CHAPTER II
CHAPTER II

MYTH IN *THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI* AND REALISM IN THE GUIDE

The word ‘myth’ owing to constant use over the last few decades, has now become something of a clichés of literary criticism. Moreover, since the concept of myth interests not only the critics but also the anthropologist, the sociologist, the psychologist, the philosophers and the student of comparative religion, the term is used in a variety of meanings, each field of study investigating it with different meanings and connotations.

Myths, in spite of their distance from contemporary reality, do have, for that particular group of men to whom they are culturally relevant, a kind of fundamental significance. There seem to be two distinct ways in which myths have been used in Indo-Anglian novels:

1. as part of a digressional technique – Raja Rao is the exponent.

2. as structural parallels, where a mythical situation underlies the whole or part of a work.

The original Greek meaning of the word, “mythos” is a tale uttered by the mouth in conjunction with a religious ceremony or ritual, actually a tale that was intended to convey an impressive and compelling revelation of the
sacred. Wellek and Warren point out that myth is narrative story as against dialectical discourse, exposition; it is also the irrational or intuitive as against the systematically philosophical (1985). In short, myths reveal how man became what he is today—mortal, sexual, and obliged to work to sustain himself. In myth, the story is considered absolutely true and sacred. It is social, anonymous and communal.

Myth is one such term which eludes exact definitions and neat categorization. Ruthven in Myth states that it is very difficult to define myth because it is “obscure in origin, protean in form, and ambiguous in meaning.” Equally William Rightner also point out that myth is one of the great cant words of our time” and “it has become a kind of intellectual shorthand which has gained acceptance as standing for an elusive, almost unanalysable, amalgam of beliefs, attitudes and feelings.” Myths transcend the coordinates of time and space, for they belong to the primordial times and world. However, Joseph Durairaj (2003) in _Myth and Literature_ says:

Myths are uncanny phenomena. They are at once regional and yet universal; static and yet dynamic; stable and yet protean; archaic and yet contemporary; profligate and yet hallowed; fantastic and yet highly – structured; divine and yet human in that they are as much about gods and goddesses as about human beings. Though they belong to a pre-literate and pre-historical era, they keep recurring in all ages and are a part of our contemporary society. Though they belong to the realm of primitive religion and come under the purview of
anthropologist, folklorists, and phenomenologist of religion, they are an integral part of literature and other arts.

In short, myths are endowed with flexibility, adaptability and resilience which help creative artists to transpose and transplant there in diverse cultures and media. Methodological procedures demand that the relationship between myth and literature be spelt out before a contrastive study of the ethnologist and the literary artist is undertaken to highlight their modes of operation in their respective fields. Scholars like Cart G. Jung, Northrop Frye, John B. Vickery, Richard Chase, William Righter, John J. White, Philip Wheelwright and Joseph Campbell have mapped out the relationship between myths and literature on the one hand and between myths and archetypes on the other.

The important distinction between the conscious and unconscious use of myth must be made at the outset.

1. The conscious use of myth is an easily recognized literary device and part of a modern trend as one can find in T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land, James Joyce’s Ulysses and so on. Init, the creative writers use diverse methods: each of them uses mythical or classical situations or characters in a modern content and there by seeking to illuminate the predicament of a contemporary man. In it, the mythical parallel is easily recognized.
2. Secondly, there are literary works where the writer may not have been aware of using a mythical situation but others have discovered the unconscious way in which myths have operated in them.

Christian, Pagan, and Classical myths have always provided a rich area of reference to English poets and writers. Methodical characters appeared in English literature as allusions and decoration. In the twentieth century, the interest to use mythical character is revived by W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, and James Joyce.

The really important theory about the myth is its character of a retrospective, ever-present, live actuality. Myth functions especially where there is a sociological strain. A potent myth appeals not to the reason but to the imagination of the reader. Myth today can be of use only if they illumine the present predicament of human society or suggest a remedy. They are meant for more inspiration than for information. They are like a religious ritual which make life more meaningful and enriches it by penetrating to its essence. A myth is no substitute for reality but only a better vehicle for a better appreciation of reality. Meenakshi Mukherjee in The Twice-Born Fiction classifies Indian myths as follows:

1. Puranic Myths – The Rama and Ravana conflict with its parallel in Gandhi’s struggle against British imperialism.
2. Sthala Purana - (e.g.) legendary history of kanthapura with Venchamma as its presiding deity.

3. Rites and Rituals -(e.g.) the ritual of ‘arathi’ with ‘kumkum’ and camphor censer or the offering of coconut and betel nut in Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and Rope* or yoking the bulls to the plough under the Rohini star in *Kanthapura*.

The use of myth in literature is significant for its quality of timelessness. Despite its remoteness from contemporary reality, it has a kind of fundamental significance, Myths, whether they are literary or in the form of legends, illustrate abstract story patterns.

