CHAPTER IV

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When we turn to R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, our task of presenting the image of the holy man, as found in the novel, becomes rather tenuous. For, Raju, the protagonist of the piece, is perhaps the most complex character created by R.K. Narayan. We find in him the craftiness and credulity of Narayya in *The Financial Expert*, the romantic flamboyance of Srinivas in *Waiting for the Mahatma* and the mystical leaning of Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* and of Srinivas in *Mr. Sampath*. None the less, a close study of the novel reveals that we have in Raju a "fraud-turned honest."

Raju begins his career looking after a small railway stall at Malgudi station. With ease, he turns into a tourist guide, Rosie's lover, Malini's agent, jail bird, fake ascetic and finally gets transformed into a holy man. Narayan's achievement may be described as the creative use of the ordinary. As Rajeev Tanevath rightly says, "from average to the extraordinary and back again to a more poignant state of average - this seems to be the recurrent movement in terms of interacting characters in the majority of Narayan's
The axis on which the basic movement ranges appears to be that of the average and the non-average as the two states of being in various forms with implicit endorsement subtly leaning towards the average. Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* moves from normalcy to dejection, tries 'sanyasa' and settles down finally into a sober state of ordinarieness, looking forward happily to his marriage with Sushila. What is natural to him is his love for an attractive girl. That is where he starts from and to which he returns. His other states are temporary deviation from the ordinary. A simultaneous awareness of two states of being is to be found in *The Guide*. Narayan's superb craftsmanship lies in the uncompromising way in which he forces the ingredients of limitation towards evolving an authenticity which satisfies.

In shaping the character of Raju, Narayan might have taken a hint or two from the lives of some of the great saints of India who had some flaw or other in their character. Valmiki whom Indians call 'Adikari', who in

later years wrote the Hindu epic, *The Ramayana*, according to tradition, has been a thief before he takes to penance. Indians believe that all the waywardness of a man is only 'Maya' and what is important is what happens when a man takes to Sanyasa. They forget his dubious past and hail him as a 'Guru' if he has apparently established some communion with God. It appears, Narayan also has invested many of such qualities to his hero to show his spiritual transformation—a transformation from a dupe into an ascetic.

Raju's account of his past life as narrated to one of his disciples, makes us feel that he never 'does' anything; things always 'happen' to him. His illustrious career as a tourist guide also begins very casually, almost, as an accident. When the tourist's happen to ask him about the spots worth visiting around Malgudi, Raju, who has been the owner of a small stall on the railway platform, exaggerates the beauty and importance of these parts even when he knows nothing about them:

I never said, 'I don't know!' Not in my nature, I suppose... I am sorry I said it an utter piece of falsehood. It was not because I wanted to utter falsehood, but because I wanted to be pleasant.²

It is only his ready response to any enquiry, posing to be what he is not, brings him to grief. Soon he finds himself escorting the tourists to these beauty spots giving them historical and geographical information and before he knows it, he becomes a full-fledged guide and the stall becomes merely a part-time business. It is Raju's confidence that makes him claim:

I had classified all my patrons. It is this that first sight helps him seize up Rosie and her husband as the type that would be his 'life-long customers'.

Raju's second role as Rosie's lover and later her business manager comes upon him quite by accident without making any conscious plans about it. It is his 'confidence' that brings Raju closer to Rosie - then her husband sends him or rather when Raju offers to bring her from the hotel room as the husband waits in the car. He has the audacity to tell her to come out as she is, without changing her dress, adding:

Who would decorate a rainbow?

... life is so blank without your presence.

3The Guide, p. 60.
4Ibid., pp. 72-73.
Warayan makes it credible by his comment put in Raju's mouth:

She could have pushed my face back crying 'how dare you talk like this' and shut the door on me. But she did not.

If Raju makes further advances to Rosie, it is because of his 'water diviner's instinct' to seize up the relationship of Rosie and her husband. The husband is interested in sculptured figures on the walls and stones in caves, but not in his wife, who, as a dancer is a living embodiment of those images. The novelist says:

Dead and decaying things seemed to unloosen his tongue and fire his imagination rather than things that lived and moved swung their limbs.

Raju easily wins Rosie away from her husband and makes her feel that he has given her a new lease of life. Once cast in a particular part, it is Raju's nature to perform it with relish and perfection and he excels as an impresario and Rosie's business manager.

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5 The Guide, p. 73.

