsession with Rosie, gets the better of the binding forces of tradition. This is indicated when we consider the mild admonitions from Raju’s mother, the laconic cautions from Gaffur and most of all, Raju’s own fossilizing conscience (‘No, no, it is not right, Marco is her husband, remember’). With Rosie as ‘the only reality in his life and consciousness’, Raju is shown to us virtually at the cross-roads of cultural crisis:

My old life, in which I was not in the least interested, was dogging my steps; my mother facing me with numerous problems; municipal tax, the kitchen tiles needing attention, the shop, accounts, letters from the village, my health, and so on and so forth; to me she was a figure out of a dream, mumbling vague sounds; [...] (117)

In addition to all this, the care-taker boy of Raju’s railway stall, has his ‘own way’ of ‘cornering and attacking’ him on Raju’s casual visits to the stall.

True, Raju at this stage, often shows some signs of a desire for recuperation; but it is notable that it is either Rosie’s occasional remorse for her infidelity to Marco (‘Is this right what I am doing’?), or Raju’s confusion about the actual motives of Rosie (‘I would not decide how to view her statements’) or a conditional dislike for Marco (‘He had placed me in a hopeless predicament’), that radiates Raju’s mind with a streak of expiatory wish on his part:

Sometimes I heartily wished that the man would descend from his heights, take her, and clear out of the place. That would at least end this whole uncertain business once for all and help me to return to my platform duties.(120)

Narayan’s focus on such a longing in Raju, willy-nilly, shows a desire for the ‘old way of life’ that forms a major textual preoccupation in postcolonial
culture-studies on ‘marginals’ who are caught betwixt the contradictory pulls of tradition and modernity. But here again, Raju’s zeal for being Rosie’s impressario dominates his nostalgia and once he broaches upon the subject of Rosie’s dancing career, all the depression in Rosie gets dispelled for the time and Raju, the circumspect opportunist, finds the way to her heart and utilises it to the utmost. Along with Rosie’s plans regarding her dancing, Raju too, an arch showman, does not lag behind and he assumes the air of a connoisseur of art only to shield any possibility of Rosie’s return to her husband. But even though Rosie tries her utmost, at first to convince Marco of the ingenuity of her ambition and then finally to save her married life on the revelation of her affair with Raju, she fails in her mission. Marco uncompromisingly prefers the life of a self-interested cultural researcher to that of passing days with an infidel wife and a practitioner of ‘monkeys tricks of street-acrobatics’ in the name of dance. The result is that, Marco leaves Rosie. We know that Raju becomes aware of these developments in Rosie’s life much later than when Rosie had harshly refused him before going to her husband in a desperate bid to save her marriage. But during the time of separation, life without Rosie seems to hang heavy on Raju as he finds his existence worth of an utter inanity of purpose and emotional fatuity. Still, Raju tries his best to revert to his long-left familiar orbit of existence. But Rosie’s return to him once again, coils Raju as if within the machination of destiny in which character has already played a decisive role. With Rosie’s return towards the end of Chapter Six, readers can discern in Raju, an increasing potential of a passionate lover who prepares to bait on his familial and traditional obligations with a determination of ‘self’ to confront society in its purely traditional form. It is obvious that nearly one month’s separation has failed to wean Raju from the memories of Rosie who is still the only reality for Raju and their reunion now renews Raju’s strength of mind to do anything for her interest. From the standpoint of normative reality of culture, such an act of pure individualism is doomed to pay for the dent it brings to the fabric of social morality and community-consciousness; and here, the crash comes from Raju’s blood-relations as well as his social affinities. It is
interesting that Rosie at first, comes to Raju's house only for shelter. But Raju's 'lack of ordinary character' and his overbearing instinct of proving helpful to others, once again comes into play when the readers find that Raju on hearing Rosie's personal trauma, galvanises himself into a messiahnic entity for Rosie with an active sympathy and renewal of his old promise to make an artist of Rosie: "You are in the right place. Forget all your past [...]. I'll make the world recognise you as the greatest artist of the time"(153). So it is Raju's self-assertive nature and his innate affinity for the role of a guide, of an active assistant, that seem to exhume now Rosie's dream of a dancing career that got crushed for a time, under the debris of personal tragedy in her life. On his own part, at the behest of proving a promoter of Rosie, Raju unconsciously sets for himself another assignment of activities that is pregnant with further possibilities of self-deception and self-agony. However, Raju's role provides Rosie with that much-needed boost to her tormented artistic self and she now garners, true to her mettle, all her creative energies out of her disastrous married life. Rosie starts dance-practice in Raju's orthodox household and the inevitable reaction comes from Raju's mother. Inspite of her sympathy for Rosie's sad lot and the habitual tenderness of a traditional mother-like hostess to the shelterless girl, Raju's mother can no longer tolerate the extent of Raju's callousness to family tradition as well as his laxity in moral character so as to house a married girl in an orthodox house and more than that, to allow her practice dance. This shock of cultural incompatibility is too much for a traditional mother and widow like her and she comes in direct confrontation with the upstart 'way of life' of her son:

You can't have a dancing girl in our house. Every morning with all that dancing and every thing going on! What is the home coming to? [...]. I was hoping you would have the sense to do something about it. It can't go on like this for ever. What will people say? (153)
When Raju protests and shows an indifference to public opinion, the mother’s reaction is just the articulation of the older generation’s unflinching allegiance to community-tradition as the sustaining force of a culturally authentic existence: “Oh! That’s a strange order you are giving me, my boy. I can’t accept it” (154). But Raju’s unstinted support to Rosie and his growth from strength to strength in his present ‘mission’ in life, show an increasing apathy for the value-based concerns of his mother who wants to restore the values of the safe cultural space of the traditional way of living that are embodied by her caring and dutiful brother, a representative of the landed gentry. But before the crisis ensues in Raju’s family life, Narayan contextualises through Raju’s first-person narration of his experiences, how insensitivity to the values of familial, social or domestic community alienates Raju from his own culturally designated existence. Raju’s constant neglect of his railway stall, (the main source of his income) since his intimacy with Rosie and his consequent foppish life-style not only bring economic complexities, but also gradually blur his interest in his tourist activities due to his overbearing and exclusive concern for Rosie. Even now, his mother tries from time to time, to remind Raju in her own way, that there is something amiss in Raju’s activities – his intimacy with the ‘serpent girl’ or his growing negligence to the stall-business. But Raju, a victim of self-esteem, brushes her aside in his own way. For example, Raju’s mother often would tell him: ‘You will have to keep an eye on that boy. I see a lot of hangers-on there. Have you any idea what cash he is collecting and what is happening generally?’ (116). It is notable that, Raju senses well enough the truth in his mother’s observation as he records in different occasions, his detection of the caretaker-boy’s cunning and concocting habit. Yet, Raju shows even to his mother, an inexplicable non-chalance that paradoxically originates from his over-confidence and self-deception: “…I should certainly know how to manage these things: Don’t think I am so careless” (116). So, instead of showing any sincere attempt at salvaging his financial position from uncertainty, Raju is seen to be advancing further into the mire of a utopian imprudence that views instant as eternity without an iota of after-thought:
My mind was on other matters. Even my finances were unreal to me, although if I cared to look at my savings-book, I could know at a glance how the level of the reservoir was going down. But I did not want to examine it too closely as long as the man at the counter was able to give me the cash I wanted.(117)

Raju’s extreme prodigality of life-style causes a proportionate indifference to his stall- business which necessitates, as if, the law of diminishing return in his family trade. Situations develop along expected lines to pose a serious financial worry for Raju as he says: “My sales were poor, as the railways were admitting more pedlars on the platforms. My cash receipts were going down and my credit sales alone flourished. The wholesale merchants who supplied me with goods stopped credit to me” (155). What further worsen the situation are -- the caretaker boy’s rough dealing with customers, his chaotic keeping of accounts and his suspected misappropriation of stock. The cumulative effect of all this incurs disfavour of the railway authorities who decide to hand over the stall to a new contractor and issues a notice to Raju to that effect. Raju’s disconnection with the railway link that has served as the launching pad to his career of a guide and shaped his ‘being’, now proves to him the ‘unkindest cut of all’. As a result, even the attraction of Rosie (his ‘only reality’) pales into insignificance for the moment: “...I knew my railway association was now definitely ended. It made my heart heavy. I felt so gloomy that I did not turn to see Rosie standing aside, staring at me” (157).

Raju’s separation from the railway connections is now complete. But it is notable that, the writer here has not only contextualised this separation as a logical conclusion, but also presented it as convincingly incorporative of value-j judgements that exist as a reality in the appraisal of Indian culture. Two positive instances can be cited from the text that problematise the concept of value-judgement. It is evident in the final part of Chapter Seven that shows
Raju’s dislocation from the railway associations. The readers clearly discern in Raju’s mother, her growing antipathy for living with a tainted woman (Rosie) under the same roof and she whispers from time to time, into Raju’s ears: ‘She is a real snake-woman, I tell you, I never liked her from the first day you mentioned her” (154). In the traumatic scene, when Raju’s anger and desperation for losing the stall provoke him to fulminate against the boy for the latter’s breach of trust, the father of the boy defines the cause of Raju’s ruin in categorical terms: “It’s not he who has ruined you, but the Saithan inside, which makes you talk like this” (156). Raju’s financial condition faces another setback when the Sait, a regular creditor to Raju, demands repayment of a huge loan but goes back disgruntled at Raju’s callously light and dilatory approach to the matter. His experience of Raju’s levity and the simultaneous dance-practice in the house render credence in his mind to the ‘Saithan inside’ story afloat in Malgudi and he quits with the premonitions of serious consequences. But even at this stage, Raju is not disillusioned. On the contrary, the Moha or attachment seems to tighten its grip on Raju who moves away from the concerns of social contact and lives in an illusory world of fatuous self-content as he later confesses to Velan: “Living with Rosie under the same roof was enough for me. I wanted nothing more in life. I was slipping into a fool’s paradise” (161). Raju’s careless treatment of his creditor baffles the latter so much, that he files a criminal suit against Raju that puts Raju’s house on to a threat of mortgage. Though Raju manages to engage the adjournment-lawyer to avert any immediate crisis, he still is seen to be an erring soul and ignores the most positive counsel from Gaffur, his true friend and well-wisher. When Raju elaborates to Gaffur his innovative plan to scrape through the financial impasse by utilising Rosie’s talent in commodifying the art of Bharatnatyam, Gaffur’s argument just endorses a safe and secure way of traditional life that does not approve the modernist way of life involving a utopian quest for culture, a lack of moral slipperiness as well as an indifference to one’s community affiliations: “Send her away and try to get back to ordinary, real life. Don’t talk all this art-business. It’s not for us” (163). Raju’s urge to
commodify the art of dancing marks him out as a postcolonial intellectual, and it has been well elaborated by critics like Krishna Sen and Nandini Bhattacharya for instance. It is a fact that Gaffur’s advocacy of the ‘ordinary, real life’ underscores the importance of traditionally lived existence that has a surviving vitality of its own without any so-called cultural ostentatiousness of modernity. That this cultural reality is losing its zest for Raju, is manifest in his offensive reaction to Gaffur’s advice that frustrates the latter whose parting with a valedictory message (‘I pray that God may give you better Sense’), later on brings in Raju the ‘anagnorisis’ of a fact as a creation of his erratic ‘self’: “I knew here was another friend passing out of my life” (163). Raju’s increasing attachment, his subsequent possessiveness over Rosie, his surging defiance of his original culture, the familial codes of living, the socio-religious values (that regard living with another’s wife a sin) — bring his self-alienation to such an alarming extent, that the traditional pattern of life can no longer provide room for Raju. Raju’s mother, who, true to her dharma, has learnt to live only in allegiance to the traditional values of womanhood, finds it no longer possible to live in the same household with a devdasi girl and an erratic, wayward and incorrigible son who has brought a sacrilege to the familial and religious values of the society by way of an extreme individualism (a Western impact) at the cost of his own cultural roots. She calls in her brother to intervene without Raju’s knowledge. Raju’s conflict with his mother and maternal uncle over his immorality, his prodigality and disrespect for the familial and moral traditions, is the objectification of his cultural depassement in the eyes of tradition.