In comparison to the European writers or their counterparts in the Indian regional languages, the Indian-English writer seems to have made a very scant use of myth in his works, although Indian people, as a whole, are still closer to mythology than the modern European people are to their own lores. Meenakshi Mukherjee(1982) in *Twice Born Fiction* states, If a world view is required to make literature meaningful in terms of shared human experience then the Indian epics offer a widely accepted basis of such a common background which permeates the collective unconscious of the whole nation.
The Indian writer in English makes use of myths available in Ramayana and the Mahabharatha and the Puranas with slight variations as he has not been easily attracted to make myth meaningful for his purpose because the writer is exposed to western culture than to Indian because of his literary training. Whereas the work of R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao is saturated with the classical Indian myths, Narayan thinks India in her present predicament stand in need of the creation of new myths in place of the old which have already seems their purpose and are of no practical relevance or significance in the present circumstances. Mythicising reality through myths has some sort of justification if the myths are fully integrated within the feature of the theme as in T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*: the legend of the Holy Grail, the vegetation myths and Christian story of Resurrection.

R.K.Narayan is pre-eminently a story letter and his stories are not only interesting in themselves but are very suggestive, in the sense that they are a creative comment on contemporary reality. In *Reluctant Guru*, Narayan says:

> A novel is about an individual living his life in a world imagined by the author, performing a set of actions (up to a limit) contrived by the author. But to take a work of fiction as sociological study of a social document would be very misleading, my novel *The
*Guide* was not about the saints or the pseudo-saints of India, but about a particular person.

The mythical trend in Narayan is evident from *Swami and Friends* (1935) to Raju of *The Guide* (1958). Shyam M. Asnani in “The use of Myths in R.K.Narayan’s Novel states, “Though the western influence is evident in Narayan’s art especially in the parodying of forms and patterns, it is not as significant as the artist’s actual observation of Indian life and delving into the archetypal myths and characters of the two epics and folklore, which abound in the Malgudi cycle and help us a great deal in deepening our awareness of the timelessness of Malgudi.

The imaginative reaction of mythological incidents and situations in Narayan is discernible in almost all of his novels and short stories. The main characters like Swami, Chandran, Sampath, Krishnan, Margayya, Raju and Raman are modern in the sense that they do not lay any claim to heroism not do they control the events rather they are controlled by them. *In introduction to God, Demons and Others* (1965) Narayan refers to the inexhaustible vitality of the classical mythology as it helps the reader make the contemporary in narrative fall into proper prospective. Moreover, the characters in the epics being essentially prototypes and moulds in which humanity is cast, they remain valid for all times. Narayan writes,

“with the impact of modern literature, we began to look at gods, demons, sages, and kings of our mythology and epics,
not as same remote concoctions but as types and symbols possessing psychological validity even when viewed against the contemporary background passing, inevitably, through phases of symbolic, didactic, over-dramatic writing, one arrived at the state of valuing realism, psychological and technical explorations, and technical virtuosity.

Narayan in all his novels imply scriptural and mythical references as follows:

1. In *Mr. Sampath*, Srinivas refers to the Upanishads and the mystery of ‘knowing the self’.

2. In *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, Sastri refers to the story of Mohini and the demon Bhasmasura to explain the mystery of Vasu’s death.

3. In *Painter of Signs*, Raman equates Daisy with Ganga, Victoria, and Hecuba, and likens his own position with that of Shantanu.

4. In *A Tiger for Malgudi*, the master explains to Raja the mystery about life and death and the Lord’s Viswarupa referring to the Bhagavadgita.

It stands as a supreme example of the writer’s peculiar sensibility where the theme, plot, structure, characterization, Irony, myth and realism are in a perfect inseparable blend, K.R. Srinivasan Iyengar points out that “The Man – Eater of Malgudi jumbles the ingredients of comedy to excellent purpose and provides ample entertainment, but the undercurrent of serious intension cannot also be missed. Accordingly Harish Raizada remarks that “Narayan’s comic vision is unmingled with pathos or tragedy in “The Man – Eater of Malgudi”. M.K. Naik considers the novel as “one of the masterpieces of Narayan’s novels”. K.M. Williams also admits that Narayan’s comedy is at its most irrepressible and his characters are more vividly absurd than ever. To P.S. Sundaram The Man – Eater of Malgudi is his greatest work. The Times Literary Supplement also maintains that hilarity and high seriousness are rarely yoked together in partnership as effectively as they are in this book. All the details of this eventual day Mr. Narayan puts before us with an unstressful vividness which is entirely delightful.

The Man Eater of Malgudi is entirely different from the rest of his novels. It has an enchanting treatment of its theme. It has a well-knit plot and is very compact in form making little allowance for digression. The introductory chapter introduces the background. In the introductory chapter Narayan gives a vivid description of the nature of Natraj, his family and his background, the true story of their ancient house in Kabir lane, his
neighbours and friends, professional out works, business acumen and so on. Natraj press with its parlour and attic above clearly established as the centre of action.

