

**EAST-WEST CONFLICT IN THE IDEOLOGY OF R. K. NARAYAN
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS SELECTED NOVELS:
*THE GUIDE AND THE VENDOR OF SWEETS***

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Abstract:

R. K. Nayan, a prolific Indo-Anglian writer in Indian English literature, the first recipient of the most prestigious award, Sahitya Akademi. He was born in India, Madras, later named as Chennai in October 1906. His works are set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. He is one of the three leading figures of Indian literature in English and is compared with William Faulkner. All of his novels are marvellous and readable. His dialogue is extremely clear, obvious and transparent. By working on 'his two inches of ivory', he has presented the whole life of Indian society and achieved fame and name in Indo-Anglian Fiction. He was regional Novelist like Thomas Hardy. As he has chosen the social life society the root of culture, tradition and dynamic as well. The first three books presented by Narayan contain accepted evil practices of society. The present paper focuses on the major issue, the east-west conflict.

Keywords: *East-west conflict, Malgudi, culture, generation, religion, society, modernity.*

Introduction

R.K.Narayan is a well known literary figure and recognized as a novelist of Indo-Anglian literature. His style, manner, mode, language and ethics are highly praiseworthy. The East-West themes are prominent in his Indo-Anglian novels. One can see the conflict between religion and reason in various novels of Nayan. It is evident from his characters who were influenced by western culture and were rational in their opinion. Others continue to be slaves of irrational or superstitious or eastern practices assigned to the orthodox Hindu religion. The author exposes these clashes through the characters of his novels. In spite of the fact that Nayan is a supporter of modernity, he does not objurgate Hindu ethos. He has taken into consideration the middle-class society. As the common masses were not aware of western techniques still they have the desire to prosper and advance in life, Narayan beautifully depicted orients have the anxiety to achieve, adopt or follow the occidentals.

If we have a look at R.K.Narayan's novel, *The Guide*, east-west conflict is a major theme. This work is an attempt to present the conflict between tradition and modernity, east and west, orients and occident's, Nayan's main aim is to give an artistic expression of Indian life. The novel, *The Guide* is the masterpiece of Narayan. He wrote this novel outside his native land and it brought him name and fame all over the world. It narrates the adventures of railway guide popularly known as 'Railway Raju'. The author describes different roles of Raju at a railway station as a food vendor, a tourist guide, a fornication, a dancing girl's manager, a swindler and a martyred mystic. He has described the life of Raju and later on become the owner of the railway stall. In addition to this, he was also a tourist guide. Through this profession, he came in contact with Marco, who was an archaeologist, and his wife Rosie. Meanwhile, he fell in love with Marco's wife, Rosie. Ultimately Marco came to know about their sinful act and abandons her. With the help of Raju, Rosie became a dancer. In the meantime, Raju's forgery lands him in jail. Somehow he manages to come out and abandons his past by living a new life of Sadhu. There was a famine

and drought the people expected him to take fast on the 12th day Raju fell down exhausted and it is not certain whether he is actually dead or has merely fainted.

In the beginning of the novel, there is a clash between the ideas of the father and the son. The son wants to go to a fashionable school where the western influence was evident whereas his father forced him to take admission in a Pyol school due to the threat of the western civilization. R.K.Narayan has beautifully shown the contrariness of the duo. It is clear from the text when Raju says:

I don't know on whose advice my father chooses to send me here for my education, while the fashionable Albert Mission School was quite close by. I'd have felt proud to call myself an Albert Mission boy. But I often heard my father declare, I do not want to send my boy there; it seems they try to convert our boys into Christians and all time insulting our gods.¹

It is evident from the passage which shows how westernization penetrates into the society. The change in the Protagonists character towards education clearly supports and assists the influence of the westernization on society. Whereas the father of Raju strictly adheres to the traditional or eastern way of education. From the beginning, the protagonist recognizes himself with the railways which show Raju as the post-colonial person. Symbolically railway shows the enforcement of western qualities into a conventional Malgudi. The modern culture, new ideologies, evolution in society, slowly changed the mentality of the protagonist and he accepted these changes in society. R.K.Narayan has shown how Raju goes beyond the spiritual transcendence into a materialistic world which is the trait of modernity. Raju has a modernistic approach. He does not accept an inherited pattern like bow down and touch the feet of seniors or elders. When Raju came out of jail and the villagers took him as Sadhu. Velan wanted to bow in front of Raju and touch his feet but the protagonist did not allow him to do so. As Nayaran states:

Velan Rose bowed down and tried to touch Raju's feet. Raju recoiled at the attempt. I will not permit anyone to do this God alone is entitled to such a prostration. He will destroy us if we attempt. I will not permit anyone to this. God alone is entitled to such a prostration .he will destroy us if we attempt to usurp his rights. (16)