It is obvious that Raju’s fall is caused by the extreme individualism of the Western influence that impels him to repudiate his own cultural roots in community affiliations. Raju’s mother and his maternal uncle stand for those very values and mores of traditional, orthodox, ritualistic Hindu society which Raju decisively rejects under the spell of his pursuit of a different plane of experience. The most poignant portion of Chapter Eight in the text is formed by the situation in which Raju’s mother leaves her home and hearth for good as
she is unable to wean Raju, inspite of the formidable support from her brother, either from his attachment to Rosie or from his inflexible purpose for sheltering Rosie in the orthodox household and promoting her dancing talent. Raju's encounter with his uncle and mother correlates the inroads of modern outlook into tradition with the fast-eroding values in the urbanising society. Raju's uncle and mother belong to a 'way of life' that enshrines familial responsibility and property as a sacred onus and leaves no room for adultery or waywardness or individual choice to dominate over community-consciousness. The desperate bid of Raju's mother and uncle to extricate Raju from the corrupting influence of Rosie, paradoxically strengthens Raju's will to cling to his decision to favour Rosie even at the cost of relinquishing the traditional value-systems that has ceased to appeal to him any longer since his infatuation with Rosie. The following extract touchingly records two patterns of cultural response – one (represented by Raju's mother and uncle) that advocates an unshaken commitment to traditional values and familial/social sanctity of prescribed modes of relationship, and the other (represented by Raju) which valorises extreme, Westernised individualism of choice and action:

My mother appealed to me, 'Have some sense, Raju. She is another man's wife. She must go back to him'. There was such calm logic in what she said, I had nothing more to do but repeat blindly, 'She can't go anywhere, Mother. She has got to stay here'. And then my mother brought out her trump card. 'If she is not going, I have to leave the house', she said. My uncle said, 'Did you think she was helpless, and only a dependant on you?' He thumped his chest and cried, 'As long as I am breathing, I will never let down a sister'. (172)

Krishna Sen thinks that the rejection of Rosie by Raju's mother and uncle 'provokes Raju to validate his support for her and justify his faith in her talent'(67). But Raju's behaviour at this stage, justifies the critic's opinion partly, since, his attachment to Rosie more than his urge to prove her a
talent, impels him to withstand rupture even with his mother, and near kins and tradition and such a behavioural pattern issues mainly from his deviation from his own culture and traditional morality, and not from any genuine bid to promote any artistic talent. The point will be clarified by a single excerpt from the text where Raju is seen watching Rosie at dance-practice and the time is just before the climax that ensues with his uncle’s arrival: “I watched her critically, but what I watched were the curves that tempted me to hug her on the spot” (163). This moral depravity in Raju blurs his vision and makes him go against exhortations of his mother and uncle (and also of Gaffur), to come back to the accustomed ‘way of life’ exemplified by his ancestors. From the vantage point of this culture, Rosie can only be seen as a corrupting agent who weans Raju from his original metier of existence. When the joint venture of mother and uncle to get rid of Rosie seemingly fails, the reactions in Raju’s uncle and mother infallibly underscores the traditional moralistic interpretation of women as Mohini, the deceptive power which the Shastras hold as the degrading influence upon man, the Purusha. The following extracts from the speeches of Raju’s uncle and mother addressed to Raju and Rosie respectively, highlight Raju’s position in the eyes of his original culture.

[Raju’s Uncle]: Never dreamed that anyone in our family would turn out to be a dancer’s backstage boy! [...]. Your father’s spirit will be happy to see you now, literally grovelling at the feet of a dancing girl! (168)

[Raju’s Mother]: Are you not satisfied with your handiwork, you she-devil, you demon. Where have you dropped on us from? Everything was so good and quiet – until you came; you came in like a viper. Bah! I have never seen anyone work such havoc on a young fool! What a fine boy he used to be! (170)

But Raju’s firm reiteration of his support to Rosie makes sure the departure of his mother from the household and Raju’s separation from his mother
symbolises the dislocation from his own cultural roots - of religion (that deems ingratitude to parents as a sin) as well as of family prestige (that favours the mother with a pivotal status in maintaining cohesiveness and peace in the household). The sanctity of her position as enshrined by tradition, emerges once again in the form of her sincere wish for family-welfare in her valedictory instruction to her son even when she is forced to leave the household out of an uncompromising commitment to tradition: "'Don't fail to light the lamps in the god's niche', said my mother going down the steps. 'Be careful with your health' " (175). Raju's separation from his mother symbolically stands for the severance with the umbilical chord of his own indigenous culture and this cultural amputation has been followed as if by an anaesthetic effect of his individualistic fulfilment in the form of his relationship with Rosie: "We were a married couple to all appearances.[...] All day long she danced and sang. I made love to her constantly and was steeped in an all-absorbing romanticism,[...]"(175). But Raju wakes up from this state of inertia at the behest of none other than Rosie and, true to his instinctive urge for being helpful, Raju buckles up all his energies to prepare the stage for Rosie's (alias Nalini's) dancing career and his speculations click with Rosie's steady display of her talent. Meanwhile, Raju's paternal house faces the risk of mortgage and here too, he proves to be a dud in so far as he leaves the problem unsolved and moves to a spacious villa at New Extention (that would suit the luxurious status of his life with Rosie) notwithstanding his mother's last wish to live in her own house for the rest of her life. Interestingly, from this point in the text, Raju's is seen to suffer from occasional visits of compunction: "I moved to another house and became very busy, and in all the rush quietened my conscience"(186). Rosie's popularity as dancer comes in usual course and even though she sincerely credits Raju for her artistic rebirth, Raju who has earned a lot of public attention as having discovered a genius like Rosie, finds himself now as an intruder into the aesthetic world of Rosie who being a gifted danseuse, would someday surely flag up herself even if Raju would not come in her life and go without so many things to make her happy: "Her name
became public property. [...] I became known because I went about with her, not the other way round. She became known because she had the genius in her, and the public had to take notice of it” (182). This kind of self-pity in Raju breeds in him a sort of jealousy and possessiveness regarding his attitude to Rosie, as he confesses later to Velan: “I did not like to see her enjoy other people’s company, I liked to keep her in a citadel” (193). Whereas Rosie moves more and more into the joy of creativity with a growing dislike for her hectic routine of performances as a glamorous celebrity, Raju slips more and more into snares of immorality that have been hatched by his preference of appearance to reality, of showmanship to his original culture and tradition. Here Raju’s character is seen to be dominated by negative attributes like jealousy, possessiveness and avarice, the dividends, actually speaking, earned at the cost of bartering the traditional ‘self’ to the prospects of materialistic gains envisaged by the emerging urbanisation of the society of postcolonial India. Krishna Sen has ascribed Raju’s predicament to the reality common to the ‘naveux-rich’ or ‘intellectual provenu’ of postcolonial India who aspire for a privileged, ultra-modern existence even at the cost of values enshrined in traditional ways of life and culture. Raju’s active role as Rosie’s impressario and his commodification of Bharat Natyam dance no doubt subscribe to this view. But the more important thing is that, Raju’s extremity of individualism repudiates the claims of social as well as personal morality and here Raju’s zealous utilisation of Rosie’s services for money, betrays a perverted craze for material felicity that is doomed to face disillusionment sooner or later. The point gets illumined in Raju’s own recollection: “My philosophy was that while it lasted the maximum money had to be squeezed out. We needed all the money in the world” (195).

It is remarkable that inspite of his teeming speculation, Raju admits that reality poses contrary to his soaring plans: ‘As it was, the style of living and entertaining which I had evolved was eating up all our resources’ (195).
Raju’s exclusive penchant for money and affluence naturally has a denigrating influence upon his character. This becomes clear when we see that under the same circumstances, Rosie flourishes more and more as a true artist, while Raju, the back-stage boy behind her eminence, is seen to grapple with alacrity, all the props of social uplift (like a postcolonial naveux-rich Indian) even at the cost of his fall from his original cultural métier and moral laxity: “I gathered a big circle of friends and we played cards [...] We had surreptitious drinks too, [...] well, the prohibition law was not for a man of my influence” (196).

Krishna Sen thinks in this connection that, the text however amply contextualises the cultural space that is characteristic of the immediate social reality of the ‘permit raj’ and the ‘licence raj’ in the Nehru-Indira era of post-Independence India. In this context, it is relevant to quote here Nirad.C.Chowdhury’s observation in his “Social and Cultural Decadence in India” with an analysis of the changed role of ‘money-making’ in it.

Chowdhury thinks that the ‘debasement of pursuing money’ is ‘a manifestation of decadence’ and even though Hindu sacred law (Dharmasastra) assigned ‘money-making’ as a ‘social duty’ of the castes and classes to provide wealth for the entire social order, ‘...in the last few decades there has appeared in India a new upstart class of money-makers who surpass the English money-makers in sordidness and dishonesty. It is this new-rich class which is contributing to social decadence in India’ (119-120). The following extract from the text graphically traces Raju’s deft marshalling of activities to acquire the status of an influential man (becoming the intellectual provenu of postcolonial India) but beneath the façade of the telling account, the depth of Raju’s deviation from the standardised behavioral norms of culture, religion and morality, emerges as if to rationalise his further baits of depravity, including the ultimate forgery that soon lands him into imprisonment:

‘Permit-holder’ became a social title in our land and attracted men of interest around me, because the permit was a difficult thing to acquire. I showed respect for law by keeping the street-
window shut when serving drink to non-permit folk. [...] We played Three-Cards sometimes [...] I changed a two-thousand-rupee cheque for the purpose, and expected those who came there to meet me on equal terms. Through my intimacy with all sorts of people, I knew what was going on behind the scenes in the government, at the market, at Delhi, on the race-course, and who was going to be who in the coming week. I could get a train-reservation at a moment’s notice, relieve a man summoned to jury work, reinstate a dismissed official, get a vote for a cooperative election, nominate a committee man, get a man employed, get a boy admitted to a school, and get an unpopular official shifted elsewhere, all of which seemed to me important social services, an influence worth buying at the current market price. (196-197)

The entire extract with its concluding line in particular, posits the postcolonial trait of commodification of influence in a society which, judged from the perspectives of cultural discourse, displays the knowledge-power hypothesis of postcolonial reality wherein the thrust of modernity and power-politics cast an abortive impact upon the traditional ways of living. Raju’s maturity into the type of a social con-man, a wizard of speculation, contextualises his further trials of self-delusion that lead to commitment of forgery and consequent imprisonment which the main text concludes with. Before one analyses the final trends of events that shape Raju’s life with relation to Rosie, it is worthwhile to consider the following point.