6 Ibid., pp. 81-82.
In the third stage of his career, Raju happens to become convict and he performs even this role with enthusiasm becoming an ideal prisoner. Raju does not drift into jail of course; he is taken there for a deliberate act of forgery. This is the one act that Raju does voluntarily and deliberately, it does not happen to him. But Raju is bewildered that such a trivial action should bring down such frightful consequences on his head.

Once out of jail, Raju finds himself into the role assigned to him by some one else. The narrative opens with the first meeting between Raju, who is freshly released from prison and Velan, the simple villager, in an old temple, by the side of a river. This eventful encounter sets Raju on the road to enforced sainthood. Not once does he deliberately try to pass himself off for a holy man, but he finds that people want to believe in his spiritual power, he cannot disappoint them. He wants to tell the villagers of his shady past of his stay in jail, but he cannot:

> It looked as though he would be hurting the other's deep sentiment if he so much as whispered the word.\(^7\)

After his long stay in prison, Raju wants to remain in obscurity which is possible only in this temple where his disciples

\(^7\)The Guide, p. 8.
bring him food. Food, the basic necessity of life, comes to him unasked for. More over, he has not trained himself to make a living out of hard work. This nature of his makes him realise that he "must play the role that Velan has given him". Right now, his main worry is not to let his shady past be known to the people. The innocent villager who takes Raju to be a Swami, assigns him a role which eminently suits him. When Velan states that he has a problem, Raju asks him to tell him about it, his "old habit of offering guidance to others asserting itself."  

Once he is accepted as a holy man, Raju, with the characteristic thoroughness, pays attention to details like his appearance, his beard and so on:

His beard now caressed his chest, he wore a necklace of prayer beads round his neck, his eyes shone with sharpness and compassion; the light of wisdom emanated from them.  

As in earlier roles, he learns his trade while practising it. In the second phase of his life, Raju picks up enough jargon about dancing to pass for a connoisseur of Bharat Natyam when actually his knowledge of this art goes no

10Ibid., p. 90.
deeper than his historical knowledge of the relics around Malgudi. The same ready wit helps him in the final role of his life as an ascetic. He soon learns that the essence of sainthood lies in one's ability to utter mystifying statements. He says:

Unless you try, how can you know what you can or cannot do.\textsuperscript{11}

When the villagers talk about the crocodile in the river, Raju says:

What can a crocodile do if your mind is clear and your conscience is untroubled?\textsuperscript{12}

Raju is surprised at the amount of wisdom welling from the depth of his being. As days go by, he seems to belong to the world. His influence is unlimited. He not only chants holy verses and discourses on philosophy, he even reaches the stage of prescribing medicines to the children:

If he still gets no relief, bring him again to me.\textsuperscript{13}

He can hardly afford a private life now. The novelist says:

By the time he arrived at the stage of stroking his beard thoughtfully, his prestige had grown beyond his wildest dreams.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{The Guide}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 47.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 54.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 53.
Part of Raju's success is his ability to identify himself with whatever role he is playing.

Things would have continued to be rosy for Raju, had not a severe drought created the conditions of scarcity and famine in Mangala. The heart rendering scenes of drought and famine leave him cold and as long as he is fed free, he doesn't mind staying there. He does not feel involved at all in the suffering and tragedy of the people. He represents the countless fake Swamis in India that lead a parasitic life.

The next stage in the growth of the Swami comes when rains fail and summer becomes scorching. Even the final episode of fasting originates in a similarly insignificant and casual manner. During the prolonged drought, the nerves of the people are tense and some minor quarrels flare up into a riot. This news upsets Raju not because he is genuinely concerned about the welfare of the village people, but because he is afraid that a disturbance may disturb the isolation of the place and brings the police on the scene who may disclose his identity. It is purely a selfish reason that makes him announce:

Tell your brother, immediately, wherever he may be, that unless they are good,
I'll never eat.\textsuperscript{15}

But the young man to whom the message is given, gives a completely different version of the message:

Tell your brother not to bring me any food.
I won't eat. If I don't eat, it will be alright and then everything will be alright ... The Swami doesn't want any food any more ... because it doesn't rain.\textsuperscript{16}

Others believe him because only a few days ago, Raju told them of a saint who brought the rains down by his fast.