Like most of R.K. Narayan’s, *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, is a vision of life as a human comedy. The title itself is ironical in the sense that the strange man-eater (Vasu) kills himself as in the case of Bhasmasura instead of being tracked and killed. The Bhasmasura myth and the polarities represented by Vasu and Natraj emphasizes sharply that the moral issues involved in the novel concern the entire question of human relationship. With militant egotism, Vasu mismanages human relationship and spread suffering around. With timid altruism, Nataraj, submits family to evil and furthers its career. M.K. Naik in “Theme and Form in R.K. Narayan’s *The Man – Eater of Malgudi*” is of the view that,

“The remedy, as Sastri indicates, lies in respecting one’s own individuality, in taking a sane, practical view of things; and in maintain a firm faith in the divine dispensation which may allow evil to flourish for a time only to ensure that it destroys itself completely in the end. While the demon annihilates himself, and the ineffectual good angel potters blundering around, it is the same man with firm faith in God who enunciates the precepts and practice of the whole business of living”
In *The Man – Eater of Malgudi*, Narayan dramatizes the conflict between the forces of good and evil. The theme is borrowed from Hindu mythology. Regarding the theme Narayan remarks:

At some point in one’s writing career, one takes a fresh work at the so-called myths and legends and finds a new meaning in them. After writing a number of novels and short stories based on the society around me, some years ago I suddenly came across a theme which struck me as an excellent piece of mythology in modern dress. It was published under the title *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*...... I based this story on a well known mythological episode, the story of Mohini and Bhasmasura.

The novel stands as a story of contrasts mutually opposing forces in conflict in a modern content. Vasu’s strength, brute force, egoism and the spirit of destruction are in striking contrast to Natraj’s weakness, gentle nature, passivism and altruism. The contrast helps in elaborating on the mythical theme of the ultimate triumph of virtue. Narayan has very beautifully adopted the theme of the Mohini- Bhasmasura episode and used it as a structural paralled throughout the novel. Meenakshi Mukherjee remarks that” The structural use of myth is a twentieth century phenomenon. If a world view is required to make literature meaningful in
terms of shared human experience. Then the Indian epics offer a widely accepted basis of such background which permeates the conflictive unconscious of the whole nation” (1982).

*The Man – Eater of Malgudi* is narrated in the impersonal first person. The aggressive activities of Vasu are described as the personal experience of the non-aggressive Nataraj. There is the inbuilt myth of the demon Bhasmasura who becomes a prey to his own burning hand. Sastri, the learned assistant of Nataraj in the press, refers to the myth in the first half of the novel and towards the end of the novel to explain the self-destruction of Vasu (Man Eater: 75 & 183). In the novel there are also references to Vishnu as the destroyer of evil, especially as the saviour of the mythical elephant Gajendra (Man Eater: 76 & 183). In the modern context evil people like Vasu destroy themselves by God’s grace and good people like Nataraj are redeemed consequently.

*The Man – Eater of Malgudi* is a re-creation of the old Hindu Myth of Bhasmasura in modern form and a presentation of two diametrically opposed attitudes to life. The Bhasmasura parallel is closely identical by the words of Sastri, who tells Nataraj the narrator, that Vasu “shows all the definitions of Rakshasa ….. a demoniac creature who possessed enormous strength, strange powers, and genius, he recognized no sort of restraints of Man or God” (Man – Eater: 95-6). Further he adds: “Every rakshasa get
swollen with his ego. He thinks he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him” (Man – Eater: 96)

R.K.Narayan’s *The Man Eater of Malgudi* has a myth for its basis the myth of Bhasmasura informing the character and role of Vasu, the taxidermist, who like Bhasmasura, becomes the unconscious instrument of his own destruction. Nemesis comes to Vasu for his evil desire to shoot down the temple elephant Kumar. Just as Mohini the divine dancer was present at the destruction of Bhasmasura, so also Rangi, the ill-famed dancer was attending on Vasu fanning the flies away from him as he dared off in his arm-chair on the eve of a procession being led by Kumar, the sacred elephant whom he wanted to kill. Vasu died as he struck his own forehead trying to kill two mosquitoes which were found plastered on his brow. This was done because Rangi too had gone to sleep during crucial interval.

In the Hindu myth, Bhasmasura was given boon by Shiva, the most powerful of God. In the novel, Vasu is befriended by Nataraj. But Nataraj is a perfect contrast to Shiva, The God of destruction, for he is a weak, timid, harmless creature. In the case of Bhasmasura it is said that he had his birth from the sudden sweat of Shiva himself while dancing. Equally, in the novel Vasu’s appearance in Malgudi is so suddenly but Nataraj is not responsible for it. Bhasmasura would start killing people once he gets his power. Equally in the novel, Vasu commits sacrilege and makes a general
nuisance of himself in Malgudi. As Bhasmasura is destroyed by Vishnu, who took the form of the beautiful damsel Mohini and artfully tricked him into the suicidal action, Vasu is not so much destroyed by Rangi but she is used as an unconscious instrument to destroy him. She is used to fan him while he keeps his vigil, but drops off to sleep thus allowing the mosquitoes to pester Vasu who deals himself his own death blow. The name Rangi is derived from the named Ranganath one of the appellations of Vishnu.