There is a close affinity between Raju of The Guide (1958) and Margaya of The Financial Expert (1952) in so far as, the characters who are linked with them somehow or other in their rise to affluence, bring about their ruin directly or indirectly. It is Dr. Pal in The Financial Expert who inspite of proving instrumental in Margaya’s fortune, later brings about the downfall of
Margaya's financial empire as well as his personal life respectively by gulling Margaya's creditors and leading Margaya's son astray. Similarly, Marco, whose separation from Rosie brings the latter within Raju's fold and makes her by peculiar twist of circumstances the 'only reality' in Raju's life, has now a role to play. Marco who undergoes a temporary eclipse under the 'radiant glow of existence' of Raju and Rosie, registers his silent reappearance into the plot bringing complications in Raju's life. He sends Raju from somewhere a copy of his book *The Cultural History of South India*, a scholarly contribution to cultural studies, the postscript of which bears a pencilled message acknowledging Raju's services in his research-work. But the receipt of Marco's book has a dismal effect on Raju who can neither read Marco's intentions nor quell his inward fear (of losing Rosie) and his confusion resists his intention to show the book to Rosie. After much speculation, Raju hides the book in secret. But the publication of it in a magazine and a subsequent query from Raju's secretary Mani, reveals to Rosie Raju's prevarication of a fact that still retains an undying importance to her. Rosie's effusiveness about Marco's achievement and her mental attachment to Marco baffle Raju's understanding of Rosie's mind, and an element of uncertainty as well as emotional inanity seem to encroach Raju's mind:

I could not understand her. I had an appaling thought that for months and months I had eaten, slept and lived with her without in the least understanding her mind. [...] I did not understand her sudden affection for her husband. [...] I did my best for her. Her career was at its height. What was it that still troubled her? (202)

Inspite of this emotional perturbation, it is noticeable that Raju plays his role well in so far as, he keeps Rosie in constant engagements to keep her in good humour until the situation comes when in the fashion of a tragic hero, he fails to negotiate a conflict of choices and invariably makes the wrong one. A lawyer's letter asking for Rosie's signature for the release of a jewellery-box
(as per arrangements made by Marco earlier) reaches Raju’s hand and he is pushed to a frenzied speculation regarding Rosie’s emotional fickleness with regard to anything related to Marco and once more, for the last time in his life, Raju’s power of judgement gets blurred though he feels that it is proper to give the letter to Rosie as it is exclusively her own affair. It is obvious that, Raju has not learnt from his experiences regarding Marco’s book as he once again falls prey to the misgiving that the letter might turn Rosie’s attraction from Raju to Marco. On a momentary impulse, he forges Rosie’s signature on the enclosed form with a faint desire of possessing a sizeable amount of ornaments. From the standpoint of standardised morality, Raju’s act is motivated by attachment as well as avarice though the mental trauma preceding such an act of depradation is well communicated by the novelist. However, the act of forgery further brings to Raju’s mind an obsession with an insured parcel and it is followed by incentives of his crime like fear, doubt and nervousness: “...everyone around appeared sinister, diabolical and cunning” (210).

This moral as well as spiritual (not in the religious sense) fall of Raju — from a jolly, resourceful tactician, a master of affairs and a skilled manipulator to a dubious, faltering person who bears the mantle of a showman with half-hearted zeal and skepticism, is the instance of an Indian who having deserted the cultural motto of ‘plain living and high thinking’, moves towards an essentially individualised, urbanised way of life that seldom allows room for moral and cultural values of tradition. It is notable that the arrest-warrant against Raju is issued while he is busy monitoring one of the most gorgeous stage-shows of Nalini in which she is personally engrossed in staging her special item ‘Ganesh Vandana’ with the snake-dance as an adulatory posture dedicated to ‘Nataraja’, the God of dancing-art. This fact is only a pointer to the cultural dissonance between the predicaments of Rosie and Raju. While the former succeeds in making a true artistic identity out of the ruins of personal tragedy, the latter steeps more and more into lures of self-deception with an unintelligible ego of offering guidance; as one, who has trammeled up the safe and secured patterns
of tradition-laid living as a result of his commissions and omissions for a 'barren passion's sake', to quote from Yeats. Raju’s arrest and remand of two days in police custody can not be averted as the police Super who is a member of Raju’s own circle of friends, ceases ‘to be friendly’ and proves ‘a frightful tactician’. Even though Rosie does her best to release Raju on a bail bond and obliges to complete her assignments of programmes to employ a renowned lawyer for Raju’s case and run the household, the house now wears in Raju’s eyes, a ‘sepulchral quietness’ and Rosie’s self-reliance breeds a jealous self-pity in Raju who fails to comprehend the gradual transformation in Rosie. It is significant that, even though Rosie has been all along the consort in Raju’s exclusive quest for pleasure and self-esteem, it is Rosie who accounts for the type of Raju’s experience (culminating in courting an arrest): “I felt all along you were not doing right things. This is Karma. What can we do?”(216). It is the same Rosie who inspite of her commitment to Raju’s cause, now suffers from an acute sense of drudgery in celebrity-life: “Even if you are free, I’ll not dance in public any more. I am tired of all this circus existence”(221). Raju’s shock at the unpredictable nature of Rosie’s decision draws out her categorical affirmation of her quest for an existence that would experience no longer any trick of appearances: “If I have to pawn my last possession, I’ll do it to save you from jail. But once it’s over, leave me once and for all; that’s all I ask. Forget me. Leave me to live or die, as I choose; that’s all” (221-22). Critics have not sufficiently rationalised this sudden change in Rosie. Actually, it is Raju’s moral degradation and puerile approach to identity and role-playing, that frustrate the artistic self in Rosie and prompt her to retire from the world of Raju and this change in her, however baffling to Raju, brings to him a chastening effect of disillusionment. Raju comes to have a new realisation that marks the recognition of Rosie’s greatness and his relative non-entity in her rise: “Neither Marco nor I had any place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she had underestimated all along” (223).
Raju’s star-lawyer whose name spells magic in the court-halls, only manages to minimise the period of imprisonment and Raju is sentenced to two years’ imprisonment. Here the main text practically ends, since Raju’s journey from boyhood through intermediate phases of his professional and personal adventures, temporarily halts at the entrance of the reformatory and thereby signifies technically, a narrative arrest on the part of Narayan, inspite of the past-present intersection and episodic structure of the narrative.

In fact, this portion of Raju’s life may be regarded to have formed the main text because it forms a narrative unit in the plot by focusing on Raju’s past life - from his boyhood to imprisonment. This phase in Raju’s career can be said to subscribe to the amplitude of social reality in postcolonial India where the sweep of rapid urbanisation brings dent to the traditional rubric of indigenous culture. This reflects a space where the experiences of ambitious and intelligent persons like Raju often tend to show a sort of cultural proselytism that problematises identity-formation. To put it simply, they often have to bear a dislocation from their own cultural roots on the one hand and existential crisis on the other as a result of failure in negotiating the eddies of modernity. Different critics and commentators show divergent angles of analysis in their interpretation of Raju. Yet their analyses fall more or less within the familiar trends of traditional criticism that tend to justify Raju’s predicament with insights gained from either Indian philosophy or spiritualism and in the majority of cases, Raju’s transformation into the saint (?) seems to enjoy the critical focus. M.K. Naik detects in the story of Raju a theme of ‘ironic reversal’ that is ‘firmly wedded to moral imagination...’(163). He further thinks that Raju’s journey as a whole, seeks to problematise a dialectical pattern of human motives and actions, such as appearance and reality etc.etc. Krishna Sen also has made a thorough and in-depth analysis of Narayan’s treatment of Raju’s kaleidoscopic nature and locates Raju as positioned against the claims of self and society, as essentially a round character with ‘continual human unpredictability’(47). Scores of critics, both Western and Indian, have
analysed the character of Raju from many different perspectives. The major part of the story analysed so far, seeks to contextualise the modes of cultural experiences in the postcolonial social reality in which an individual’s search for a ‘whole way of life’ wavers between the gravitational pulls of one’s roots on the one hand, and the whirlwind of changes objectified by urbanisation/modernity on the other. Up to imprisonment, Raju’s experiences — right from his encounter with railways, his growth into a tour-guide, his acquaintance and growing intimacy with Rosie, self-delusion, incursion of adultery, eschewal of familial attachment in favour of sexual passion, an utopian quest for self-esteem and felicity, his consequent moral apathy and degradation of mentality, commitment of forgery with the subsequent finale — are integrated to Narayan’s textual politics of focusing the normative cultural equivalent to the average experience of ‘Indianness’ in the social milieu of colonial as well as postcolonial India.

It is interesting to note that Narayan’s search for culture does not remain confined to a mere projection of the normative image of India’s cultural reality. Narayan’s fictional presentation of India’s culture markedly differs from the cognitive dualism and negativist stereotyping prevalent in the works of say, Nirad.C.Chowdhury or V.S. Naipaul, notwithstanding their astute Westernised and Euro-Centric sensibility. The second part of the story, beginning from Raju’s release to his altruistic end, as revealed in Raju’s reminiscences to Velan, obviously traces a different level of the protagonist’s experiences, altogether contrary to the mode of experience stated in the main text dealing with Raju’s past.