Suddenly the atmosphere becomes electrified. The villagers forget their bickerings and all their troubles and decide:

Let us all go and pay our respects to Swami, our Saviour.\textsuperscript{17}

But the person whom the villagers respect as their saviour, is a fake ascetic, who even at this stage, waits for his usual gifts and food. People gather round Raju for 'darshan' without bringing food. This has an ironic side to it because food has been the first link that has connected Raju with the

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{The Guide}, p. 100

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 101-102.

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 104.
inhabitants of Mangala village. He has accepted the role of a holy man because it gives him unconditional and free supply of food. Now Raju has no alternative to fasting. He feels, we are told, he has worked himself into a position from which he could never get out:

He now saw the enormity of his own creation.
He has created a giant with his puny self. 18

Raju is called upon by the community to undergo an act of vicarious suffering to purify the sins of others. It is at this point that the penance of purification through fasting is thrust upon him. It is a dangerous task and even Raju, who has so far always lived for the moment improvising and acting the part that is convenient, senses the destructive risk of the situation. It occurs to him, at this stage again, that the best course for him would be to run away from the whole thing. What keeps him back, is not practical considerations or fear of being caught; but very surprisingly, the faith of the people:

He was moved by the recollection of the big crowd of women and children touching his feet. 19

19 Ibid., p. 111.
In a mood of elevation, Raju asks the villagers to go home for,

Tomorrow I will take my usual food
and then I shall be alright. 20

Velan naturally connects it with rain and asks:

Do you expect to rain tomorrow sir? 21

Raju really feels sorry for shattering his faith. Then he confesses and relates his life story to Velan. Raju thinks that Velan will react angrily to his being an imposter; but to his surprise, Velan addresses him as Swami and his admiration is only increased by his self-abasement. This is the starting point of change in Raju's career as a Swami. He strives hard to deserve the faith of the people. Raju's fast soon begins to assume great public importance. He decides to observe the fast in a genuine spirit:

If by avoiding food, I should help the trees bloom and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly? 22

21 Ibid., p. 108
22 Ibid., pp. 237-238.
Raju's whole life has been a ceaseless record of deception, trickery and sexual licence and now he wishes to confront his naked, real self. Rising above a narrow selfish individualism, Raju seeks to discover his true human identity through identification of his fate with that of the whole humanity.

The novel comes to a close with Raju's completion of the last day of his fast. At the end of the novel, the reader seems to be left in doubt whether this is only a miraculous vision of a martyred soul or a pathetic delusion of a dying man or still worse, an attempt to delude Velan. Narayan deliberately leaves the ending open and ambiguous. But as Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly points out:

> Whether his fasting really brought the rains down or not, is an irrelevant question. More important is Raju's moment of transcending his limited self. 23

A writer has to turn to mythology of his own culture to create significant patterns of fiction. Offering mass prayers and breaking coconuts to propitiate the god of rain are common sights in India. In one of the Hindu epics,

there is a story of King Bhagiratha resorting to penance to bring the sacred river Ganges to earth when there was a severe drought. It may be the same story that Raju tells his audience with his own additions to it. The question of faith, miracle and superstition, here, is a variation of the question raised in the novel where the climax hinges on a ritual for bringing down the rain. There is a faint suggestion, though very ambiguous one, that the miracle does happen. India's undying faith in God and goodness, holy men and miracles is here rendered quite credible by the novelist's art even to the sceptical and questioning eye.

In the story of Raju, we have seen the created object transcending its creator. The sainthood that Raju has created out of deception, ultimately transcends his control and obliterates his former self. Raju has, more or less, created Malini, the dancer. But Malini does not remain a doll in his hands. Finally she goes out of Raju's influence altogether to become an illustrious artist on her own strength and lead a fuller life devoted to her art. At the end, in both cases, Raju's creations transcend him. Malini soars high above leaving him below, behind the bars and the saint that Raju unwillingly creates, passes into a different level of reality, leaving the imposter behind.
Many critics have found in this novel, an honest picture of an ordinary man conquering the seemingly impossible heights of spiritual realm. They believe that Raju, the guide, finally becomes what he has posed to be, a real 'Guru'. Meenakshi Mukherjee, for instance, concludes that "towards the end, Raju loses the feeling of an actor performing an act, the act becomes the reality, the mask becomes the man and Raju, the guide, turns into a Guru."24 H.M. Williams takes it for granted that Raju, the guide, "becomes a 'spiritual guide' ... a fraud - turned honest, whose impersonation turns into a genuine act of self-sacrificial virtue."25 Panduranga Rao contends, "Raju's drift to Swamihood is as fluent as his progress from 'Railway Raju' to 'danger's backstage boy."26 Even a sound and seasoned critic of Indian writing in English like Sreenivasa Iyanger seems to subscribe to the view of Raju's transformation into the Swami."27 Some critics have gone even to the extent of saying that we have in

