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Rajo, More Sinned against than Sinning in, R.K Narayan's *The Guide*

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Abstract:

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami, an Indo-Anglican writer popularly known as R.K. Narayan, was born on 10th October, 1906 in the city of Mysore and died on 13th May, 2001. His novels would occupy the world of commonplace and barefaced individuals of a fictional South Indian place called, Malgudi. His literary works began with a semi-autobiographical novel, *Swami and Friends*, which went begging for publishing until a renowned critic and his friend, Graham Greene, recognized his worth, and called it, "a book in ten thousand". After the success of "*swami and friends*", more wonderful works followed; *The English teacher*, *The Financial Expert*, *Waiting for the Mahatma*, *Mr Sampath*, and his masterpiece, *The Guide*.

The Guide is his most admired and skillfully written novel. The novel is set against the background of Malgudi. The paper attempts to deconstruct the popular view about its chief character Rajo, an anti-hero, a swindler, and an impostor. The paper shall discuss, Rajo, a thrilling character who is willing to take risks, try new methods, ideas and experiences, A character who is more sinned than against sinning. Michael Gorra, Prof of English at Smith college, writes in the introduction to the novel, *The Guide*, "*The Guide* stands as the greatest of Narayan's comedies of self-deception. Pellucid and elusive at once, and marked by an ease that masks its difficulty, it was the first novel in English to win the annual prize of the Sahitya Academy, India's national literary academy."

Keywords: Malgudi, Rajo, Guide, Swami.

Introduction:

R.K Narayan is known for his novels about people living in villages. It is the naive, simple, innocent superstitious people of these villages, who become the characters of his novels. He gives us the story of these ordinary beings, who see their way through Hindu Mythology and superstitions, in the matters related to the moral problems and other complications of their social lives. In the novel, *The Guide*, Rajo's journey from a railway guide, to a swami elucidate him a man on whom things are necessitated, rather done of his own will in the first place. Throughout the novel, Rajo's actions are an outcome of the external agencies, that drift him passively to a certain situation or position. Rajo plays the role of a tourist guide. His behavior as a tourist guide is not out of his own choice, rather the

role is thrust upon him. People who visit Malgudi, expect him to guide them, they enquire about him by the name of "Railway Raju". It is tourists who make him famous. He only provides them with the answers, they would like to hear, and would suit their own best. Being intelligent and skillful, Raju accurately knows how to satisfy them. He magnifies the beauty of Malgudi before them, in his talk, to much of their liking. His descriptions about Malgudi though fake, certainly seem to amuse them. Narrating his story to Velan, he says; "I came to be called Railway Raju. Perfect strangers, having heard of the name, began to ask for me when the train arrived at the Malgudi railway station. It is written on the brow of some that they shall not be left alone. I am one such, I think. Although I never looked for acquaintance, they somehow came looking for me.....they asked, "how far is?" or which way does one go to reach...? Or are there many historical spots here...?I never said, "I don't know." Not in my nature, I suppose. If I had the inclination to say "I don't know what you are talking about," my life would have taken a different turn.....It was not because I wanted to utter a falsehood, but only because I wanted to be pleasant"....(Chapter V).As a tourist guide, Raju's intentions are purely to entertain tourists and not to disappoint them. Shortly he finds himself escorting them to the best known places of Malgudi, and providing them with the geographical and historical details about the place. He is almost pushed to the role of a railway guide. According to William Walsh the critic, "Much the most vivid part of Raju's life was lived in public places: first the streets, the shop, the railway station and later concert halls, jail, the temple. He was always in some sense an institutional figure." From a tourist guide, Raju almost involuntarily drifts to the role of being Rosie's Lover. A born romantic Raju, is at once, enthralled by her personality. He is amazed at Marco's neglect of such an attractive creature. Marco a queer, unconventional archaeologist seems to be quite a miss match for such an adoring, lively wife like Rosie. There seems to be an awkward tension in the husband wife relationship, which certainly paves the way for Raju Rosie affair. Raju observes that Marco's interest is more in finding dead things than her living wife. In Marco's conversation with Rosie; "If it interests you, you can make your own arrangements. Don't expect me to go with you. I can't stand the sight of a snake-your interests are morbid." Raju provides Rosie with all the feeling, empathy, care, understanding and compassion, with things missing in her relationship with Marco. He meets her expectations at all levels and instances. Prof Narasimaiah remarks; "Raju Rosie relationship becomes credible and acceptable only because of the neglect, Rosie suffers at the hands of her husband". Raju offers her all the happiness and genuine love she deserves. He takes care of her likes, her passion and her impulses. She confesses to Raju; "I'd have preferred to any kind of mother in law, if it had meant one real, live husband."....(Chapter:V). Rosie is almost non existent to an eccentric husband like Marco, and as the events unfold, they only bring Raju and Rosie more close to each other, almost involuntarily. Raju does not contrive plans to seduce her, things just happen to him. Being forsaken by her husband after her infidelity, Rosie has nowhere to go, but Raju. Raju a carefree, easy going person is least concerned with the social principles of right and wrong, He acts according to the dictates of his heart. He welcomes deserted Rosie