In fact, this later stage of Raju’s life, right from his interaction with Velan up to his transformation (?) into a saint, forms the counter-text through which the writer tries to explore a teleological possibility of Indian cultural experience. It seeks to embody an emancipatory prospect that the writer thinks to be elusive to the Euro-Centric discursive structures of attitude and reference that propose
to explain Indian culture within the standard apppellations of social reality. The counter-text strategically sets the scene for a transcendence. Generating almost a 'negative capability' in Raju the jail-bird, it seems to conceptualise Narayan's positivist view of Indian culture that seems to be intertwined with every stratum of experience faced by Raju in an altering space and subject-character after imprisonment. Right from the inception, the narrative in the counter-text seeks to accentuate in an alternating mode of the autobiographical and authorial, a perception of transformation or change in Raju's experiences of prison-life and it is a fact that for affable and basically sentient persons, imprisonment has often been deemed in Indian culture to be a necessary evil, a system that often holds a chastening and even sublimating influence (one may remember the name of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh). It is the fixity of experience (within the confines of prison), free from the contamination of the outer world, that endears prison life to Raju and his acceptance of his lot with stoic fortitude, brings in him the illumination to detect a measure of authenticity in his new predicament:

I was considered a model prisoner. Now I realised that people generally thought of me as being unsound and worthless, not because I deserved the label, but because they had been seeing me in the wrong place all along. To appreciate me, they should really have come to the Central jail and watched me. (226)

For the first time in life, Raju gets the taste of a primeval reality and sheer joy of living in connection with his gardening experience:

I dug the earth and drew water from the well and tended it carefully. [...]. I grew huge brinjals and beans and cabbages. When they appeared on their stalks as tiny buds, I was filled with excitement. I watched them develop, acquire shape, change colour, shed the early parts. (227)
The words like ‘develop’, ‘acquire shape’, ‘change’ and ‘shed the early parts’ are problematic in so far as they can be applied to offer correlatives for Raju’s predicament that poses an emerging transformation in his being. Interestingly, Raju’s leaderly instinct persists and he becomes a ‘master of the show’ as a model prisoner, as a sincere follower of the superintendent and as a ‘way-shower’, the Vadhyar (Teacher) to his prison-mates. But it is unmistakable that, Raju’s bias for self-esteem (which is a part of his nature) now undergoes a different situation which leaves no room for materialistic gain or self-delusion and rather focuses a perception of the sheer joy at the purity and simplicity of living which liberates sensibility from the bondage of reality: “Oh, it seemed to be so good to be alive and feeling all this; the smell of freshly turned earth filled me with the greatest delight. If this was prison life, why didn’t more people take to it?” (229)

Critics in general seem to have missed out this height of realisation that dawns on Raju amidst his prison-experiences so as to usher in, a semblance of change, an urge for transformation in him that has little connection with the tendency for wrong judgement that motivated his earlier self. The brief stint of his jail-life is important in another respect which again, has not been aptly illumined by the critics. It is in the prison, that Raju reaps the harvest of his experiences with Rosie in the form of a knowledge that the latter has moved out of his life. Furthermore, Raju stands one more outrage of his fate in the form of his encounter (possibly the last one) with his mother that terminates with her blatant despair and self-pity for giving birth to a dud like Raju:

What a shame you have brought to yourself and on all known to you! I used to think that the worst that could happen to you might be death, as when you had that pneumonia for weeks; but I now wish that rather than survive and go through this… (231)
However, Narayan’s bold use of understatement, his bare narrative and ironic undertone do not hold back from the readers the nature and scope of such experiences for Raju whose sattva or the very being, has already begun to show some change or perceptive difference. It is very much possible that these extremities of personal experiences, the inanity of passion (Raju’s mental difference with Rosie) and the severance with the roots of his very being (Raju’s rupture with mother), paradoxically serve to whet Raju’s new-born affinity for his prisoner’s identity (which again is a marker of some transcendence in Raju). This change in Raju’s perception explains his emotional attachment to the prison at the time of his release after two years’ imprisonment: “I felt choked with tears when I had to go out after two years, [...]. I’d have been happy to stay in this prison permanently”(228). What, we may ask now, is the role of this prison? It seems that the prison here is not a Foucaultian panopticon, a state apparatus devised as a mode of surveillance. It is in fact largely ideational, a ‘vale of soul-making’ that brings about Raju’s regeneration and slowly brings him closer to his own cultural roots. So it is this Raju (who has changed a lot from his earlier existence; no matter how far this change issues from choice or circumstances), that Velan meets near a broken shrine.

Raju’s interaction with Velan at the broken temple (that he chooses as shelter instead of his old familiar Malgudi), his involvement with the interest of Velan and the Villagers of Mangal (being prompted by his basic instinct of volunteering guidance to others), his rise to the stature of a Mahatma, his enforced fast to end a drought and an attainment of altruistic spirit before his collapse – form the falling action of story that receives adequate critical attention and explication from the critics. However, the prevalent criticism more or less exalts the transformation in Raju as a miracle of faith and this transformation as if comes sui generis as it happens in the case of the ‘Valmiki-Ratnakar myth’. Seldom there has been a conscious critical effort to problematise this transformation in Raju as a part of Narayan’s textual strategy of exploring the cultural matrix of Indian reality that ever opens up a dimension
of transcendence. It is significant that the counter-text maps Raju’s experiences in an altogether different cultural space symbolised by Mangala which represents the unsoiled stratum of Indian culture where faith in God, Yogis and miracles co-exist with feuds and struggles for existence, where traditional values are enshrined even amidst the stringent trials of faith. It is a textual strategy of Narayan in the shifting of his ethos from Malgudi, a hybridised locale where Raju fails to cope up with reality, to Magala where Raju’s self-esteem and guiding instinct is set to negotiate a different ordeal of faith and expectation from a simple minded, believing community. It is true that Raju’s sense of humour (which according to Krishna Sen is his redeeming feature that never fails him at any stage of experience) and Narayan’s famous understatement, detached irony and the art of ‘omission’(Ram 4), seem to discourage, according to critics like Robert Towers, Prof. Iyenger and V. Y. Kantak, any critical attempt to discover either a message in Narayan’s novels or a writerly attention to any such possibility. Even though the counter-text shows at the outset, Narayan’s comic-ironic mode of narration in Raju’s first meeting with Velan which conspicuously marks Raju’s amused reaction to the reverential behaviour of Velan, Raju does not fail to discover some unusual depth of his own sensibility notwithstanding his conscious display of a philosophic appearance and illumination to the latter. Velan’s posture of reverence without any ostensible reasons irks Raju. Yet when Velan broaches upon his personal problem, Raju reacts with a nod of allowance in the fashion of a spiritual guide or a ‘guru’ and delivers a consequent string of revealing and illuminating comments:

‘I have a problem Sir’, said the man. Raju nodded his head and added, ‘so has everyone’, in a sudden access of pontificality’. […] ‘If you show me a person without a problem, then I will show you the perfect world. Do you know what the great Buddha said?’ […]. ‘If you show me a single home without a problem, I shall show you the way to attain a universal solution to all problems’. (14-15)
It is true that these philosophic statements have a ‘weightiness’ to cast a desired spell on a simpleton like Velan who ‘was of the stuff disciples are made of’(19).

Narayan’s ironic thrust at Raju’s assumption of the role of a saint also becomes conspicuous when he speaks of Raju: ‘He had gradually come to view himself as a master of these occasions. He had already begun to feel that the adulation directed to him was inevitable’(18). It is as if like a seasoned spiritual guide in Indian society, that Raju treats Velan’s personal problem regarding his sister’s negotiated marriage: “We can not force vital solutions. Every question must bide its time.[...].And to arrive at a proper understanding, time is needed”(21-22). Such a mode of reaction with sermon-like sayings on the part of Raju, is seized by critics like Krishna Sen in particular, as the unmistakable instance of Raju’s motivated showmanship, his instinctive urge for self-esteem in order to secure his practical needs of food and shelter in an altered situation.

In respect of Raju’s encounter with Velan and the villagers, Krishna Sen has located Raju’s conscious effort for role-playing with his growing belief in appearance as the reality: “He wants to limit his role to that of a play-acting Swami, who will utter mysterious profundities to soothe their minds in exchange for food and obeisance...” (44). Another critic B.S. Yadav in his psycho-philosophic and socio-ethical study of the novel, terms Raju as a ‘practical psychologist’ who capitalises his ‘fair understanding of human nature’(24). It is very much likely that these criticisms get much support from Narayan’s characteristic ironic mode of narration as revealed in this early chapter of the counter-text: “Raju felt he was growing wings. Shortly he felt he might float in the air and perch himself on the tower of an ancient temple”(22). But it is note-worthy that these observations do not seem to be valid as one reads the lines that follow the authorial expression just quoted above: “Nothing was going to surprise him. Suddenly he finds himself asking “Have I been in a prison or in some sort of transmigration?”(22). This kind of self-interrogation
undeniably denotes a conscious change in the sensibility of Raju and keeping in view Raju’s lack of formal education and enlightenment, one may suggest that the spontaneity of the highly philosophic truths of his statements and his cautious display of an unattached spirit undoubtedly show in him, a measure of transcendence that has begun to take place during his experiences at the prison. Raju’s speech to Velan (who has come with his disobedient step-sister to Raju with a hope for a miraculous change in her attitude to a settled marriage) at the end of chapter One, is also equally revealing in so far as, it problematises the concepts of Fatalism and Pre-determinism and the Indian status-quo mentality, (the issues that can seldom occur to a naïve charlatan or a con-man): “What must happen, must happen; no power on earth or in heaven can change its course, just as no one can change the course of that river’ (22). However, Raju’s fatalistic approach to the problem relating to Velan’s sister may be a safe strategy for him to keep himself aloof from the villagers’ affairs as far as practicable. But it is surprising that the girl shows a positive change in attitude and for Velan such a happy turn in his family is nothing but a ‘miracle’ on the part of Raju and it generates in Velan, a feeling of reverence. William Walsh, a sensitive critic of Narayan, however analyses Velan’s response to Raju as merely part of a reciprocal formality, a quality that character accrues from tradition: “Politeness, which makes the apparently impressive Raju more pliable, also makes the humbly deferential Velan the more effective. The civility which each uses to the other is [...] part of the essence of character” (15).

Velan’s attitude, however baffling to Western intelligence, is an unfailing proof of what Krishna Sen points out - “the quintessentially Indian emotional response to the spontaneous, implicit, unquestioning faith in a person perceived to be a holy man” (91). A critic named Bill Bennet 12 has sceptically rationalised Velan’s (and consequently the villagers’s) response to Raju thus:
Regardless of the lack of practical worth of his advice, or his utter lack of authority to be giving it, his ability to present advice in a convincing format makes him invaluable to the villagers [...]. They are simple people, who are willing to ascribe mystical power to anything unusual. (par 2)

This critic views Raju's ceremonious acting as a discreet method to impress the villagers. This inference specifically refers to Raju's placing of the edibles brought by Velan and his sister, before the stone image of the God and his random tale of the mythical Devaka though Raju himself is not sure of 'either its course or its purport'. Yet Raju resorts to a ceremonious stage of acting in a manner appropriate for the holyman and succeeds in convincing Velan's sister that she has been in the presence of a higher being and that her own desires must be petty. However, it is obvious that, inspite of Raju's self-consciousness ('I have had enough trouble in life'), his present predicament shows that he not merely negotiates the logical dividends of his wise sayings, ceremonial acting and rational predictions, but gradually moves towards a new trick of circumstances or even destiny. Narayan has presented this dilemma in Raju. This is noticed when Velan comes to Raju with the happy news related to his sister.