24 The Twice-born Fiction, p. 124.


Raju, one, who is transformed from a forger into a 'Fakir,' a picaro into a pilgrim and from a fake 'Sadhu' into a famous martyr. Such critics seem to think that "Raju is an admirable modern modern vision of the Indian myth of a sinner becoming a saint," like Valmiki, Pundarika, Vemana and Bilvamangala.

But some other critics are drawn to the other extreme stand of seeing Raju, even in his death, as a cheat obviously responding to the ironic overtones employed by the author from the beginning to the end. For instance, M.K. Naik questions the accepted idea of Raju's transformation.

Is it a case of 'Truth sits upon the lips of dying men?' Or is it only the final flying of deception and self-deception by a confirmed deceiver?

However, we may take the stand that the railway guide is finally transformed into a 'guru.' When the vanity and vainness of his early life becomes obvious to Raju in the prime of his doom, the novelist remarks how


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. 

This is a moment of illumination, a moment in which an individual acquires the power to go beyond himself. The strength that Raja gets comes from the hither to untapped reserves of stories he had daily heard from his mother, of good men that sacrificed themselves for others, it comes from the simple faith of the villagers, a faith which by its purity and depth could move even the hard-hearted and it comes from Raju's readiness for the first time to rise above himself for other's sake. Further more, there is a suggestion at the end of the novel that Raju is given an awareness of the alliance of the down-to-earth and the realm-far-above in him, an awareness totally absent in him in all his earlier encounters in life. The last lines are very significant in this regard:

The morning sun was out by now; a great shaft of light illuminated the surroundings. It was difficult to hold Raju on his feet, as he had a tendency to flop down. They held him as if he were a baby. Raju opened his

A close look at the diction employed by the novelist makes our point clear. The cliches like 'darshan,' 'meditation' and 'Penance' which have been used earlier in the novel, are conspicuous by their absence here. Instead of a diction from the spiritual realm, worn out by his paradoxical use, fresh images - 'the morning sun,' a great shaft of light illuminated,' 'a baby suggesting a spiritual awareness in Raja,' are consciously employed by the novelist. The metaphysical quality of these images suggest a freedom for Raja from his self-deception and what is more, reveals the spiritual heights he has scaled.

As G.S. Amur rightly observes, 'The Guide should be read as an affirmation of the human possibilities for self-recovery and self-transcendence rather than, as a story of enforced sainthood.'

In presenting the gradual transformation of Raja, Narayan employs double time. His technique of mixing up

past and present is valuable as an aid to achieving the simultaneity of multiple states of consciousness. The narrative opens with the first meeting between Raju who has been released from prison and Velan, the simple villager, in an old temple. This encounter sets Raju firmly on the road to enforced sainthood. The reverence of the other man, Velan and his 'grateful' response to his platitudes make Raju doubt whether he has grown 'apostolic' beard already. At this point the novelist shifts the narrative back to the recent past and presents Raju who is released from prison. Again the narrative is resumed at the point it is left in the immediate present and we find Raju revered high in devotion and approached for guidance. Another flashback follows, Raju sketching his past encounter with Rosie and narrating his earlier life. These time-shifts which occur in the very first chapter, are maintained throughout the novel. In every present scene, time passes in a leisurely pace while the narration of the past has a rapid movement with a rush of interesting episodes. A regular alteration of these two, a short scene in the present always followed by a long stretch of history, gives the reader a perspective. It gives him a discrimination of fact from the sense of fact. The events in Raju's life, as he tells them to Velan, are colourful and gripping
in themselves, but a distant view from where they have led him, would reveal their total insignificance. The reader also experiences how life without any values and any moral awareness, however satisfying it may be physically at the moment, makes its own futility clear in retrospect at a crisis.

R.K.Marayan exploits not only the technique of mixing up past and present, but also different points of view to drive home to us the image of the holy man that he seeks to present in the novel. The reader is made to look at the events of the novel through the eyes of Raja while he deceives others and himself as well as through the eyes of his followers with all their faith in Raja. Besides this ironic juxtaposition, the serio-comic mode of the authorial narration presents another dimension to the reader who shares the outlook of the author. A passage or two may be taken from the last chapter for consideration.

