Conflict between Good and Evil in R.K. Narayan’s the Guide
Dinesh Kumar
Asstt. Prof. of English Dyali Singh College, Karnal
Dineshkarnal1@gmail.com
Mob. No. 09466580017

Abstract
There is no doubt in denying the fact that R.K. Narayan is one of the dominating figures in Indian Writing in English. The conflict between good and evil is a recurrent theme in his fiction. Although, this theme has been dealt by a number of British and American novelists in their fiction, but Narayan has dealt with this theme in an efficient manner. Unlike his novel, The Man of Malgudi, in the present novel, The Guide, he has chosen only one figure, Raju, an embodiment of both the traits good evil. How this conflict between good and evil leads to his catastrophe, is the central concern of the present novel, The Guide.

Paper
R.K. Narayan’s novel, The Guide won him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960. The central protagonist of the novel, Raju, is a romantic rascal and, like his fictional predecessors, Margayya and Sampath, Raju, too, plays many “parts” and puts into practice some of Dr Pal’s pregnant ideas on tourism. 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 lover. Abandoned by Marco, Rosie realizes with Raju’s help, her ambition of becoming a dancer. But his possessive instinct finally betrays him into a criminal action, and he is charged with and convicted of forgery. Coming out of the jail he cuts off all connection 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 he is 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 incarceration. But nobody would now believe that he is 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 opportunistically a martyr.

As far as the theme of good and evil in the novel, The Guide, is concerned, it is a development of The Man-Eater of Malgudi and other of Narayan’s novels. Whereas in The Man-Eater of Malgudi, the good and evil are represented by two separate personalities, in The Guide, both good and evil are embodied in the same character, Raju, the hero of the novel. Raju is both the hero and the villain in the novel whose transformation takes place towards the end of the novel.

The novel has been written in the tradition of picaresque novel. The word “picaresque” comes from the Spanish word Picaro meaning a rogue or a villain. A picaresque novel is a novel which deals with the adventures of a rogue or villain. The rogue or picaro is the central figure, and in the novel, he plays many roles and wears many masks. In The Guide, Raju is the central figure, and he is a rogue and fraud who plays different roles, till, finally, he comes to be regarded as Mahatma, and falls a martyr to his own ingenuity.

Does it really rain, or is it Raju’s optical delusion? Does he really die, or merely sink down in exhaustion? Has the lie really become the truth or has it been merely exposed? We are free to conclude as we like; Narayan might say in Piradelloean fashion: “Right, you are, if you think so.”

From the very beginning of his life, Raju is good for nothing. He plays with the village boys and acquires dirty habits of all sorts. He swears horribly and uses the most vulgar abuses. He
does not like to go to school, wastes his time there when he is forced to go, and learns almost nothing. His father has a poor opinion of him, and his mother regards him as loafer. When the railway comes to Malgudi, his father takes a stall on the station and leaves it in his charge. His father soon dies leaving him to look after the stall, the house as well as his mother. The disciplining influence of the father is thus removed early in his life and Raju is left free to sow his wild oats.

So, Raju as a reckless and the romantic hero is poised against a whole set of hard realities. The innate urge of Raju to find a meaning of life, to assert his identity in an imperious world, takes up an urgency in the character of this comic hero and the greater the urgency, the greater is the dynamism of his actions and reactions. He can defy the ethical injunctions of the society to satisfy his existential needs. The comic clash with the external reality presents life’s depths and colours in a Kaleidoscopic pattern.

From a stall-keeper, Raju soon turns into a tourist guide. He is shrewd, intelligent, and observant, and he soon acquires little bits of knowledge by reading the old magazines and books which he stocks, and by talking to the passengers who come to his stall. He tells the tourists about Malgudi though he himself is a fraud who does not know much about Malgudi and its environs, but, he pretends to know everything. He has a “water diviner’s” instinct, is able to size up his clients at first sight, and modifies his talk accordingly. He freely changes and distorts facts to please the tourists, and as a result of that his fame spreads and he comes to be known as Railway Raju. His self-confidence pays him rich dividends, and he never worries about the many distortions in which he has indulged and the untruth he has told. He deceives, lies, and adopts crooked ways to fleece the unknowing tourists which reveals his evil nature.