'I do not want to delay even for a second the happy event'. 'For fear that she may change her mind once again?' Raju asked. He knew why Velan was rushing it through at this pace. It was easy to guess why. But the remark threw the other into a fit of admiration, and he asked, 'How did you know what I had in mind, sir?' Raju remained silent. He could not open his lips without provoking admiration. This was a dangerous state of affairs. (29)

Inspite of his effort to 'debunk' his image in the eyes of Velan ('There is nothing extraordinary in my guess'), he fails to dispel Velan's undue reverence:
“Not for you to say that, sir. Things may look easy enough for a giant, but ordinary poor mortals like us can never know what goes on in other people’s minds” (29-30). Velan’s statement leaves a cautionary impact on Raju’s sensibility: “He was beginning to dread his own smartness now a days. He was afraid to open his lips. A vow of silence was indicated, but there was greater danger in silence” (30). It is unfortunate that critics fail to note this conscious modulation of behaviour in Raju (which in its own right, shows a measure of transcendence from his earlier self) and they locate change in him only at the last part of the novel when Raju willy-nilly, undertakes the fast to put an end to the drought in the village. It is clear that Raju’s guiding instinct has led him, whether he likes it or not, to a phase-shift of experience where community-consciousness confers on him the stature of a holy man whose very presence, act or even silence, are expected to yield something positive. Raju’s predicament can be termed as Narayan’s strategic use of a major sociological reality in India that shows adoration for Swamijis for allegedly having occult powers. Ramesh Sree has pointed out in this connection: “It has its roots in the ageless past of India, and is deeply embedded in the collective unconscious mind of the Indian psyche. Even in the post-colonial scenario ‘Swamijis enjoy acceptability and popularity’”(211). As to the question how far these Swamijis like Raju merit this popular deference, the counter-text in the novel seeks to envision a certain extent of transcendence of self in Raju. It is true that out of Raju’s own accord, a certain compromise with situation has been made for practical reasons - shelter and, more or less, a regular supply of food. But the turn of events that follow the case of Velan’s sister, is simply the saga of India’s spiritual history where faith and unconditioned dependence bring miraculous change in a character, where community-consciousness overpowers the Western choice of Individualism. An important facet of oriental philosophy demonstrates that the outer order of a character if observed carefully, influences and finally becomes the inner pattern itself. One may instinctively remember that oft-mentioned mythic story of a fisherman who breaks into the king’s garden one night in order to steal fishes. When the guards sense
something amiss and begin the chase, the fisherman smears himself with ashes and sits under a tree like a Sadhu. People take him for what he looks and worship him. This fact leads the man to a realisation that if a show earns him so much respect, a real effort might bring him the greatest good and finally he renounces the world in search of God. Therefore, Raju's coming to the broken temple, his chance-encounter with Velan, the fluke of his little bit of showmanship administered to impress Velan and his sister, have set in motion an imperceptible order, a mechanic of community-consciousness, faith and dependence (that thwarts Raju's individual choice and action). Raju in a sense, subscribes to an Indian tradition of spiritual culture. It is only natural then that Raju's 'circle was gradually widening' (31). But in the context of Raju's psychic reaction to the phenomenon of deferential attention of the villagers, it must be mentioned that a sense of stoic acceptance, a semblance of fortitude and detachment which are symptomatic of some change and transformation in him (that set in since his imprisonment), begin to be apparent in his new role of a moderately 'reluctant guru' who in reality, thinks of his own salvation from the popular ordeal of faith. As Raju has learnt to change under the burden of his ignoble past, he learns faster inwardly now, to appropriate the new role or the ordeal of existence till the vesture becomes the essence at the end.

The guru-shishya relationship between Raju and the villagers of Mangala, even if the 'guru' is a partly reluctant sort, shows a compatibility with the known cultural format of the 'eternal'India which shows the spiritual mentor's experiences unfolding in the matrix of the disciples's unswerving faith and acceptance. As the novelist charts the graph of Raju's experience:

Velan, at the end of his day's agricultural toil, came and sat on the lower step. If Raju spoke, he listened; otherwise he accepted the silence with equal gratitude, got up without a word when darkness fell, and moved away. Gradually, unnoticed, a few others began to arrive very regularly. Raju could not very well question who they were;[...]. He
didn't have to say a word to anyone; [...] and tried hard to think where he should go next and what to do. They did not so much as whisper a word for fear that it might disturb him. Raju was beginning to feel uncomfortable on these occasions, [...]" (31)

The last sentence in the quotation brings out Raju's honesty to his own conscience and one evening, in a half-hearted bid of withdrawal, he hides himself in a hibiscus bush and the conversations of the villagers on his absence reveal their respect and faith:

Said one, 'Where could he have gone?'

'He is a big man, he may go anywhere; he may have a thousand things to do.' (31-32)

'... He has renounced the world; he does nothing but meditate. What a pity he is not here today!' (32)

'We won’t have to fear anything more; it is our good fortune that this great soul should have come to live in our midst. (32)

'Do you know sometimes these yogis can travel to the Himalayas just by a thought?' (32)

Noticing how the villagers' veneration spirals upward for a man like him, the 'reluctant guru' Raju feels obliged to give his future course of action a serious thought: 'He had to decide on his future to day' (33). Return to his former cultural space (Malgudi) with the inevitable experiences of 'giggles and stares for a few days' seems to be an unedifying prospect to Raju. Inability to 'make a living out of hard work' due to the lack of training, is another handicap for Raju. Now, none of these prospects would provide him with his foremost necessity - food, which is claimed to be like God to an empty stomach. Only
prison life, Raju thinks, might cater to this requirement. But it had earlier come to him not as a matter of choice, but circumstances. So, to Raju's sensibility, his present predicament as a guide to this leaderless simple village-community is the only option left with him since it will provide the barest modicum of sustenance—'Food was coming to him unasked now' (33). So it is clear that much forethought and speculation precede: Raju's decision to meet the demand of the situation facing him: "He realized that he had no alternative: he must play the role that velan had given him" (33). Raju's self-introspection and analysis have been duly textualised by Narayan as a mark of Raju's evolving self-consciousness, a trait, which strangely has not been adequately explained by the critics. The point is that, this evolving consciousness of the 'self' has been accompanying him since his imprisonment and does not come *sui generis* only at the last stage of the story when Raju obliges willfully to undertake the fast. It is true that Raju's identification of the self with community becomes perfect at that stage, yet we notice at every stage of Raju's experience, the continuity of a process of transcendence which ultimately leads to the climax. This continuity or the process has to be perceived of course, under the superficial veneer of actions which are ostensibly prompted by Raju's instinctive urge for offering guidance and help in the garb of a showman's self-esteem. Raju's determination to play his new role to perfection betrays a dramatic objectivity in him so as to re-organise his acts and moves to help and guide the dependent villagers whatever their expectation be. The ironic ring in the narration hints at the inner dialectic of appearance and reality, of a showman's initiative and an evolving sensibility for offering help and guidance to those who really need them:

With his mind made up he prepared to meet Velan and his friends in the evening. He sat as usual on the stone slab with beatitude and calm in his face.[...] He had observed silence as a precaution. But that fear was now gone. He decided to look as brilliant as he could manage, let drop gems of thought from his lips, assume all the radiance available, and afford
them all the guidance they required without stint. He decided to arrange the stage for the display with more thoroughness. (33-34)

It is not surprising that the ceremonious play-acting in Raju, traceable in his treatment of the village teacher and his pupils, is actually a part of his strategic move towards the acquisition of this ‘thoroughness’ of an accomplished guide to the villagers of Mangala: ‘He went up to young boys and asked ‘What are you studying?’ in the manner of big men he had seen in cities’(44). In response to the disappointing reaction from the students (‘No school for us’), ‘Raju clicked his tongue in disapproval. He shook his head’. Readers find further cogent, masterful strokes of impressiveness on the part of Raju. With characteristic humour and irony, Narayan depicts the extent of Raju’s appropriation of the role of a ‘way-shower’ to the masses. In fact, Raju’s unstinted display of showmanship at this stage is a logical sequel to his deliberate choice of an existence (that he can stay nowhere other than in this temple in the midst of the villagers) and his re-definition of roles necessitated by a cultural appropriation. He gradually tries to prove himself as an ingenious promoter of the cause of enlightenment. Learning that boys have no school, it is notable how Raju reacts as if on an inspiration: ‘If they cannot find the time to read during the day, why should they not gather in the evenings and learn?’ When someone asks ‘where’? Raju says, ‘May be here’, pointing at the temple hall. Later Raju’s interaction with the village school master reveals Raju’s zeal to prove his concern for the education of the children as a part of his ‘overwhelming altruism’: ‘It’s our duty to make everyone happy and wise’(46). Raju’s conversation with the teacher has no doubt been presented with a comic-ironic tone of the omniscient narrator, ostensibly to highlight the element of showmanship or stuntism on the part of a classic master of appearance. But it may also be said that Narayan perhaps tries to show here that Raju works for an abnegation of his ignoble past and moves towards a positive struggle for the future. So when the teacher submits to the force of Raju’s guidance and openly acknowledges Raju’s influence (‘I will do
anything’ he said ‘under your guidance’), Raju expresses the sanity of his perception regarding his experiment with the ‘self’: ‘I am but an instrument accepting guidance myself’ (46). Again, when the teacher apologises for the negligible number of boys present at the temple hall on the ground of their fear of crocodiles in crossing the river in the dark, Raju’s instant reaction is notably pregnant with some rudimentary concepts of Indian spiritualism that valorise the power of the ‘self’ over external, elemental forces of nature: “What can a crocodile do to you if your mind is clear and your conscience is untroubled?” (46).

Raju’s statement is reminiscent of Narayan’s oft-quoted reference to a sixteenth-century Tamil mystic who defined the real feat of human beings as – ‘to still the restless mind and understand one’s real self” (My Days 149).

It is therefore, not a phenomenon of mere concoction, a made-to-order stuff of gimmick on the part of any classic fraud, that traditional criticism tends to hold. Notwithstanding his conscious knack for a thorough role-playing for practical purpose, it is obvious that some change has already set in, in the being of Raju, independent of his choice and this shock of revelation though in the minimal form, makes self-consciousness its first target before procuring any extraneous correlative.

To put it clearly, the author’s comic-ironic mode of delineating Raju’s experiences does not appear to foreground the element of showmanship; instead, it seems to be an objective delineation of Raju’s amazement in the evolving perception of something new and unforeseen in his own behavioural pattern and consciousness: “He was surprised at the amount of wisdom welling from the depths of his being.” (47) When the teacher requests Raju to speak to the boys whatever he can, Raju speaks to them on godliness, cleanliness, the Ramayana, the characters of epics and other things. Here too, Raju experiences a sense of self-discovery: “He was hypnotised by his own voice: he felt himself
growing in stature as he saw the upturned faces of the children shining in the half-light when he spoke. No one was more impressed with the grandeur of the whole thing than Raju himself"(47).

