



impression

Diana in High Heaven

by A Z M Haider

In a vision once I saw Diana dallying with a fountain sprinkling all over with manna dew in the garden of Eden. I watched her dawdling with heavenly flowers, taking fruit of the forbidden tree and singing unpremeditated songs. She was found to have been lost in a conversation with Dante's Beatrice and Rabindranath's Urvashi as she was treading a flowery passage on green turf in that heavenly garden. She appeared to be at peace with herself as well as with everything around in serene and blessed atmosphere of paradise. The blissful life she is leading in heaven is in complete reversal of the emotional agony and mental torture that made her life on earth a veritable inferno.

In the immortal words of Wordsworth, she was a phantom of delight. She was like a lonely flower in a distant dale, far away from the sordid realities of life. She was a misfit for this planet full of hatred, hostility, hideousness and ugliness. She was

married in her late teens and passed away in her early thirties. The brief interregnum of little over a decade or so between her fairy tale marriage and poignant end was an unending agony. The sons she mothered served as an oasis in the desert of her life.

She is a modern version of Shakespeare's Desdemona who has suffered husband's tyranny for no fault of hers. But the man with which her fate was tied was no Othello. He lacks greatness of Shakespeare's tragic hero. But Diana possesses virtues of Shakespeare's women like Desdemona, Ophelia and Juliet. Despite Yágo's fiendish endeavour to falsely implicate her with an extra-marital amour, Desdemona's virtuosity remained untarnished and her greatness, undiminished. It was only after her death that Othello, to his utter shock and surprise, came to know that Desdemona was not involved in any incest, and that she was as chaste and pure as a flower in early dawn. Likewise, all charges of aberration with which attempts were made to indict her proved

furthest from truth and it was only after her death that Prince Charles, her husband, came to realize that she was an epitome of purity and piety. But unfortunately the prince realized that when it was too late. He then did not have time to make amends for the lapses he committed by initiating divorce proceedings against Diana.

The charges of aberration, far from undermining her image, elicited deep love and sympathy at her premature death not only from her compatriots but also from her friends and well-wishers all over the world. The love and sympathy she aroused in millions of hearts were so deep that they did not ebb away with the passage of time. On the contrary, the sentiments of love, sympathy and compassion welled up afresh in millions of hearts at the first anniversary of her death observed last week was unprecedented.

What is cause of world-wide love and sympathy over Diana's death? Was it because she was an exquisitely pretty woman? There are women as pretty as



Diana or even prettier than her. Was she prettier than Helen who launched thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium? Is it necessary to refer to the devastating beauty of Princess Margaret

in juxtaposition with that of Diana? Princess Margaret, sister of Queen Elizabeth, set ablaze numerous young hearts including that of Townsend in the bloom of her life. One wonders if she was a more bewitching beauty than Suchitra Sen who in the spring of her life used to cause frequent traffic jam in the busy thoroughfares of Calcutta. Even now when she is in her early seventies many young men are ready to lay down their lives for a glimpse of her. But none of them could evoke undying love and affection in hearts of millions as Diana did.

Despite allegation of extra-marital romance she was involved in with Dodi, the Egyptian business magnet, her popular image did not dwindle, nor popular sentiment of love and affection for her diminished. She was far above all sorts of slanderous accusation.

Despite her personal tragedy, Diana, regardless of her sufferings, responded to needs of ailing humanity anywhere in the world. Gifted with the milk of human kindness, she traversed all

parts of the world to attend to the lame, the blind, the leprosy and the cancerous in their shanty dwellings in swampy hamlets in Africa, Latin America and in hot and humid Asia. Without caring for her personal comfort she flew all the way to Pakistan to open a cancer institute and to stand by the neglected cancer patients there. She was chairman of a number of charities and participated in their campaign to raise fund for the medicare of helpless patients.

As Lord Byron said "man's inhumanity to man has brought countless thousand mourn". Despite succour she generously rendered to the suffering humanity she was not spared suffering, cruelty and injustices and man's inhumanity. At the first anniversary of her sad and sudden demise helpless ailing humanity all over the world prayed for divine benediction on her departed soul and said

A perfect woman, nobly planned
To warn, to comfort and command
And yet a spirit still and bright
With something of angelic light.

book review

The Guide: A Masterpiece of Storytelling

by Batool Sarwar

WHAT makes R K Narayan so unique a storyteller is his blending of traditional Indian themes with modern techniques of storytelling and an exploration of such themes from an entirely new perspective.

Narayan's novel *The Guide* serves as an excellent example of how Narayan incorporates modernist techniques and outlook into a novel written from deep within Indian society.

The Guide is a novel where Narayan uses complex storytelling techniques to trace the stages in the growth and development of Raju's character from a man who makes a living through his wits, to a man infatuated by a woman and delighted with his social success, to a true saint who unselfishly sacrifices his life because he believes it will benefit the people. Narayan's masterly storytelling allows him to make *The Guide* a realistic novel as well as a modern myth, which draws on traditional ideas of Hindu mysticism.