Vasu, like an asura, used to frequent Nataraj’s parlour and even he bullies Nataraja’s friends and even tries to win favours through Nataraj’s services. When neighbours complain of stench, Nataraj little suspects that the fountain head of all the stink was the attic over his own machine. The brutality of Vasu’s fraud strikes Nataraj rather late, he loathes it but is frightlined to ask Vasu to vacate. He feels dwarfed and tongue tied before Vasu. This leads to fresh trouble with Vasu who makes a complaint to the rent controller. Nataraj faces a difficult time with sanitation and forest and rent control departments for letting Vasu occupy the attic. Vasu’s activities of killing and stuffing animals increase and even the stairs are filled with stuffed creatures. However, when checked by forest officials, he turns his hunting in the direction of Malgudi’s prostitutes and Nataraj never ceases to wonder at this enemy’s devilishness.
Nataraj’s acquaintance with Muthu brings Kumar the temple elephant to Malgudi to be cured of its illness. One of the eves of the temple festival Rangi informs Nataraj of Vasu’s plan to shot Kumar during the procession. All efforts of Nataraj, his friends and even the police prove futile in dissuading Vasu from his convention and Rangi’s interference even shatters Nataraj’s domestic life. On the night of the procession Nataraj boldly attempts to somehow overpower Vasu but runs back at the sound of an alarm. On the following day Vasu is found dead. Nataraj becomes the target of suspicion and he feels shocked at this development and later resigns himself to it. In the end, Sastri discloses the secret that Vasu died by his own brutal strength, trying to kill a couple of mosquitoes, like Bhasmasura, Rangi bearing witness to it.

Vasu becomes a perfect embodiment of asura in Man-Eater of Malgudi. He has demoniac stature. He is a large man, about six feet tall and has a bull neck, a tanned fist, large powerful eyes under thick eye brows, a large forehead and a shock of unkempt hair like a black hat. In the course of the novel, Nataraj aptly describes him as the ‘Prince of darkness’. His movements are as mysterious as his activities in the jungle. Hi is a taxidermist and his room is filled with a strong stench of rotting flesh and hides being cured – which never disturb him in the least. He has the strength of a rakshasa. He is nick named by Nataraj as Man – Eater. Every
day he eats one hundred almonds every morning, followed by chicken and rice for lunch and vegetable and fruits at night. He used to do vigorous exercises every day. He starts doing exercises right from three o’ clock in the morning. He has giant’s strength.

The Rakshasas in Hindu mythology have powers to destroy everything. Shukracharya, the guru of the asuras was a learned scholar who could bring the dead to life with his skill in Sanjivani Vidya. Ravana who was well-versed in the Vedas was actually said to have invented new and systematic ways of reciting them. Mayasura, who designed the wonderful assembly hall for the Pandavas was as accomplished artist. Narayan was not totally aware that he was creating an asura in the person of Vasu, because in a radio interview he said, “The Man – Eater is a man, not a tiger, an ego – centred man for whom the objective world is non-existent a modern rakshasa who wants to kill the elephant that belongs to the local temple.”(Writer’s Workshop, 1986).

Vasu is a perfect embodiment of the typical rakshasa of ancient Hindu mythology. He has demoniac lot and has demoniac lot and has characteristics like pride, wrath, harshness of speech, insatiable desire and cruelty. The rakshasa is always pictured as being of superhuman strength, ugly and ferocious in appearance with cannibalistic propensities, incapable of affection, gratitude, sympathy or regard for others, and in fact reveling in inflicting pain; a nocturnal creature, a creature of the jungle, full of
mystery; dirty and unclean in habits; and a being complete, immoral, obeying no laws of God or man. The demons in Hindu mythology are often seen to be not ignorant; unlettered monsters but actually skilled in learned and scientific pursuits and capable of the hardest penance with which they secure valuable boons from the gods. K.V.Suryanarayana Murti in “Monkey and Hanuman: R.K.Narayan Novels” admits,

Educated rogues or demons like Vasu, who sin against and thereby against God and who are responsible for the death of spiritual values degrading the dignity of education itself are sure to dig their own graves. Society is to guard itself against such evils. Altruistic action and acceptant like Nataraj’s only is the need of the hour, in the context of modern spiritual decadence and upsurge of violent selfishness, but selfless action for universal harmony should also be wise. Nataraj learns and grows through humiliating experience up to the climax of his destroy(Critical Studies in English Literature, 1987).

Vasu does not have a raksha’s strength but also he uses it like a rakshasa. He breaks bed stead with a single blow of his fist, dislocates the wrist of the policeman with a single strike and kills himself when he hits himself on the temple to crush the mosquito. He is boorish and unmannerly, rude and aggressive and bullies and browbeats people. His motto is to challenge everyone who contradicts him in any way. Callous
and hardhearted, he is absolutely incapable of my regard for others and their feeling and needs. He seems to take a perverse pleasure in making people suffer. In the novel, he take Nataraj with him to the Memphi forest and abandons him there, even ignoring him when the poor man, hungry and tired, asks him for money.

He shoots the pet dog of a small boy and horrifies the entire town by shooting an eagle and announcing his plan to shoot the temple elephant. He seems to be perfectly immune to all human emotions and feelings. Love is for his mere lust. Vasu revels in breaking all laws and is a law unto himself. As a hunter, he has a license to shoot only duck and deer but he shoots all animals and bullies people. He justifies his plan to shoot the temple elephant thus, “There’s nothing terrible in shooting. You pull your trigger and out goes the bullet, and at the other end there is an object waiting to receive it. It is just give and take” (Man – Eater: 176).