But the repercussions of Raju’s philosophising slowly and surely cast him into a familiar ‘guru-shishya’ pattern of relationship vis-à-vis the villagers and this relation follows a rule of its own, necessitating a process of illumination on the part of a conscientious ‘guru even if he turns reluctant’. As Narayan describes: “Velan ventured to suggest, ‘Give us a discourse, sir’. And as Raju was listening without showing any emotion, but looking as if he were in deep contemplation, Velan added ‘So that we may have the benefit of your wisdom’ ”(50). Raju’s perception of his own predicament corresponds to the acceptance of destiny by a ‘reluctant guru’: “Raju felt cornered. ‘I have to play the part expected of me; there is no escape”(51). However, Raju’s sanity of self-analysis is noticeable even in his helpless awareness of identity-crisis which has been imposed upon him by Velan and the other villagers. Narayan aptly presents the ingenuity of Raju’s problem:

He felt bored. The only subject on which he could speak with any authority now seemed to be jail life and its benefits, especially for one mistaken for a saint. They waited respectfully for his inspiration. (51)

Raju’s deliberate tips, intended to get rid of the awkwardness of his situations (like ‘all things have to wait their hour’, or ‘I will speak to you when another day comes’ or ‘I will advise you to pass the hour brooding over all your speech and actions form morning till now’), however produce no positive effect on Velan and his men. On the contrary, Velan’s instant reaction once more indicates an age-old tradition of community-dependence on and automatic deference for persons who are accepted as spiritual guides or mentors:
How can we do that, sir? We dig the land and mind the cattle – so far so good, but how can we think philosophies? Not our line, master. It is not possible. It is wise persons like your good self who should think for us.

(52)

What Raju experiences hereafter, appears to the readers to be a ritualistic observance of adulations that are conferred on a person who is taken for a saint though the question how far the person concerned actually deserves it, remains, especially in the context of Raju’s conscious play-acting. But it is noticeable that Raju is slowly yet surely coming out of his old tendency for wrong judgement. He moves along the right track of performance in the given setting of helpless dependence of the villagers: ‘The essence of sainthood seemed to lie in one’s ability to utter mystifying statements’(52). As ever he has tried to perfect his role, here too, Raju starts methodically by holding his regular assembly with specific programmes like chanting of holy songs with rhythmic beats and using refrains to be repeated by the audience. It is interesting to note that, Raju’s willing participation attracts unstinted respect from the disciples. Narayan’s description highlights here this Indian aspect of popular devotion to the Swamiji and his place as a divine sanctum:

The ancient ceiling echoed with the voices of men, women, and children repeating sacred texts in unison. Someone had brought in tall bronze lamps and lit them [...]. People brought of their own accord little framed pictures of gods and hung them on the pillars. Very soon women started to come [...] to wash the floor and decorate it with patterns in coloured flour; they hung up flowers and greenery and festoons everywhere. The pillared hall was transformed. (53)

In accordance with his role, Raju also modifies his appearance with “an apostolic beard caressing his chest”. He undergoes various ‘prickly’ phases of make-up with fortitude to acquire the looks of a holyman. Narayan’s textual
mapping of Raju’s evolution into the stature of a saint corroborates the mythic parables that relate to the making of a Swami or a God-man who is believed to posses some dubious occult powers. Ramesh Sree in his analysis quotes from James Frazer and writes that there are two types of human gods who can conveniently be distinguished as the religious and the magical man-god respectively. According to Sree, “It is the magical man-god whose modern prototype is the Swamiji’s with occult powers who usually hold sway” and “Raju’s case proves identical with the position of this modern man-god” (213). The following extract amply illustrates Narayan’s articulate presentation of the preparatory stage, the making of Raju as a man-god to the villagers of Mangal:

By the time he arrived at the stage of stroking his beard thoughtfully, his prestige had grown beyond his wildest dreams. His life had lost its personal limitations;[...]. He seemed to belong to the world now. His influence was unlimited. He not only chanted holy verses and discoursed on philosophy, he even came to the stage of prescribing medicine; children who would not sleep peacefully at night were brought to him by their mothers; he pressed their bellies and prescribed a herb, [...]. It was believed that when he stroked the head of a child, the child improved in various ways. (53- 54)

Objectively speaking, the description jestures to some transcendental power in Raju’s personality similar to that of the magical man-gods. It is also notable that this role of Raju is, however, not merely confined to the domain of the physical and spiritual aspects of life, but it also extends to the trivial, worldly matters like division of ancestral properties. Thus it is circumstances rather than choice, that primarily project Raju’s plight to a forced altitude; but this existence generates in him with time, a serenity of self and a consequent charm in appearance that match a person outgrowing into a saint or a Mahatma. Chapter Six opens with the account of Raju as one who is being slowly yet surely moulded into the stature of a saint and strikingly, the following
description seems to unravel to the sensible readers, some teleologic possibility:

Several months (or perhaps years) had passed [...] He kept a rough count of time thus, from the beginning of the year to its end through its seasons of sun, rain and mist. He kept count of three cycles and then lost count. [...] His beard now caressed his chest, his hair covered his back, and around his neck he wore a necklace of prayer-beads. His eyes shone with softness and compassion, the light of wisdom emanated from them. (90)

It may be noted that Narayan’s description here is strangely free from his habitual ironic implications. Equally revealing is Raju’s conscientious reaction (‘I am a poor man and you are poor men, why do you give me all this?) to the community’s jestures of adulation manifest in the expensive gifts like huge crysanthemum garlands, jasmine and rose-petals. The authorial comment once again serves to highlight the spontaneity of devotion in the villagers who are keen on conferring godhood on the entity of Raju:

But it was not possible to stop the practice; they loved to bring him gifts. He came to be called Swami by his congregation, and where he lived was called the temple. It was passing into common parlance. (91)

It can be argued with considerable justification that Raju’s slow, yet conspicuous transformation in his personality, the reciprocal concretisation of the villagers’s faith in him and Narayan’s objective treatment of these two aspects, collectively seem to convince the readers, at this point of the narrative, of some degrees of authenticity in Raju, some measure of calibration in him that can withstand the last ordeal to prove the true mettle of a guide in him.
Unfortunately, this element of textual authentication on the part of the writer to rationalise Raju’s maturity, has not received much critical attention. All this evolution in Raju’s own self as well as in his society, takes place unhindered until the climax comes in Raju’s life with the failure of rains in the locality and a curious turn of events caused by over-hearing and mis-reporting of what he has actually said. Narayan’s use of this element of chance as if serves a causal necessity to entangle Raju with a course of events that seek to galvanise him into the role of a saint, a phenomenon of the spiritual and also the sociological reality of Indian cultural life. Raju, who has by now developed a feeling for the well-being of the villagers, now senses an emerging change in his world with the villagers. A veritable panic of drought has stifled the spirit of the community: “The talk was always about the rains. People listened to discourses and philosophy with only half-interest. They sat round, expressing their fears and hopes.”(92). Narayan offers a sensible rendering of an encroaching disaster and a rationale on the role of philosophy in such a changing situation: ‘...a situation was developing which no comforting word or discipline of thinking could help’ (93). The gruelling tension, coupled with sure signs of famine (the wells in the village drying up, the earth getting perched and cracked) disturbs the quietude of life in Mangala and soon Raju witnesses the villagers being embroiled in acrimonious activities like strife, distrust, feuds and litigations. The granaries of the previous years remain unreplenished in most of the houses with their level alarmingly going down and it is only natural that, gifts to Raju shrink in size and volume. Added to this, Raju witnesses via-media, growing feuds and litigations among the villagers. He takes stock of the new developments from a half-witted fellow who happens to be Velan’s brother. Raju feels disturbed at these unwanted developments partly because of his soft corner for Velan and partly because of his natural aversion to commotion which ‘might affect the isolation of the place and bring the police on the scene’. However, on a sudden fit of serious thinking, Raju vehemently orders this man to communicate to Velan and others, his urge for peace which in case of violation, might result in Raju’s denial of food: ‘Tell your brother, immediately whatever he may be, that unless they are good, I’ll never eat’(100). What follows, is an unfortunate misrepresentation, a garbled
message that gives rise to a rumour that the Swami would not touch food until it rains. It is obvious that Raju chooses a wrong man to convey his message. The half-witted village moron fails to connect ‘fight’ with ‘This man’s food’. When he reaches the villagers discussing on rain and other local issues, he out of his fear of the elders for reporting to the Swami of the feud (which was the last thing the villagers would have liked to bring to the Swami’s attention), relays the Swami’s message in a jumbled manner saying that the Swami has refused food to bring about rains. This element of misinterpretation, arising out of unclear intelligence, is only a part of Narayan’s narrative strategy to connect Raju with the problem that forms the major focus of the counter-text. The problems of the ensuing drought, ‘the problems that man faced form time immemorial’, in the opinion of Ramesh Sree, ‘surfaced to the ill-luck of Raju’ (213).