V S Naipal has called Narayan's novels 'religious books' which are 'intensely Hindu'. Narayan has himself commented that:

"With the impact of modern literature, we began to look at our gods, demons and sages, not as some remote concoctions but as types and symbols possessing psychological validity, even when seen against the contemporary background." (*English in India in Press, Commonwealth Literature pp 22*).

It is this ability of Narayan to bring out the relevance of classical myths that makes *The Guide* such a complex novel. Narayan creates the contemporary background in realistic detail and uses irony and ambiguity in portraying his characters without detracting from the seriousness of the theme of Raju's conversion to sainthood.

One of the most interesting devices used by Narayan to control the reader's response to the theme of Raju's sainthood is the narrative technique that he uses in the novel. The narrative alternates between a first person and a third person narrator and also uses a braided time scheme. The first person narrative by Raju fills in the details of Raju's childhood and earlier life, while the third person narrative often interrupts Raju's childhood and earlier life, while the third person narrative often interrupts Raju's narration to comment on his actions and feelings in the present time. One of the obvious advantages of such a narrative technique is the flexibility it allows. Narayan in manipulating the distance which the reader maintains from Raju. The first person narrative allows the reader to get to know Raju intimately during his earlier days, but the omniscient narrative at the end makes Raju a remote and mysterious figure when he gradually advances in the paths of sainthood.

Using the first person narrative technique also allows Narayan to achieve an effect similar to the one that Dickens gets in *Great Expectations* by using the adult Pip as the narrator of the novel. We never lose sympathy with Pip even when he is at his most snobbish because we realise that the mature narrator is always aware of the follies of his younger self. Similarly, the narrator Raju can look at the incidents

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from his past from a distance without feeling any of the earlier passions or frenzy. He now realizes that his own behaviour showed an 'ordinary lack of character', he realises how insensitive and cruel his treatment of his mother was, he realises that Rosie would have achieved fame on her own and that he had treated her shabbily. This ability to look at his past from a distance shows that he has achieved the detachment from his past life which is one of the criteria of achieving *sannyasa*. It could be argued that Raju tries to debunk himself only because he wants to be let off the penance of fasting, but Narayan's narrative technique prevents us from arriving at such a conclusion. Raju's first person narration does not begin in chronological order in chapter six when he begins telling the story to Velan, but is placed much earlier in chapters one and two where it alternates with the narrative of the omniscient narrator. What is most interesting is that these switches from first to third person narrative are made using Raju's memory as a link so that it almost seems that in the sections of first person narrative we are hearing Raju think aloud.

For example, the first section of omniscient narrative ends with the sentence: "It was in his nature to get involved in other people's interest and activities. 'Otherwise', Raju often reflected, 'I should have grown up like a thousand other normal persons, without worries in life', and the first person narrative resumes 'My troubles would not have started (Raju said at a later stage in the course of narrating his life-story to this man who was called Velan) but for Rosie'.

Though Narayan adds a parenthesis that this is part of Raju's later narration to Velan, the effect that is achieved is that we are hearing Raju reflect aloud. Similarly, the section of omniscient narrative which ends with Raju telling Velan the story of Devaka, is followed by a first person account of Raju's musing about why he cannot remember the end of the story. The feeling we get at the very beginning that the first person narratives are interior monologues, allows us to consider the rest of the story Raju tells Velan as an externalisation of his innermost thoughts.

Post-structuralist and de-constructivist theories of criticism have emphasised that silences and reticence within the text are important in understanding the total significance of the text. What *The Guide* is noticeably silent about are Raju's years in prison. Before he goes to prison, we see Raju as a greedy, snobbish person who disdains intimacy with anyone without a high social position. Yet, in his narrative, the only account Raju gives of himself in prison is that of a well adjusted person, happy in performing the most menial occupations and loved and revered by the prisoners as *Vadhyar* or teacher. There had to be a period of transition between the Raju we hear of

before his prison life and the Raju we are told of in prison, and the fact that Raju is totally silent about it suggests that it must have been a traumatic period which changed him considerably. What Raju emphasises about his prison life is his delight in being close to nature and planting the seeds which grow into vegetables:

'I loved every piece of work, the blue sky and sunshine, and the shade of the house in which I sat and worked, the feel of cold water; it produced in me a luxurious sensation. 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.'

This feeling of bonding with nature is a regenerative influence, which makes more credible Raju's later desire to avoid food to 'help the trees bloom and the grass grow'.

The change in Raju's character in the end is dramatic but not totally unexpected, because Narayan also subtly shows from the beginning of the novel that the very qualities which make Raju successful as a hustler, also contributes to Raju's transformation into a saint. As Cynthia vanden Driesen points out 'If, as E M Forster suggested, "the test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way," Raju emerges as a fully rounded character. This capacity for sympathy is no incomprehensible development. It is the quality which has throughout enabled him to gauge the emotional need of others.' At the very beginning of the novel Raju responds to Velan's appeal for help because of 'the old, old habit of affording guidance to others reasserting itself.

