

## The Guide:- Raju. — A character sketch.

(1)

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 the Indian life and reflect its subtle peculiarities. The Guide, Swami and Friends, The Dark Room and Waiting for the Mahalaxmi are his marvels of English Fiction. The characters are the men and women of flesh and blood and represent the main features of social strata to which they belong. Of course, often if not always, he sketches his characters in a satirical vein. Raju is one of his important characters. Let us see him in a brief!

Raju is the central figure in the most celebrated novel, 'The Guide'. The whole of the novel revolves round his character. He is the main source of all incidents and events in the novel. He is the most complex character. He plays the roles of a Guide, a Lover, a fraud, a prisoner, a hermit and a preacher. In him we find the dishonesty and credulity of Margayya, the flashy bombast of Mr. Sampath, the adventurousness of Mali, the romantic excesses of Sriram and the mystical learning of Chandra. He is born in a middle class family, in a neglected corner of Malgudi. He is so ordinary that his father calls him 'clay head'. Though his education is irregular, he acquires knowledge from life and becomes a successful man of life.

After his father's death, Raju starts a stall at the Railway station and soon becomes Railway Raju and Raju Guide. He knows all places of importance in Malgudi and works as a professional

Guide. He is quite sincere to his profession. He is so popular that every visitor to the place asks for Raju Guide. He leads a happy and peaceful life. But, his meeting with Rosie and Marco brings a sea change in his life. <sup>Raju</sup> appreciates Rosie's beauty but Marco's indifference towards Rosie, together with Raju's youthful sympathy, makes him a lover. When Rosie is deserted and she comes to live with Raju, he blindly sacrifices his relation, friendship and peace to make her a dancer. He is so enthusiastic and passionate that he does not care even for his widow's mother's feelings who leaves him for ever. He bears all sorts of anger and remarks but succeeds in making Rosie a famous stage artist, Nalini. He earns enormous wealth and respect but, at the same time, he leads immorally luxurious life. He becomes selfishly greedy that lands him in jail as a criminal. However, as a jail bird, he proves himself a model prisoner. He is called 'Ustad' and walks with the jail superintendent. When Raju comes out of the jail, he is touched by the word, Mahatma, as a remark of a talkative barber. As he has nowhere to go, he happens to find a lonely temple where Velan's submissive respect makes him assume the role of a Swami. The ignorant and superstitious villagers throng around him with full devotion and expect spiritual guidance from him. Raju understands his situation and intelligently proves himself equal to the expectation of the people. Finally, he is compelled, in a way, to observe faste for the rain that he really does and dies as a true Swami.

Thus, we see that R.K. Narayan, through the portrayal of Raju's character, successfully hints at different traits of life. Raju acts and reacts, like a true

(3)

Indian youth who is fresh and energetic and takes any situation seriously. No doubt, while living with Rosie, he commits immoral acts. But we must not wink at the fact that, in such a given situation, one cannot check oneself. Besides, as no immoral act is left unpunished, Raju is sent to jail.

When Raju is thrust upon the role of a Swami, he is very much alive to his conscience. He repeatedly tries to disclose his identity but none believe him. It is here that Narayan lashes at the superstitious beliefs of Indian society. In short, Raju is an important character of R.K. Narayan who represents an adventurously passionate Indian youth who successfully throws discerning light on different social problems through his different roles.