But the message surprisingly, conduces to a sense of unity among the villagers with a fragmented mental condition: ‘the atmosphere became electrified. They forgot the fight and all their troubles and bickerings. The village was astir. Everything else seemed inconsequential now’ (103). The community wakes up to a possibility of a miracle on the basis of its assumed messiahnic potentiality in Raju, the new ‘Mahatma’ in Mangala: “This Mangala is a blessed country to have a man like the Swami in our midst. [...] He is like Mahatma [...]. If he fasts there will be rain” (102). Raju, who is unaware of the overnight spate in the villagers’s faith in him, initially fails to realise why they come without food and why the gathering addresses him as a ‘Mahatma’ and talk of his penance. But soon he wakes from the spell of self-respect (‘that his personality radiated a glory’) induced by a heightened show of reverence, to reality when Velan gives him a clear-cut account of what his brother has told them and what Raju is expected to do – stand in knee-deep of water, look at the skies and utter prayer lines for two weeks completely fasting during this period – ‘and, lo, the rains would come down, provided the man who performed it was a pure soul, was a great soul’ (109).
Significantly, even before Raju has the time to grasp the magnitude of his ordeal, ‘the earnestness’ with which Velan speaks, ‘brings tears to Raju’s eyes’. This fact leaves no scope of doubt about some inner transmutation of feeling in Raju, about an emerging transcendence in him away from the self-oriented theory of existence that has earlier led him by the nose. Narayan here sensibly records the inner turmoils of self-introspection and judgement in Raju whose mind by now, has learnt to think beyond the material interests related to his self. With the detection of a necessity (‘... time had come to him to be serious – to attach value to his own words’); Raju now realises the enormity of his stature in the eyes of the villagers and his own contributions to his predicament: “He now saw the enormity of his own creation. He had created a giant with his puny self, a throne of authority with that slab of stone” (109). Raju finds that there is no escape from this position, notwithstanding his equanimity and mental agility. In a last bid to extricate himself from the ‘noose of faith’ drawing near, and also to dispel the illusion in the villagers about taking Raju for a born ‘Mahatma’, Raju now narrates to Velan his whole story right from his boyhood to his release from the jail with an expectation that Velan’s disillusionment would deliver him at least from his present crisis. Raju’s pretty lengthy, detailed account of his past (covering chapters 7 to 10) takes a whole night and concludes with daybreak. But to Raju’s utter surprise, Velan’s reaction seems typical of a disciple who retains faith even amidst all trials and tribulations: ‘I don’t know why you tell me all this, Swami’ (232-233). Velan’s retension of faith in Raju inspite of the latter’s unpleasant past, corresponds to Indians’ age-old, unquestioning faith in holy men who are thought fit to perform miracles. Krishna Sen has traced in Velan’s unperturbed reverence for Raju ‘the more visceral level of faith’ (92) as explicated in mythic stories like, say, that of Valmiki who rose to sainthood from a sinful past. In a slightly different vein of criticism, Ramesh Sree links Velan’s unflinching faith in Raju with India’s primitive, ritualistic faith in Swamijis who notwithstanding their ‘dubious occult powers’, hold a permanent niche in the Indian psyche. Whatever it may be, Velan’s unshaken faith in him prevents
any possibility of escape for Raju who can do nothing but resign to his lot: ‘This man will finish me before I know where I am’ (233). With Raju’s helpless acceptance of the ordeal, practically the primitive ritual of invocation and penance for rain starts. Narayan’s genius as a sensitive, realistic Indian writer comes out as he holds mirror to the spontaneous response that Raju’s enforced fast creates in the locality of Mangala village. It wears the pomp and éclat of a festival in keeping with the tradition that village rituals have enshrined for centuries. Narayan here splendidly catches the essential flavour of eternal India in featuring the carnivalesque character of the mela issuing from Raju’s penance to usher in rains. Krishna Sen here detects Narayan’s use of irony in the treatment of this festivity centering round Raju’s fast and writes: “The incident humorously demonstrates the way in which the Indian masses can turn any situation, trivial or grave, into an occasion for a mela or fiesta” (93). This opinion however is partly justified in diagnosing the writer’s attitude. It is true that humour and irony are inextricably linked with Narayan’s fictional art. But in the Indian cultural milieu, spiritualism and anything related to religion evoke the maximum of public interest, no matter how far adept the person or the persons performing or organising them are. Narayan’s reference to the fads and fetishes originating from Raju’s penance as stated below, is then to be viewed as a part of his strategy as a realistic fiction writer. A wandering journalist picks up the news and circulates it to all the towns in India with the headline – ‘Holyman’s penance to end drought’. This is the starting point at which public interest catches fire. There is a day-to-day newspaper coverage on how the saint has walked to the river, ‘stood knee-deep of water from six to eight in the morning, muttering something in his lips, his eyes shut, his palms pressed together in a salute to the gods’ (233). The Government gets moved and sends a commission to inquire into the drought condition and prescribe remedies. Special trains and buses are provided for visitors coming from all over the country. The Health department arranges for campaigns for B.C.G. vaccination and awareness of diseases like Plague, Malaria etc. etc. Shops shoot up everywhere around the temple overnight. Even gambling-booths, muscle-show
and film-shows come to join the carnival throbbing with a constant rush of men, women and children. Microphones mounted on tree-tops, blare with popular hit songs. Now the government also conducts mass-awareness drives with ad-films on dams, river-valleys and various projects. Peddlers in the mela are busy vending balloons, red whistles and sweets. The whole scenario receives a cosmopolitan tinge when Narayan introduces Mr. Malone, a California based television-programmer who has come to shoot Raju’s jestures of penance to cater to the foreigner’s interest in ‘exotic’ religious observance in India. In fact, the introduction of Malone and his objective by Narayan, is another version of Raju’s commodification of Rosie’s Bharatnatyam dance as has already been hinted in this chapter.

What emerges from Raju’s authentic development and the festivity associated with it, is a bi-polar pattern of culture with Narayan’s subversive use of the centre-periphery paradigm. The counter-text seeks to establish through Raju’s transcendence of his ‘self’, an eternal and to some extent, a perceptive aspect of Indian culture. The closing pages graphically present the emerging change in Raju from the persisting obsessions with ‘self’ to the abnegation of ‘self’. In the early phase of the fast, Raju manages with left over foods reserved in the inner sanctum and eats them on the sly. But when the stock gets exhausted, he has to bear starvation with angst and a vindictive self-dignity:

He had his back to the wall, there was no further retreat.
This realization helped him to get through the trial with a little more resignation.[...] Velan ought to know, yet the fool would not stop thinking that he was a saviour. (236)

Raju’s impression of Velan is unambiguous: “this single man was responsible for his present plight!” (236). Yet, it is surprising that, a sudden rush of pity for Velan breeds in Raju an abrupt change in his psychology. On the fourth day of the fast Raju suddenly feels touched by the sight of the poor fellow (Velan)
who ‘lay asleep out of exertion is straining himself in order to make the penance a success’. Being left without any other option of escape, Raju’s fast flickers on a sudden impulse of fellow-feeling: “Why not give the poor devil a chance?” (237) His awakened soul castigates any thought of the ‘self’: “He felt enraged at the persistence of food-thoughts”. He adopts a ‘vindictive resolution’ to purge his being of all corporeal feelings: ‘...I shall eradicate all thoughts of tongue and stomach from my mind’.

This is the real turning point after all those false starts earlier. This is the beginning of the real and ultimate transcendence in Raju which shows henceforth a steady progress without a moment’s fluctuation. The resolution to rise above corporeal feelings gives him ‘a peculiar strength’ as the writer notes:

‘If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?’ For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort; for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him a new strength to go through with the ordeal. (237-238)

Raju’s inner transformation lends an active interest to his saintly performances and the ‘fourth day of his fast found him quite sprightly’ and “lack of food gave him a peculiar floating feeling which he rather enjoyed with the thought in the background, ‘This enjoyment is something Velan can not take away from me’ ”(238). This enjoyment of Raju reveals a veritable aspect of Indian spiritualism which supplements a lessening sensation to physical propensities with the emergence of some purely spiritual ecstasy. The semblance of Raju’s experience to that of Indian Yoga however, can not be ruled out simply because he becomes a saint more by accident than out of his own accord. Raju’s condition here subscribes much to the ideal of Jivan-Mukta stage of a Yogi as
explicated in Indian spiritualism. It is said to be a state in which a saint has ceased to have any involvement or attachment in his actions and yet who resserves the ability to sympathise and remonstrate with ordinary men. R.K. Narayan’s fictional presentation of Gandhi and his impact ostensibly corresponds much to this trait of Indian spiritual discourse. After the transcendence of his narrow ‘self’, Raju’s emotional identification with the purport of the penance, his refusal of saline and glucose, his appropriation of the Jivan-Mukta state should leave no trace of ambiguity about the ingenuity of Raju’s self-sacrifice. However, with the increasing ‘hum of humanity’, Raju’s penance slowly approaches perfection. Narayan faithfully records the halo that Raju’s penance radiates in the fashion of the saints and Swami’s in India: ‘A large crowd stood around and watched the saint with profound awe’. Along with the darshan inside the temple, the ‘air rang with the music of a few who had chosen to help the Swami by sitting near him, singing devotional songs to the accompaniment of a harmonium and tabala’(241). These arrangements as jestures of veneration are very common in Indian society and are meant for a spiritual guru or a religious mentor who is supposed, either to show the way to God or to prepare for some altruistic feat. Raju’s sincere observance of the fast weakens his health; the Government becomes worried over his condition. On the eleventh day of the fast, doctors prescribe glucose and medicine but Raju refuses to break his fast. Persuasions fail, Raju asks Velan to help him to his feet, manages to totter up to the river-basin with Velan’s help halting for breath at every step and sags down uttering his valedictory speech that seemingly ushers in rains with a beatific conclusion of Raju’s saintly performance: “Velan, I can hear the rains upon the hills,[...] under my feet’ (247).

Whether it finally rains or not, is immaterial in the final reckoning of the fact that the self-oriented man has passed the ordeal of self-renunciation. The quality of transcendence which takes its origin in his prison-experiences, has now come up toconsummation in the end. Bill Bennet has traced two distinctive qualities that confer heroism on the character of Raju. One of them
is courage and the other depends, according to this critic, implicitly 'on the question of moral relativism' which is —'acquisition of admiration for achievement and qualities'. Raju's courage comes out first in his emotional dedication of himself to the fast. Next, he demonstrates his courage in his uncompromising allegiance to the fast and the penance despite the appeals of doctors and government officials to save himself. An ordinary, weak-willed man would have run away from the show on any excuse, yet Raju even in the depth of his weakness, staggers to his praying post and sags down in the process. About the other criterion of heroism, Bennet contends that Raju becomes a hero in the eyes of the villagers who really needed a hero in him. The mechanism of faith and dependence elevates Raju to the expected altitude of respect and courage, that can be claimed only by a hero.

In his essay titled "Reluctant Guru", Narayan has written: "My novel The Guide was not about the saints or the pseudo-saints in India, but about a particular person"(101). In the same context he also disapproves of taking a work of fiction as 'a sociological study or a social document'. The above extract clearly highlights Narayan’s dislike for the overbearingly academic tendencies of present-day literary criticism. Now, inspite of Narayan’s exclusive interest in the individual, one has to admit what Wilbur Scott thinks: “Art is not created in a vaccum. It is a work not simply of a person, but of an author fixed in a time and space, answering to a community of which he is an important because articulate part”(124). Therefore, Raju’s transcendence, apart from an achievement of an individual, does also reflect that timeless, unchanging aspect of Indian culture that deals with spiritualism, mysticism, the ideal of renunciation and the Swamis. Indian culture survives through ages even in the socio-political turmoils caused by the colonial experience. This aspect of Indian life has been illumiated by Narayan in his essay "India and America": 'the quality of life in India is different. Inspite of all the differences, irritations, lack of material comforts and amenities and general confusions, Indian life builds an inner strength'(239). Raju’s transformation in this context
thus offers an instance of some ‘inner strength’ to transcend the ‘self’. It is relevant to note that in his autobiography My Days, Narayan mentions a similar fast that was intended successfully to bring rain to a drought-stricken place and he admits that this experience acted as the starting point of his novel The Guide:

A recent situation in Mysore offered the setting for such a story. A severe drought had dried up all the rivers and tanks; [...] 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 Kaveri, fasted, prayed, and chanted certain mantras continuously for eleven days. On the twelfth day, it rained and brought enormous relief to the countryside.(167)

Even though the novel abruptly ends with Raju’s ostensible collapse, a note of assurance, normalcy and order gains prominence with a strong suggestiveness of rains. The transcendence in Raju becomes emblematic of the extent of his psychic maturity as well as a miraculous possibility. However, this height of maturity is reached at a halting pace in accordance with a cardinal concept of Indian spiritualism that true knowledge or enlightenment comes to the human soul only after thousands of ordeals, the lures of the maya. Raju’s passage to illumination thus displays a journey of the human self from the darkness of illusion objectified by his acts of self-esteem, to the light of discovery. Raju’s transcendence has further been explicated in the light of Hindu mysticism by critics like Mary Beatina Rayen, Viney Kirpal, and John Rothfork. Mary Beatina Rayen finds in the rendering of Raju as a Swami, a quintessential Hindu ambience that posits religion as vesture to communicate the spiritual essence. As Krishna Sen has pointed out, Viney Kirpal equates Raju’s role-playing with the doctrine of Lila and his end, with the attainment of moksha where ‘good action and renunciation of self’ assure his return to the dharma that he once abjured with his penchant for kama (attachment) and artha.
(money). Viney Kirpal’s criticism underscores the categorical application of the Hindu doctrine of *asramadharma* in Raju’s life. John Rothfork\(^\text{18}\) finds in Raju’s penance and death, the manifestation of the Hindu concept of *Yoga*, union with *Brahma*, ‘the imperishable Being of the universe.’ V. Panduranga Rao discerns the principle of *Gunas Comedy*\(^\text{19}\) as operative in the novels of Narayan. Accordingly, the counter-text which deals with Raju’s transcendence may be considered as an objectification of the *sattvic* quality of realisation that identifies the self with the well-being of others as the ideal state of existence.