Narayan emphasises the duality of Raju's character through a series of multi-layered images which portray the qualities which makes Raju comprehensible both as rogue and redeemer. At the beginning of the novel, when Velan studies Raju's face with 'intense respect', 'Raju strokes his chin thoughtfully to make sure that an apostolic beard has not suddenly grown there.' The image of Raju with an 'apostolic beard', prefigures Raju's transformation at the end of the novel but, in the very next section, as if Raju is himself aware of the irony,

we get a flash back of Raju coming out of prison and being shaved by the barber who views Raju with amused contempt. Such juxtapositions make us realise the difference between a saint and a sinner might only be in the different points of view from which we look at a person. The story of Devaka is also used by Narayan in the same way. In the first instance, the story is used by Raju to exhibit his wisdom to the villagers. The second time it occurs in Raju's own narrative about his childhood when he recounts how the story was told by his mother to put him to sleep. We realise that Raju is unable to complete the story when he is telling it to Velan because he always fell asleep before his mother fin-

ished narrating it, a point which makes us ironically aware of the adult Raju's ability to project himself as a wise man through the use of his wits. Yet, the image of Raju, the child, blissfully dropping off to sleep in the security of his mother's lap evokes a portrait of peace and innocence, which can be connected to the higher innocence that Raju achieves at the end of the novel, when he sinks like 'a baby' into the womb of the earth mother.

Narayan also makes intensive use of the acting metaphor to make us aware that Raju assumes the role of *Sadhu* as a part he is acting. In the first encounter with Velan 'he fell like an actor who was always expected to utter the right sentence.' Later he realises 'that he had no alternative: he must play the role that Velan had given him' so he decides to 'arrange the stage for the display with more thoroughness.' Such images might suggest that Raju is a mere impostor but Narayan is also well aware that in writing about Raju as a *Sadhu* he is working within the context of Hindu mysticism, which allows us to view the images from a different perspective. In Hindu philosophy, for a man to follow his *dharma* he must immerse his ego in an archetypal role. From the standpoint of *dharma*, all of life is a great play through which the individual moves both as actors and audience. The only way a man can find release from the prison of his Karma is by following his *dharma* i.e. by accepting the role that is assigned to him. Thus Raju realises that he has no alternative but to play the role assigned to him by providence.

Once he accepts this, almost in spite of himself, he begins to undergo a transformation so that he wonders 'have I been in a prison or in some sort of transmigration?' Gradually, as he subjected to the regenerating influence of the timeless routine of the village life in India, his life begins to 'lose its personal limitations.' The beginning of Raju's conversion to sainthood, is brought about when the garbled version of Raju's command to the villagers makes them believe that Raju is going to fast to end the draught.

Before this point the irony in the narrative voice makes Raju a comic figure craving for *bonda* and aware of the absurdity of playing 'hide and seek with his feet'. At this point, however, the narrative voice becomes absolutely serious as it relates Raju's moment of self-realisation: Narayan emphasises the duality of Raju's character through a series of multi-layered images which portray the qualities which makes Raju comprehensible both as rogue and redeemer. At the beginning of the novel, when Velan studies Raju's face with 'intense respect', 'Raju strokes his chin thoughtfully to make sure that an apostolic beard has not suddenly grown there.' The image of Raju with an 'apostolic beard', prefigures Raju's transformation at the end of the novel but, in the very next section, as if Raju is him-

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He left his seat abruptly, as if he had been stung by a wasp, and approached Velan. His tone hushed with real humility and fear; his manner was earnest.'

Narayan's realism prevents Raju's conversion from being too abrupt or sentimental. In the next instance Raju contemplates running away 'but he feels moved by the thought of their gratitude.' Throughout his life Raju has served the needs of others because he gets something out of it personally. It is only at the end that he transcends his self and realises the pleasure of devoting his life to others:

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'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.'

The carnival atmosphere at the end of the novel shows how the intrusion of Western secular influences has created a spiritual draught which can only be ended by Raju's sacrifices, which revivifies the well-spring of Hindu mysticism lying deep within Indian culture. Narayan deliberately leaves ambiguous at the end whether the rains come or not, but the miracle that makes Raju a saint is not that he ends the draught but that he is willing to give up his life to benefit others.

Thus at the end of the novel, Raju achieves release from the prison of his own individuality by annihilating his ego and mingling into the eternal. It is Narayan's mastery of the art of storytelling which allows him to make *The Guide* perfectly credible as a realistic novel and modern myth. In the *Guide* Narayan combines psychological realism in portraying character with innovative narrative devices and complex images to show the relevance of Hindu values to the problems of modern life.

1. From Rouge to Redeemer: R K Narayan's *The Guide*, Cynthia vanden Driesen (University of Western Australia), *The International Fiction Review*, Vol. 6, No 2, Summer 1975.

The Author is Lecturer, Dept of English, University of Dhaka.