The holy man stood there for two hours. Then walked up the steps slowly and lay down on a mat in the pillared hall of the temple while his devotees kept fanning ... all the time. 33

Here the novelist has placed himself among the devotees of

Raju. Apparently he is speaking like Velen in high regard, all in faith. Yet his own comic attitude is implicit in these lines. He proves as much a deceiver in his regard and faith as Raju in his holiness and sainthood, only when we pass on to read the thoughts of Raju:

Raju saw them across his pillared hall whenever he opened his eyes ... what were the vegetables?34

This, after all, is the deep meditation of this holy man.

Marayan's well-known ironic vision comes very handy to him in his attempt to present his protagonist as a fraud-turned honest. The very title, The Guide, like that of The Financial Expert, clearly indicates the all pervading irony which informs the entire action by indicating the moral dilemma of the protagonist. Naturally it raises overwhelming questions such as the relationship between appearance and reality, the man and the mask and end and means thereby highlighting the essential ambiguities of the human condition the title seems to sum up, in one word, the tremendous significance of the strange transformation of the protagonist from a tourist guide into a spiritual guide. This transformation is presented, as we have seen, as a highly complex process unfolded in distinct stages of development.

34 The Guide, p. 234
The complex and deep seated irony is the inherent theme of enforced sainthood. The following passage is one of the finest instances of irony of situation that we find in R.K.Narayan's fictional output:

'Do you know, sometimes these Yogis can travel to the Himalayas by a thought?' remarks one of the villagers finding him absent from his usual seat. 'I don't think he is that kind of yogi,' said another. 'Who can say? Appearances are sometimes misleading,' said some one.

The context is, Raju is hiding behind the temple contemplating some means of escape from the village, for, he is no longer able to pull on with the fast that the villagers have thrust upon him because they have thought him to be a saint. The villagers chance to arrive at temple in large crowd to have a 'darshan' of their Swami. It is his conspicuous absence from his seat that occasions this conversation among his disciples. The comment which the first of them makes is a very striking ironical comment on the opposition of appearance and reality. The native villagers think of Raju as a yogi with great spiritual powers. It, thus, suggests that they persist in being the unwitting victims of irony of situation. But far more striking is the incongruity of appearance and

\[^{35}\textit{The Guide},\ p.\ 32.\]
reality which finds an ironic expression in the highly memorable scene: 'Appearances are sometimes misleading'. The passage in question shows how helpless they are as victims of irony.

Marayan uses not only irony, but also his sense of humour to make his portrayal of the holy man effective. Irony works as a base for Marayan's humour, the instances of which are found at every step in the novel. We can take a good example. Raju, the guide turned saint, who has embarked on a fast for fourteen days, is in a serious condition and on the height of tragic scene, Marayan sends crowds of people who come to see the saint as if they are going to a fair. An American takes a movie of the scene. Press-reporters go on sending their stories. People eat and drink at the stalls, laugh and enjoy publicity cinema shows while Raju is dying by inches. Here this incongruous mixture of tragedy and irony creates bitter humour. The development of Raju from a tourist guide to a holy man provides humour. As we have seen, everything happens to him. He does not plan to be a guide, but he becomes so on frequent enquiries from the visitors. He does not want to be an impresario, but he becomes one because Rosie, abandoned by her husband, comes to him. He does not wish to be a saint, but sainthood is forced upon him by Velan and the villagers of Mangala village.
Thus the image of the holy man that one gets from a close analysis of Raju's character is that of a young man who recovers himself from a deluded pursuit of sensual pleasures and earthly goods and achieves transcendence through an act of the will which commits him to something outside himself and brings about an integration of his divided personality of Rosie arouses Raju's sensuality and lust for power and money, thereby alienating him from home and community, Velan, who symbolises the mute strength of the peasant's strength, turns out to be an unconscious instrument of Raju's self-recovery and self-transcendence.

This is precisely why Narayan's own description of The Guide as "a novel about some one suffering enforced sainthood" is not convincing in-as-much as it does not do justice to Raju's individual achievement. It is true that Raju never aims at becoming a saint. What he does aim at is to remove the gap between word and deed and integrate his personality. That he succeeds in his attempt is not difficult to believe. His genuine compassion for Velan and the other villagers and, above all, his preparedness to suffer for them lift him out of his limited self to a higher and transcendental place of existence.