In The Man Eater of Malgudi Vasu’s act of crushing his own skull while trying to kill a couple of mosquitoes setting on his forehead has been sought to be related to the myth of Bhasmasura who had to work out his destruction at the clever bid dance of Vishnu who appeared to him in the guise of the dancer, Mohini. Considering the opposites, M.K.Naik in “Theme and Form in R.K.Narayan’s The Man – Eater of Malgudi” says:
The interplay between Vasu and Nataraj also indicates a contrast between two diametrically opposed attitudes to life, each shown to be disastrous in its own way, between the demoniacal, self-centred egotism of Vasu and the ineffectual, self-effacing altruism of Nataraj, between the temerity of Vasu and the timidity of Nataraj. For Vasu everything in the external world must sub serve his own interests; other people, society, human considerations – all exist to feed his egotism. Such an attitude to life is fraught with obvious dangers for both the individual and society; such self-centredness must inevitable end in self-destruction. nature, it must generate from within itself the forces which destroy it.

Nataraj’s altruism is as extreme as Vasu’s egotism. It makes him unworldly and unbusiness like in his own profession. The contraries between self-centred egotism and self-effacing altruism are well represented by the level headed and mature Sastri. He comments on both these attitudes and pin-points their danger. It is he who explains the Vasu phenomenon in terms of the rakshasa myth. As a devoted Hindu he is convinced that; like all rakshasas, Vasu too will meet his end, a well-deserved punishment. As soon as Vasu dies, Sastri goes on a holy pilgrimage to reveal the mystery behind Vasu’s death. With his solid common sense and staunch faith that evil, however triumphant, will ultimately destroy itself, Sastri appears to emphasize a way of life straying
away from which has brought death to Vasu and a great deal of mental anguish to Nataraj.

In the end of the novel, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* Sastri point out to Nataraj the moral of Vasu’s sudden and violent end. This makes reference to the myth related to Bhasmasura. Sastri says, “Every demon appears in the world with the special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the rakshasas that were ever born. Every demon carries within him, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment. Otherwise what is to happen to humanity? (Man-Eater: 242)

The novel, *The Guide* also can be labeled as a picaresque novel. The theme revolves round the central episode of the Raju - Rosie liaison, reminding the readers of Narayan of the Raman – Shanta liaison in The Dark Room. There are references to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in The Guide. In the Ramayana there is the central episode of Ravana abducting Sriram’s consort Sita, and in the Mahabharata there are the two episodes of first Duryodhana and later Kichaka trying to dishonor Pandavas’ consort Draupadi. These legends appear as the mythical soul of the novel in the modern context. There are three important characters in the novel: Raju, Rosie and Marco. There are some minor characters as follows:
1. the taxi driver, Gaffur, who keeps up his identity representing the voice of society warning Raju that his not doing the right thing with Rosie.

2. Raju’s mother, who fails to correct the behaviour of Raju, and tearfully on her visiting Raju in the goal, wishes him to die instead of bringing shame to the family.

3. Velan, the villager of Mangala, who becomes instrumental in leading Raju to his destiny.

Considering all these things, Ramesh Dyante(1993) in “The Hot House Cactus: A note on R.K.Narayan’s *The Painter of Signs* observes, “The asura of Narayan’s legend presents the novelist with different images: as a conformist in the time-honoured dictums of the Shastras, as a Karma-conscious writer believing in the cycle of Janmas, as a humanist accepting the wholeness of life and the pre-ordered scheme of things and, as a comic-ironist watching the absurd drama of human existence with amused detachment”( Indian Novel in English, 1993). Likewise, the novels *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* to the extent and The Guide to some extent use myth as their basis. By using mythical elements consciously, the artist, Narayan wants to bring the archetypes into contemporary events and to highlight the necessity of it in determining the predicament of a modern man.
REALISM IN THE GUIDE

Realism is a many splendoured thing. It has its sociological, aesthetic, philosophical, political, regional and psychological nuances. The realistic movement both in the West and in the East gathered strength in the mid-nineteenth century with the protest against the traditional, sentimental, sloppy stuff; mysteries, romances, legends, religious sermons, and utopias of wish-fulfillment. Novelists like Tolstoy, Balzac, Maupassant, Dickens, Hardy, Premchand, Anand and R.K.Narayan faced social and political persecutions but ultimately found themselves canonized into saint of realism. They lashed out at social inequities, mental inhibitions, moral and religious taboos, economic disparities, political systems and metaphysical subtleties in a spirit of strong, healthy humanitarianism.

The Third International Dictionary defines realism as an objective procedure not influenced by idealism, speculation or sentimentalism.