However, it must be admitted that despite these overt Hindu elements in the transformation of Raju, Narayan’s *The Guide* is not a religious fable, but an essentially culture-text. The theme of transcendence in Raju’s role of a saint no doubt evokes an impression of a spiritual, mystic phenomenon, but this element is only a major part of that part of Indian culture which continues to exist according to Ramesh Sree, in the ‘collective unconscious mind of the Indian psyche’ (211). To read the novel only as a straight forward rendition of India’s spiritual values is only to ignore the element of complexity in Narayan’s use of the text/counter-text strategy to explore the conventional and normative cultural image of India that allows no binary between the traditional and the transcendent. The transcendent, eternal element of culture as embodied in Raju’s maturity comes, though in an oblique way, in the counter-text so as to question the validity of the normative appellation of Indian culture which is sought to be expressed in Raju’s past. The complexity in Narayan’s fictional art is manifest also in his problematic use of myth in the present sociological context of postcolonial Indian society. A simultaneous presentation of a ‘carnivalesque’ character of the mela *vis-à-vis* Raju’s ingenious progress towards self-denial, is also another case in point that establishes a cultural hybridity in post-Independence India. For Narayan, myths in the context of literary use can at best offer in the present-day world, ‘types and symbols’ that have a veritable contemporaneity in the writer’s experiences of men and manners. Krishna Sen finds that Narayan has made a subversive use of myth in
the issue of the villagers's acceptance of Raju as a saint. She identifies Raju's wrong, aimless and unfinished account of the story of Devaka as 'emblematic of Raju's own life', 'without shape and purpose'. In the opinion of Krishna Sen, 'the abandoned deity seems to jesture at Raju's flawed nature [...]'. The mythical and scriptural allusions, instead of affirming an archetypal worldview, are actually subverting the world of empirical reality and being subverted by them in return"(96). The critic however finds an intersection of myth and reality in Raju's assuming of the responsibility of a redeemer despite his imperfections, in his self-sacrifice -- where 'Raju plays out the greatest of his many self-chosen roles'(97).

Again, Nandini Bhattacharya, whose criticism on the novel has much in common with that of Krishna Sen, also concludes her appraisal of Raju with a note of ambiguity about Raju's transcendence: 'And finally, is Raju a true holyman, or simply the archetypal showman who will even convert death into a kind of superb show, replete with lights, camera and a director?'(61). It seems that Narayan's ingrained irony, detached humour and a highly complex, even subversive use of myth have justifiably baffled some critics to find credibility in Raju's transformation. However, some other critics like Chitra Sankaran have found Narayan's use of myth in the novel to be convincing so as to offer a rationale for Raju's career. Chitra Sankaran in her book entitled *The Myth Connection*, points out that Raju's life embodies the mythic paradigm of the 'trickster sage' like Valmiki who manifests his divinity in the ambience of the Sanskrit 'Katha' literature through a chain of deluding stages - similar to the 'maya' or 'lila' with a fair share of 'human imperfections'. Impartially speaking, Narayan's use of myth so far related to the development in Raju, corresponds to his aim at locating his character in a larger continuum of place and time, in a bigger framework of cultural reference that imbues every experience with a philosophical and moral significance.
‘My position is that texts are worldly’, writes Edward Said, ‘to some extent they are events, and even when they appear to deny it, they are never the less a part of the social world, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted’(4). The production of text, and culture in the postcolonial world thus become a ‘complex and hybridized formation’ (Ashcroft 109-110). In the postcolonial discourse, literature under the burden of a double history, becomes a search for an independent voice to interpret above all, the experiences of cultural subordination, marginalisation and even domestication. In this given context, the intent of this chapter by now seems to have been spelt out. The counter-text dealing with Raju’s transcendence in liaison with a collective consciousness/unconsciousness, seems to resist the Westernised attempts of perpetuating the image of India within the appellations of normative culture with the help of what Leela Gandhi thinks, ‘structures of attitude and reference’. Narayan’s belief in some inner strength in Indian culture can otherwise be felt as his faith in a possible re-integration of Indian selfhood where the possibility of recuperation is not ruled out even to the most worthless individual. Raju’s change from a classic fraud to an altruistic personality is thus rationalised in this context of eternal India where, to quote from C. D. Narsimhaiah, ‘the criterion of greatness is still the stature of the spirit’. Raju’s transcendence thus makes the counter-text an ‘insider’s story’. Narsimhaiah writes:‘Here is India from inside. Raju is India itself – its astonishing power, and deep inner reserves to revitalise itself and work its way to fulfilment’ (192).

Finally, in the development of Raju, Narayan’s The Guide turns out to be a ‘textual take-over’ to explore the culture-soul of India away from perpetuating images of a standardised and designated reality. In this way, the counter-text seems to justify in the form of Raju’s experiences upto his end, the timeless and the surviving aspects of Indian culture which according to Narayan, does not seem to respond to any attempt of theorisation nurtured in the West. It is one such point perhaps, that impels Dorothy.M.Spencer to view
Indian English fiction in general as ‘a systemic study of culture-contact and cultural change, with Indian world-view as the focus’(11). It therefore seems according to the critic, to enlighten the Westerners’ “knowledge of acculturation process”(11). Counter-textuality renders the novel thus a quest for transcendence – from predictability to unpredictability, from the personal to the impersonal, from the meretricious to the abiding, from retrogression to resubmergence to the cultural substrate of existence. This emancipatory character of the writer’s search in *The Guide* can be validated with reference to Alex Aronson’s statement on Indian civilization: “In any case, in a world of perpetual motion, India remains a perpetual becoming, a vast and protean sea of human improvisations on the great dance of time.”21
NOTES

1. Boehmer finds an ‘oblique’ approach (in the form of ‘the unspoken and the understated within texts’) in the writings of Narayan and Naipaul who seem to ‘...preserve appearances – or to mimic standard responses – while yet speaking as Other’ (Boehmer 175).

2. Bibhutibhushan Banerjee describes the pathshala scene where Apu, the new entrant, sits on a tattered mat noticing the proceedings—how his classmates, Nutu and Satish engage in mischiefs while others are chanting multiplication tables in a high pitch with ‘guru mahashya’s vigilant eyes to every development in the class and also to his customers.

3. Om Prakash Mathur in *Modern Indian English Fiction* notices the gradual influence of modernity ‘which seems to penetrate the lives of the common men at numerous points’(97). R.K.Narayan also points out in an essay:“All means of communication, all methods of speedy travel, all newspapers, broadcasts and every kind of invention is calculated to keep up a barrage of attack on the Frog in the well.”(“Frog in the Well”: *Next Sunday*, p.8)


5. *Sloka No.7* in Chaitali Dutta ed. *Chanakya Sangraha* (a compilation of slokas of Chanakya/Koutilya):

   Matribat Paradareshu Paradrobyeshu Lostrobat
   Atmabat Sarbabhuteshu Ja Pashyati Swa Pandita.

(He who sees another’s wife as mother, goods as stones the whole world as his own is wise). Translation added.

7. See, William Butler Yeats's poem "Introductory Rhymes" where he writes as if his life had been rounded out.

He asks pardon of his "old fathers," Yeatses and Butlers, Middletons and Pollexfens:

...that *for a barren passion's sake*,

Although I have come close on forty-nine,

I have no child, I have nothing but a book,

Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine.


8. The *Ratnakar myth* pre-figures the mystique of transcendence. Ratnakar, a notorious dacoit, was the son of a saint called Chavan. Once the dacoit came across Narada, the sage who invoked Ratnakar to eschew the path of violence and sin so as to save his soul since the family for which the dacoit sacrificed his virtues, would never afford to share his sin. Awakened to sense by the sage's advise, Ratnakar underwent a strenuous meditation and incantation of 'Ram Naam' and eventually outgrew into a great hermit, 'Maharshi Valmiki' who composed *The Ramayana*. In Indian tradition, the Ratnakar story always implies a possibility, a hope for redemption for even the most erring soul.

10. Iyenger thinks of Narayan: "...he would, if he could, explore the inner countries of the mind" (Indian Writing 360).

11. V.Y.Kantak comments on Narayan’s use of language: “Words or phrase rarely glints with compression or suggested meanings” (“The Language of Indian English Fiction”, P.224).

12. Bill Bennet however stresses on the role of community-consciousness that galvanises Raju’s personality with the latter’s discovery of courage and stamina that makes a ‘hero’ of Raju. Bennet’s analysis does not consider any role of Indian spiritualism/myth in the change in Raju.

13. The expression is taken from the title of Narayan’s essay “Reluctant Guru” in A Writer’s Nightmare, (pp.99-105). Here it has a double implication. In addition to indicating Raju’s unwilling acceptance of the ordeal of fast, it also jestures at Narayan’s embarrassment in facing the queries from the audience in a mid-Western University who expected Narayan, the Visiting Professor to clarify - if Malgudi was imaginary or real, if India was full of saints, if the novel (The Guide) was typical of India etc.

14. The state of JivanMukta has been defined by Octavian Sarbatoare (BA USyd) with the following excerpts from Yoga Vasishtha as discussed in Vidyaranya, S. Jivanmukti Viveka, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1996.

He is the jivanmukta to whom this world of senses has ceased to exist although he lives and moves in it, and only the all-pervading vyoman i.e. Knowledge exists. (Vidyaranya, 1996, p. 35). (par 8)
He is the jivanmukta who, although responsive to the spurs of love, hate, fear and the like, is absolutely pure in heart as the akasha. (Vidyaranya, 1996, p. 37). (par 10)


16. Mary Beatina Rayen in “The Guide: A Study in Transcendence”, detects religion as a discipline that helps the articulation of 'spiritual accent' (76).


19. V. Pandurang Rao [Ranga Rao] finds in Narayan’s novels the interplay of three primal qualities of human nature—sattva, raja and tama. He says in an interview in The Hindu:

Narayan's "Gunas Comedy", if it can be so called, is not an Indian form of the Humour Comedy. […]. Jonsonian Humour is physio-psychological, whereas the *gunas* are psychic-moral. Jonsonian Comedy is the comedy of excess, of abnormality.
Narayan's comedy, based on the *gunas*, is charged with humour within the bounds of normality.(par 5).

20.  Boehmer uses the term while discussing how the textual responsibility undertaken by the imperialist British was shared by European scholars and colonial officials (particularly in Asia) who ‘absorbed indigenous religious texts, laws, and legends…’(19).

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