warm heartedly into his house. In addition to accommodating her into his house, Rajo becomes her guide and mentor and encourages her desire of becoming a dancer. It is Rajo who gives meaning to her life, who unveils her talent before the world. It is because of her rigorous support, that Rosie achieves fame and recognition. In Rajo's speech; "You are in the right place, forget all your past. We will teach that cad a lesson by and by".....First, I'll make the world recognize you as the greatest artist of the time.".....(Chapter:VII). Rajo an airy, casual and a happy go lucky fellow, never sees Rosie as a married woman, but someone who should chase her dreams, and follow her passion. Rosie also realizes the fact which makes her confess to Rajo; " Even if I have seven rebirths I won't be able to repay my debt to you.".....(chapter:IX) .

Rajo's forging the sign of Rosie is a desperate act of possessiveness. It is his insecurity, which makes him conceal the letter from Rosie. He doesn't want to lose her at any cost. He fears Rosie might get to know of her husband's nobility in sending the jewellery box back to her after all these years. He cannot stand her commending his work, speaking highly of him, and expressing her gratitude for the act; As R.K Narayan lays bare his mind before us; "She would in all likelihood lose her head completely. She was likely to place the wildest interpretation on it and cry out, "see how noble, he is!"and make herself miserable and spoil for a might with me...but I felt to show to her this letter would be suicidal. She might refuse to do anything except talk about his nobility.".....(Chapter:IX) It is Rajo's final role as a spiritual guide which redeems, him completely. From a mock Sadhu to being a divine one Rajo undergoes a complete spiritual regeneration. Though again, the role of a Sadhu is obliged upon him, he is bound to act like one as expected from the simple, naive, and gullible people of the village Mangala. Rajo's , sitting "cross legged", "besides an ancient throne", makes Velan, an innocent villager mistake him for a Sadhu. He looks at him with astonishment and reverence. He is more than convinced that Rajo is not an ordinary being, but a holy man. He gazes at him , the way a devotee might gaze at his "Guru". Rajo's thoughts at this particular moment, clearly show his reluctance to play the role of swami. He has no role in making himself a swami. He very much wants to be left to himself.The text reads; " Rajo wanted to blurt out," I am here because I have nowhere else to go....But he hesitated, wondering how he should say it. It looked as though he would be hurting others deepest sentiment.... "He tried at least to say , "I am not so great as you imagine I am just ordinary." It is evident from the above lines that he is compelled to be a Swami. A person who is pushed to certain limits by external elements. To prove Velan wrong about himself he even, gives him an account of his past events, without concealing a single bit of it. He awaits Velan's disgust with him, after hearing him, so he could be left to himself. But Velan's reaction is quite contrary to what Rajo anticipates, Velan says; I don't know why you tell me all this Swami, It is very kind of you to address at such length your humble servant."The final incident of Rajo's fasting also arises almost spontaneously. Rajo has no calculative motives behind the scene. He behaves the way people imagine him to behave. However while performing the role of a swami, eventually Rajo forgets, he is an actor, the strong belief of villagers transmute him completely, and a

railway guide turns into a spiritual guide; “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....If by avoiding food I should help the trees to bloom, and the grass to grow, why not do it thoroughly.”The collective belief of villagers makes him believe in himself, and he like those innocent beings awaits a miracle to happen. In his essay, The reluctant Guru, R.K Narayan writes, “I felt myself in the same position as Raju, the hero of my Guide, who was mistaken for a saint and began to wonder at some point himself if sudden effulgence has begun to show on his face.”

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