Raju "is a grotesque character almost fantastic for those who believe in human industry and cause effect theory, says William Walsh in this connection, “Much the most vivid part of Raju’s life was lived in public places: first, the street, the shop, the railway station; and later, concert halls, jail and temple. He was always in some sense an institutional figure.”

At the station, he was sought out by everyone who wanted advice and directions which is one of the chief attributes of Raju. “It is written on the brow of some, “he tells Velan, “that they shall not be left alone, I am one such” “He could not be left alone because he was felt to be a naturally public character one of those who seem hardly to exist in private.”(P-49) It is compulsion of such people (we feel we have known them intimately perhaps because they display something latent in us all today but grossly, extremely) to respond in the way the audience wants. Raju’s answer to his questions the railway station bear no relation to conviction or reality but only to the feeling he senses in the questioner. It is inevitable, therefore, that he should become a guide, but a guide with no content in his message, only attitude determined from outside.

However, one of good traits lies in Raju’s character because of which tourists from all parts insisted on his services, and whatever he does for them he does with a certain detachment, not for any private gain, but simply because they ask him “Anything that interested my clients was also my own interest. The question of my own preference was secondary.”(P-42) He learns as he earns, and soon acquires not only intimate knowledge of Malgudi and its surroundings but also of human nature. So, as a tourist guide, he has a number of good qualities embodied in himself. Indeed, throughout his career he shows an amazing understanding of human psychology.

Raju would have remained a tourist guide, but for the arrival of Marco and his fascinating but discontented wife, Rosie. Raju is at once fascinated by her and wins her heart by his sympathy and consideration, as well as by his keen interest in her art. Both of them are born romantics, and it is the coming together of two similar temperaments which is essentially romantic. By
being romantic, is not any positive quality, in fact, it is an evil that is responsible for their misunderstanding later on Says William Walsh “She and Raju are two of a kind and they fall in love at once. Not that there is anything head longer tumultuous about their affair, which strikes one as being as much a crises or nerves as of passion.”

Rosie is one of those butterflies type of women who frequently appear in the novels of Narayan. She is the heroine of the novel having charming and fascinating personality. Like Raju, Rosie too embodies within herself some good as well as evil qualities. Raju falls in love with her at first sight and says, “She was not very glamorous, if that is what you expect, but she did have a figure, a complexion, not white, but dusky, which made her only half visible as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice.”(P-38)

Rosie is a born dancer and her inherent feeling for dancing cannot be suppressed, and when she gets a chance to perfect the art, she seizes it. This is one of her chief qualities. Her giving way to Raju is understandable, she might have resisted the physical urge if her husband had been the least kind and considerate: but his inhuman coldness, Raju’s evident administration and the opportunity so conveniently provided by her husband, result in what seems a forgone conclusion. But basically Rosie is a good girl and she is amazed that her husband does not throttle her infidelity, and is deeply grateful to him for it.

When that husband throws her out and she has no other place to go to, she comes to Raju, a wicked and flirt indeed. More than the attraction of sex is Rosie’s desire to perfect her art and realize herself fully in God given gift. She does not take long to achieve eminence, and it is Raju who helps her to attain that place which has she desired for. When Raju wants her to give performances, she is not unwilling, but with fame come unceasing demands on her time and energy. She has to fall into a routine and go round and round like a bull yoked to a crusher; her weariness of it all is like that of any film star.

Due to his evil nature, Raju exploits Rosie for his own advantage and narrow, selfish ends. He says “I had monopoly of her and nobody had anything to do with her…. She was my property(P-58 )And a little later….. “I did not like to see her enjoy other people’s company. I liked to keep her in a citadel.” Raju’s evil nature can be seen in the fact that in spite of the hard work of Rosie, Raju takes all the credit for her success, and is of the view that she would not be able to do without him, but he is soon disillusioned.

Raju performs the role of Rosie’s business manager and publicity agent with relish and perfection, excelling as an impresario. At this point, Raju’s evil nature does not come to the surface as he arranges her dance performances, bestowing great care to the last detail.

