

The Guide: As a Regional Novel: Narayan as a R. Novelist.

B.A. (H) - III Paper - 7K

R.K. Narayan is a great Anglo-Indian writer. He is the most artistic of all the Indians writing in English. Unlike Mulk Raj Anand he writes with the sole aim of giving aesthetic satisfaction and does not take art as a medium of Propaganda. However his literary works reveal his deep insight into the recesses of Indian life and reflects its subtle peculiarities. The Guide, Swami and Friends, The Dark Room and Waiting for the Mahatmas are his marvels of English Fictions. The critics have charged him for being a regional novelist for the back-grounds of his novels are essentially Indian.

But a thorough and impartial study of Narayan's novels reveal that the regional elements are so represented that they become universal. No doubt like Hardy's Wessex, Malgudi is everywhere in Narayan's works. But, it is a symbol and its inhabitation symbolises that of the whole of India. The actions, ^{and} reactions, hopes and failures, joys and sufferings of the characters of the novel are not regional but general and are similar to those of the whole humanity. Though a character appears to belong to a particular region, but, in fact, he or she represents the whole class with all its minutiae. Let us see some regional elements in The Guide.

Like other novels of Narayan, The Guide is also often treated as a regional novel. A regional novel, as it is generally understood, deals with the physical features, people, life, habits, customs, manners and tradition of a particular locality. A regional novelist selects and records the materials and incidents apparently with local touches and colours. But, in this selection and re-ordering, he creates a new world and emphatically stresses, though indirectly, that life in its essentials is the same everywhere. The selected region becomes a symbol of the world, a microcosm that

reflects the great world beyond. The novelist rises from the particular and local to the general and the universal. Narayan is such a novelist. His Malgudi, an imaginary place in South India, is exactly Hardy's Casterbridge and stands for the whole of India.

Like Casterbridge, Malgudi of *The Guide* has every thing of its own. It has a railway station, Mission school, College, hotel, clubs, Cinema hall, public places. It has all features that may describe a particular locality such as Albert Mission College, Lawley extension, Pyl school, Market Road, Kabir Street, Memphis Hills etc. It inhabitates people of different social status, caste, creed and religion. Its people have their own habits, manners, customs and tradition and beliefs. They are superstitious and cannot defy their age old beliefs. As examples, we can cite instances of Raju's mother's reaction to Rosie's presence in her house. She is so intolerant to immoral acts of her son that she leaves her house and goes to her brother's place. The villagers' belief that the saint's fast will certainly bring rain shows another important tract of Indian life.

The character sketch of Raju also throws ample light on the universal aspects of social life of Malgudi. We see Raju, a child of a low middle class shopkeeper, playing under a tamarind tree. After his father's death he shifts to Railway station and starts a stall of magazines and old books. He becomes popular and is called Railway Raju. Every visitor to the place soon asks for Raju's Guide. He works as a professional guide. His meeting with Rosie and her strain relation with Marco make him her lover. When Rosie is deserted by her husband and comes to live with Raju, he sacrifices his all to make Rosie a Nalini, the dancer.

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of everyman's dreams. But the affluence of wealth and position makes him selfishly greedy that leads him to jail as a criminal. Finally, the ignorant villagers make him a swami. He is compelled to play the roles of a saint that he performs and, at the end, dies in the sacred river, Ganga. Thus, we see that the very thoughts, actions and reactions of Raju are true to those of youths.

In short, here in *The Guide*, Narayan presents an account of a particular locality that is a symbol for India. The customs, habits, tradition and beliefs are distinctly those of India. The sufferings of its hero or other characters are essentially those of people in every corner of India. In other words the particular has been artistically generalised and universalised by R.K. Narayan. Really regional elements have been transformed into universal ones.