Further, the Dictionary gives four themes of realism:

1. Platonic – Universals exists prior to thoughts


3. Epistemological – objects of sense or cognition exist in their own right, independently of their being known.

4. Sociological – a human collectivity or group has a reality apart from the individual.
The term ‘realism’ began to be interpreted liberally right from the extroverts with their penchant for an outside view of reality to the introverts with their stream of consciousness theory. Some others went as far to include even a mystic apprehension of reality into the connotation of the form. In contrast to these, Emile Zola and other writers thought that realism need not fight shy of the sordid, mean and sensational realities of life. There were others who thought that to be truly realistic, one must rediscover reality, recreate it so as to bring out its real essence and mystery for the benefit of the ignorant masses to illumine reality, to make it more real and meaningful for the present and future generations. The realistic writers give a very sensitive and rational exposition of the human predicament without fear or favour.

Realism appeared in Europe and America as a reaction from devotional sermons, romantic literature, legends, mysteries and folk tales. A shift was evident from romanticism to realism. The word ‘realism’ was first applied in France to Courbet’s paintings around 1850 but was soon extended to literature as well. In 1857, it was applied to George Eliot’s Scenes of Clerical Life. The emergence of science and the reaction against the romantic excess ended in consolidating the position of realism in literature in Fiction.

A sort of psychological realism has also surfaced in the indo-English Novelists which goes by the name of stream of consciousness. This
tendency suits the introspective, brooding and dreaming temperament of the Indians. In Anand’s Untouchable, Raja Rao’s The Serpent and the Ripe and R.K. Narayan’s The Guide the device is used.

The novels that depict realism were sociological in their intent and highlighted the evils of factories and low courts, the problem of the emancipation of women, the inhumanity of war and so on. A realistic novel like Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* makes reality more real for the reader’s sake and for the sake of posterity. In the realistic novel, the novelist combines the use of a microscope and a telescope in revealing to the readers the involutions of a living cell. The realistic novels give the feeling that such things have been happening in the world for ages past without one being conscious of them for one reason or the other. Also in a realistic novel one can easily transfer one’s own identity to some characters and derive vicarious pleasure out of such an identification. A novel of psychological realism offers the readers a fine type of pleasure, a rare insight into the different levels of consciousness and experience. Narayan’s *The Guide* gives the biography of the hero, Raju that symbolizes the journey of the novel from mundane levels to spiritual heights finally redeemed through death.
K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar comments on the plot-content of the novel in realistic terms as follows,

“… Raju is a romantic doubled with racial like his fictional predecessors, Margaya and Sampath. Raju too plays many ‘parts’… Trying to help a rich visitor, Marco in his researches. Raju is involved in a tangle of new relationships. Rosie, Marco’s wife becomes Raju’s love. Abounded by Marco, Rosie realizes with Raju’s help, her ambition of becoming a dancer. But his persuasive instinct finally betrays him into a criminal action, and he is charges and convicted of forgery. Coming out of the jail, he cuts off all connections with the past and sets up as a sort of ascetic or Mahatma. Once again he is caught in the coils of his own self-deception, and his obliged to undertake a twelve-day fast to end a drought that threatens the district with a famine. In vain he tells his chief ‘disciple’, Velan, the whole truth about himself and Rosie, and about the crash and the incarnation. But nobody would believe that he his – or has been – anyone other than a Mahatma. He has made his bed, and he must perforce lie on it. We are free to infer that, on the last day of the fast, he dies opportunely, a martyr”.

Considering the narrative aspect of The Guide, V.V.N. Rajendra Prasad in says:

The narration in The Guide proceeds at two levels. Raju narrates the story of his life to Velan. When his disciple, the village folk, prevail on his to face the ordeal of standing knee-
deep in water without food for propitiating the god of rain, Raju confesses to Velan by narrating his story. This we notice in section six of the text. Sections Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten constitute Raju’s free and frank confession of his past experiences and lapses. The concluding section dramatizes Raju’s efforts to live up to the expectations of the image of himself he has raised in the minds of the village folk. In the first six sections, we have the narrator and Raju alternately narrating, so that the narrative voice may be taken as chorus that enlarges and specifies the scope and the significance of what Raju has to say about himself and his activities. (Five Indian Novelists, 1990)

The novel, *The Guide* describes Raju’s life from birth to death in two parts.

1. the span before Raju’s release from jail
2. and that after to his death

The novel begins strikingly with the current phase of the hero, with Raju seated on the steps of a lone old temple in the appearance of a Swami cleanly shaven and Velan, the first devotee – Raju’s guiding destiny – approaching him. The frustrated Raju released from jail actually intends to start a real like a new, but fate hardly allows him. K.V. Subramanya Sastri comments on R.K. Narayan,

“The foul career with a reaped consequence that has passed and the present trap designed by destiny in the guise of the villagers’ faith in which he has one step placed already create a sort of stunning awe in him; resultantly a sense of spiritual anguish flashes in his mind; he reviews his past that is really needed for self-awareness and
R.K. Narayan writes, I am not a saint, I’m just an ordinary man being like anyone else. Listen to my story, you will know it yourself. (The Guide: 99). The Guide as a text has complex meanings. The most significant of this complex of meanings is the self and the roles it play. Raju the tourist guide, plays the role a guide to a particular family. He helps Marco complete a scholarly work. He helps Rosie actualize her potentiality as an artist. He plays the role of a spiritual guide to a village community and at the same time one can admit that he does not achieve any realization of the self in the various roles in which he appears.