Along with Rosie’s rising graph towards fame, adulation and eminence, Raju too rises in stature, wealth and success intoxicates him and he loses all sense of proportion. In any case, the comparative unimportance of passion between Raju and Rosie looks surprising only at the beginning of the affair. But, soon after they begin to live together, what they do in spite of the opposition of Raju’s formidable but sympathetic mother, their relationship takes on a different character. From being primarily personal, it becomes primarily functional or official. It is the evil nature of Raju that he drives out his mother for Rosie’s sake. After her dance practices, Rosie or Nalini, as she becomes in the theatrical world, blooms into a great artist, and Raju thrives as a successful entrepreneur.

But soon Raju’s greed, or in real sense, his evil nature forces him to forge Rosie’s signature on a document claiming her jewel out of some muddled system of motives, a mixture of curiosity, jealousy, goodwill, sheer love of the devious, and the habit of doing things for no adequate reason at all, Raju forges Rosie’s signature on the document claiming her jewel box, which is in her husband’s keeping. At once Marco, who all this time is distant, faintly ominous presence, takes his
revenge. Raju is prosecuted, his friends evaporate, his lawyer is a shark, the judge is unsympathetic. He is sentenced to two years in jail and this phase of his career is summarily terminated.” (P-58)

In the prison, Raju turns out to be a model prisoner, he is perfectly happy in jail—as he thinks, “Now I realized that people generally thought of me as being unsound and worthless, not because I deserved the label, but because they had been seeing me in the wrong place all along. To appreciate me they should have come to the central jail and watched me.”(P-99) Raju responds enthusiastically to the various calls made on him by the prison community and he becomes the teacher and comforter of the prisoners whom he could talk out of their blackest mood, the friend of the warders, and personal servant and secretary to the superintendent. Here, we witness that there is a transformation which starts in the prison although it is slow. So, his evil nature starts changing into somewhat good.

This change towards goodness can be witnessed the way in which he works with pleasure on a vegetable patch in the backyard of the superintendent’s home, “watched with delight the beans and cabbages and brinjals grow, plucked them tenderly, washed them polished with the end of his jail jacket, arranged them, artistically on a tray of woven bamboo and carved them ceremoniously to the superintendent, a lover of good food wherever it came from.”(P-62)

But when his punishment comes to an end, he feels choked with tears as he admits himself that when he has to go out after two years, and he wishes that we had not wasted all that money on our lawyer. “He would have been happy to stay in that prison permanently.” (P-64)

When Raju comes out of the prison, he is very much depressed because all the avenues for his return to Rosie as well as to his mother are closed because of his wickedness. He feels very terrified because he has no source of income and throughout his life he has befooled others and earned his living by cheating others. But destiny has decided something different for Raju which sends him to village Mangal. Some are born saints, others become saints and there are some on whom sainthood is thrust and such one is Raju. Raju plays the role of a Mahatma very efficiently for basically there is not much difference between the role of a railway guide and that of a spiritual guide. The same gift of eloquence, the same ability to make grand, mystifying statements, the same air of knowingness enable him to play his role with much success, and here also Raju’s evil nature comes on the surface.

But the irony of situation prevails when he is called upon to undertake a twelve day fast, so that it may rain and the starving villagers of Mangal may be saved. Raju, as a swami, tries to run away from the village but he is not able to do so, for he has himself closed all the avenues to escape. The belief in his sainthood in villagers is still stronger when he narrates his past story when he used to be a criminal, a fraud, and a rogue and, ultimately, is compelled to undertake the fast, and finding no escape, he decides to do it thoroughly. As says K.R.S. Iyenger in this connection:

“For the first time in his life he was making a personal effort; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested.”

Here, Raju tries to be good because he is not able to face the harsh reality of the world. The tragicomedy of the individual’s helplessness in the face of awful external reality becomes abundantly clear when Velan, even after learning the entire history of Raju’s life, accepts him as “Swami.” What makes velan behave so is left ambiguous, but in the figure of Velan, all the weights of the world come to crush Raju and force him to maintain an utterly inconvenient position. On the first day of his fast, quite in his guileful way of a comic hero, he secretly eats some rice. But on the second day, he searches for food in the aluminum vessel in vain. His indomitable ego, which hitherto has been responsible for all his crises, once again
comes to assert itself as a challenge to the pressure of the world.