In this realistic novel, The Guide, Raju drifts into several roles casually and realistically. It is sufficiently clear that Raju never did anything, but things always happened to him. His illustrious career as a tourist guide also begins very casually, almost as an accident. There are four stages in his life:

1. in the first stage, the owner of the sweat meat stall on the railway platform found himself escorting the tourists to beauty spots, giving them historical and geographical information and became a full-fledged guide.
2. in the second stage he became an entrepreneur, found himself acting as Rosie’s business manager.

3. in the third stage of his career he happened to become a convict, and even he performed this role with enthusiasm, becoming an ideal prisoner.

4. in the fourth stage, once out of jail he finds himself drifting into the role of a sadhu and accepts his own end.

Saros Cowasjee in Modern Indian Fiction states that Raju’s note in The Guide varies from stage to stage. He writes: We first see him as a railway guide to tourists, then a kind of guide to a married woman called Rosie, and finally a guide to mankind. The last is a rather strange role which unable to shake off, he reluctantly accepts. Raju is a curious combination of disparate qualities: a romantic and a realist, a lover and a cheat, a clever manipulator and a drifter. When Vealn approaches Raju, Raju is obsessed by the shadow of his past, estrangement of the present and the uncertainty of the future. He lapses into flash backs and flash forwards in the contest of the present in a jumbled manner. Narayan narrator the story with detached sympathy and omniscient understanding of human nature in a jumbled third personal and first personal narration. Raju’s first success is that he becomes a reliable guide on the railway platform in Malgudi and at the Mumpi Cave hills. His fall starts with the arrival of Rosie and her husband Marco, the
archeological researcher. He is fascinated by the attractive Rosie. When seriously engaged in his research, leaves Rosie to be looked after by Raju. Raju explores this opportunity by praising and permeating her desire to become a dancer. She mechanically yields to him. Later, divorced by Marco, she comes to Raju, and he enthusiastically aids her in becoming a famous classical dancer. He enjoys money and popularity. Later, excessive greed leads to his fall. When he forges her signature to have a hold on her jewelry, he is convicted and incarcerated.

When Velan comes to him, Raju fancifully allows himself to be taken as a Swami and he pretends to solve the villagers’ problems. He succeeds in gaining their confidence and devotion. When his obliged to undertake a fast for twelve days to end the drought gripping the village; he is exhausted and begins to sag down. He becomes a failure. In reality, Raju realizes that he is obliged to undertake a fast to end a drought and threat of famine. Realistically Narayan in The Guide illustrates:

This resolution gave him a peculiar strength. He developed on those lines: ‘If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not it do 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. The fourth day of his fast found him quite sprightly. He went down to the river, stood facing upstream with his eyes shut, and repeated the
litany. It was no more than a supplication to the heavens to send down rain and save humanity. It was set in a certain rhythmic chant, which lulled his senses and awareness, so that as he went on saying it over and over again, the world around became a blank. (Guide: 123)

In the end Raju realizes that he is only doing what he has to do. He declines the Government doctors’ request to break the fast; the soul hurries to embrace death. Narayan realistically narrates the end of Raju as follows:

He got up to his feet. He had to be held by Velan and another on each side. In the profoundest silence the crowd followed him down…. Raju could not walk, be he insisted upon pulling himself along all the same. He painted with the effort. He went down the steps of the river, halting for breath on each step, and finally reached his basin of water. He stepped into it, shut his eyes and turned towards the mountain, his lips muttering the prayer ….. The morning sun was out by now; a great shaft of light illuminated the surrounding. It was difficult to hold Raju on his feet, as he had a tendency to flop down. They hold him as if he were a baby. Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said, ‘Velan it’s raining in the hills, I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs …..’ and with that he sagged down. (The Guide: 193)
Narayan excels in the authenticity of his descriptions of the everyday scene in the life of Malgudi. In the very first business encounter with Vasu, Nataraj gets to know the demoniac, pugnacious nature of the taxidermist, Narayan realistically writes, “I knew of his weak spot. I hit him there with the edge of my palm with a chipping movement …… and he fell down and squirmed on the floor….. You didn’t stop to help him? I helped him by leaving him there, instead of holding him upside down and rattling the teeth out his hand. (Man Eater, 17)


‘How long have you been without food now?’
‘Ten days’
‘Do you feel Weak?’
‘Yes’
‘When will you break your fast?’
‘Twelfth day’
‘Do you expect to have the rains by then?’
‘Why not?’
‘Can fasting abolish all wars and bring in world peace?’
‘Yes’
‘Do you champion fasting for everyone?’
‘Yes’
‘What about the caste system? Is it going?’
‘Yes’
‘Will you tell us something about your early life?’
‘What do you want me to say?’
‘Ed-for instance, have always been a yogi?’
‘Yes more or less’ (Guide: 218 – 19)

In *The Guide*, Psychological realism operates in the relationship between Rosie and Marco. The Fiasco of Rosie-Marko relation suggests that the couple have to understand and respect each other’s aspirations and sentiments with platonic identity. In realistic terms Rosie’s roles and character suggest indirectly that the educated woman is to rise up to her educational culture and find her identity in moral integrity. On the other hand, Raju’s role and character reflect him trickery and deception ultimately recoil on the practitioner and grandeur lies in becoming a real guide to oneself and society. The novel closes with Raju collapsing before the temple on the river bed, pointing to Raju sitting at the same temple on the river near Mangala in the beginning; it begins, where it ends and thus it is circular.