“He felt enraged at the persistence of food thoughts with a sort of vindictive resolution he told himself, “I’ll chase away all thought of food. For the next ten days I shall eradicate all thoughts of tongue and stomach from my mind.” (P-48)

With this resolution of Raju, in forsaking he domestic life and in accepting martyrdom, the narrative moves out of the bounds of the comedy and enters the portals of a religious drama; the comic incongruity persists, though now outside the character of Raju. Raju’s long rigorous penance and the loony crowd around him are in ironic proximity to each other. This is, in fact, an encounter between an extremely private self and an indifferent world lying outside.

“….each day the crowd increased. In a week there was permanent hym pervading the place……. People swarmed around little water holes.” (P-91)

Raju’s undertaking the penance in order to eradicate the drought and thus mitigate the suffering shows his goodness as well as generosity. Yet he remains his solitary self amidst all these merry making and religious festivities. The objective world looms large with the special trains carrying passengers, Gaffur’s taxi, the big tea stall erected by the Tea Propaganda Board, the Khaki-clad inspectors of the Health Department and the D.D.T., the film shows about Malaria, swarming press reporters, and the American film producer, the gambling both and peddlers and onlookers. A serious religious mission generating such propaganda and festivities that belong absolutely to a commercial world is, of course, a comic spectacle.

While the commercial world goes on exhibiting itself, Raju shrinks in words:

The hum of humanity around was increasing. His awareness of his surroundings was gradually lessening in a sort of inverse proportion.” (P-67)

What seems to be a funny collaboration between innocent village folk and an imposter working for an impossible end, takes on serious dimensions. Against the trepidations in the inner depths of existence of a sinner experiencing the metamorphosis into a saint through self-mortification, the flirtation and flippancy of the curious crowd, of the vast network of commercial and governmental activities are juxtaposed. Beneath the comedy of the entire scene, an awful anxiety lurks about Raju, who faces the most crucial tryst with his destiny. Narayan, here, not only depicts the state of Indian society in a period of transition; on the existential plane, he seems to suggest the bewildering relationship between the individual and the world.

In this way, The Guide is a powerful artistic projection of the socio-economic forces and the psycho-spiritual layers of human personality existing in a traditional and upcoming society of Malgudi.

This psycho-spiritual drama is explored in terms of the encounters and confrontations between the individual, and his self as well as it between the individual and God. The novel can be hailed as a social, psychological, emotional, and spiritual transformation of Raju in terms of his interaction and experiences finally terminating into the role of a Mahatma. In this way, R.K.Narayan’s vision of life in the novel The Guide is both comic and serious along with temporal and spiritual translated in the novel in terms of Raju, Rosie, Malgudi Syndrome. Narayan comic is vision is thus a view of life with a frame of reference. It has its roots in a traditional ethos and a scale of values. And these values have a special reference to the institution of the family which constitutes Narayan’s sensibility milieu. Evolution of “a proper detachment”,5 or dissociation while leading an embodied and temporal life has been the sum mum bonus of the Indian philosophy of synthesis.

The resolution of the conflict between the evil forces and the good forces has not been shown by the novelist till the end of the novel because the end of the conflict between the good and the evil takes place all of a sudden The Guide is a novel about an average man whose evolution is curious like that of his beloved from a stall-keeper...
he came to be Mahatma as Rosie from a devdasi came to be a dancer of the world renown. They are creatures of the earth who get out their fantasies, finally, to succumb to the external forces of conventions of the society to whom they belong. Neither are they, nor do they pretend to be great. They are mere actors in the comedy humane of Narayan’s world of average emotions and actions. The ending of the novel has been highly praised by critics like C.D. Narasimhiah who writes “And the ending is smooth and inevitable. India’s undying faith in God and goodness, holy man and miracles is here rendered quite credible by the novelist art even to the skeptical and questioning mind.  

The metaphysical quality of the sentences in the novel suggests a freedom for Raju from his deception and from self-deception at last. All his life, he has submerged his personality and projected different images of it befitting the requirement of the various situations. The joys and sorrows of his life have been of those projected images rather than his own. Thus he realizes, perhaps, only in his last moment, strives to liberate his submerged self and comes to possess again his long lost true identity. The tragedy of it is that it becomes possible only at the point of death.

REFERENCES