In *The Guide* Rosie narrates her story to Raju, It helps her clarify the self-what it is and what it seeks. She realizes that acquiring name and fame, and wealth as an artist is not an end in itself. The self has not only aspirations but duties as well. It is in the process of actualizing her aspirations as an artist that she discovers her aspirations, obligations and duties. Raju helps her master the illusion, and in the course of mastering it,
discover the self. Raju himself discovers the self by passing through the illusion that he is serving in the first instance a family and in the last instance society at large.

Raju’s problems and troubles generate from his first acquaintance with Rosie. Raju wonders why she calls herself Rosie as she is not a foreigner but an Indian in Indian dress. Raju has enough shrewdness to tickle her vanity by saying that as an orthodox dancer, she fosters the Indian cultural tradition. Equally one can understand that the plot of The Guide is more complex as it presents the formation and the break-down of a man – woman relationship and tries to seek self-realization in the traditional Indian sense. Concerning this, K.V.Suryanarayana Murti in “Monkey and Hanuman: R.K.Narayan’s Novels” states, “ The priest in the Hanuman Temple who guides Margayya concerning Lakshmi Puja and disappears later in The Financial Expert appears to have been portrayed as picaroon Raju in The Guide.

Narayan, being a skilful craftsman, converts both myth and reality of the man enters of Malgudi into an organic whole which he fails to do so in The Guide. Even the setting and the variety of minor characters like baiting journalist, the adjournment lawyer, who must extort quotation ready for every occasion, the poet who celebrates the marriage of Radha with Krishna in his memorable book Radha Kalyan, the seductive temple – dancer Rangi, Vasu’s paramour – a goddess carved out of cinder, Muthu, the tea-shop
man, the forest ranger of the Mempi forest who has a book of Golden Thoughts ready for printing the bus conductor and so on to make the book thoroughly realistic.

The process of realizing one’s self through a net work of socio-cultural institutions is the staple reality that one can notice in the fictions of Narayan, Narayan’s views on reality and realism are not entirely different but he has made realism pretty Indian by making it more inclusive and thoroughly traditional. In Narayan’s realism everything is interrelated as Narayan in Gods, Demons and Others says:

Even the legends and myths, as contained in the Puranas, of which there are eighteen major ones, are mere illustrations of the moral and spiritual truths enunciated in the Vedas. “No one can understand the significance of any story in our mythology unless he is deeply versed in the Vedas”, the story-teller often declares. Everything is interrelated. Stories, scriptures, ethics, philosophy, grammar, astrology, astronomy, semantics, mysticism, and moral codes – each forms part and parcel of a total life and is indispensable for the attainment of a four-square understanding of existence. Literature is not a branch of study to be placed in a separate compartment, for the edification only of scholars, but a comprehensive and artistic medium of expression to benefit the literature and the illiterate alike. A true literary composition should appeal in an infinite variety of ways; any set of stanzas of the Ramayana could be set to music and sung, narrated
with dialogue and action and treated as the finest drama, studied analytically for an understanding of the subtleties of language and grammar, or distilled finish to yield esoteric truths.

Realistically in the novel, The Guide, Narayan creates a realistic story of a man who turned to be a sadhu. It is as Meenakshi Mukherjee in The Twice Born Fiction observes:

In the story of Raju, we see the created object transcending its creator. The sainthood that Raju has created out of his deception ultimately transcends his control and obligates his former self. The theme gains its strength through repetition, because earlier, in the Rosie episode, the same pattern had been established. Raju had more or less created Nalini the dancer, and his motivation was not exactly an artistic passion for Bharat Natyam. But Nalini does not remain a doll in Raju’s hands. For her dance is not a profession, a means of making money, but a cause, a devotion, and as Raju gets more deeply involved in the forgery case. Nalini begins to lead an independent life of her own. 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. *(Guide, 121).*

The parallelism between the Rosie episode and the final episode of Raju the holy man is too pronounced to be accidental. In both cases the first phase involves a little struggle, but in both, once launched in the field Raju never has to look back. Both as a business manager and as a sage Raju’s success exceed all his expectations. The episodes begin very
casually, almost by accident, and in both cases Raju makes every effort later on to fill in the details of his part. In both cases he becomes a public man eventually. In one he makes a slip and lands in jail. In the other, owing to misunderstanding, he is pushed into fasting, which at first appears as disastrous an experience as a prison sentence. At the end in both cases Raju’s creations transcend him. Nalini soars high above him, leaving him below behind the bars, and the saint that Raju unwillingly creates passes into a different level of reality leaving the imposter behind. In *The Guide* one is made to believe that the Goddess Parvathi jumped into the fire and produced the river of Malgudi.