In spite of the fact that Rosie has got an M.A. Degree, she is not modern in nature. She lacks modernistic values. She is a traditional Indian wife longs for care and affection from the husband. Marco did not like anyone to interfere in his professional activities. He expects that Rosie must be thankful for his studies. This difference in their ideology is the cause of quarrel between them. Rosie was compelled to enter an extramarital affair with Raju. Nayaran asserts that in eastern countries society is rigid one in which there is no respect for freedom of once potential, that Orientals regard women as inferior and does not provide them the chance to express themselves. This is the painful thing for the feminine community. R.K.Narayan says in my days:

From times immemorial, man assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning that she herself began to lose all nations of her independence, individuality, her status and strength. A wife in orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstance.²

On the other hand, Marco and Rosie were not married according to the eastern rituals but in the office of the registrar of marriage which is also the sign of westernization which has gradually enveloped the Indian culture., society and civilization. If we have a look at the name "Rosie" is westernized and its utilization in the text shows her state of ejection. This type of name was not familiar to the people living eastern countries or to the orthodox Hindu society in which the protagonist was living. Here the foreign name is the sign of Rosie's social fusion, through which Nayaran portrays the real face of Indian society.

After knowing about the extramarital affair of Rosie, Marco deserted her and went to Madras by train. She came to Raju's house for shelter. Raju's mother was shocked after seeing Rosie alone in the evening. To quote from the text:

The very first question she asked was, 'who has come with you, Rosie'? Rosie blushed,

hesitated and looked at me. I moved a couple of steps backward in order that she might see me only dimly and not in all raggedness. I replied I think she has come alone, mother. My mother was amazed. 'Girls today! How courageous you are! In our day we would not go to the street corner with an escort. And I have been to the market only once in my life, when Raju's father was alive'. (*The Guide* 141)

The difference in character, as well as the temperament, is obvious. The mother of the Raju was a traditional Hindu woman who does not permit public. She has not permission and hence afraid to go out alone, on the other hand, Rosie is a modern woman. The western influence is apparent in her attitude, behaviour and temperament. She is not at all concerned to go out alone. In this novel, one can feel a conflict between the eastern and western culture and synthesizes the two through their assimilation which has been represented by Rosie's transformation into Nalini. Whereas her change of name from Rosie to Nalini is a clue of her desire to adapt herself in that very conventional society which she challenges and abandons. "Nalini "means "the Lotus", the place where goddess Lakshmi sat. According to Mythology of Hindu, Brahma too sat on the bed of lotus petals in the state of rumination. Hence the westernized Rosie shows her state of social exclusion. The name of Nalini, Rosie symbolically searches the path through which she can enter the orthodox society that rejects her.

Modern European and American novels influenced the Indo-Anglian writers as Narayan was not able to prevent himself. Thus the western fictional paradigms of bildungsroman and picaresque narrative are obvious in *The Guide*. Narayan's concerns as a citizen writer are articulated in a difficult way through his characters and their conflicts. Narayan writes:

This is how Narayan's novels show Indian society negotiating the complex terrain of the modern. Malgudi, in that sense, becomes a laboratory where various possibilities and positions are tried. *The Guide*, undoubtedly Narayan's best-known novel, as a narrative of modern India is about the nature of an ancient Indian institution, that of the guru, which indeed has no exact counterpart. R.k. Narayan's use of slightly lighter, slightly more frivolous and certainly more ambiguous word, "Guide", is therefore telling. (174)

If we have a look at the characters in the novel, Rosie, Velan, Raju's mother, and uncle Gaffur, the driver, Joseph, The Steward of the bungalow stayed where the husband of Rosie stayed, are all characters representing the traditional Indian civilization, culture and custom. Raju and Marco, on the other hand, exhibit features of western culture and manners. Thus the conflict between east and west is clear in the behaviour and dialogue of these characters throughout the novel.

The character in *The Guide* depicts not only Indian society and their traditions, customs, culture, religious faith and orthodox principles but they have presented a conflict between the eastern and western values which are shown by the protagonist's mother and his maternal uncle on the one hand and by Raju and Rosie on the other. In such conflict, cultural, customary or old values have to give place to new values and hence Raju's mother leaves her home for Raju and Rosie. Narayan's novels are written in bi-cultural perspective. The clash between the ancient eastern Indian tradition and values on the one side and modern western values, on the other side, is visible in many novels.

Raju, the protagonist of the novel, *The Guide* goes through intense conflict traditionalism and modernity, and in this book, the episode that beautifully depicts is the relationship with Rosie. Also showing Raju's character was turned by the increasing western civilization around him and has been enforced by the patriarchal society that established. Raju, after coming out of jail abandons the society and went towards the countryside by the river 'Sarayu' were due coincidences and acts of kindness by him, he changes into a holy man or Guru as they call him. What Narayan so frankly and subtly presents before us is nothing short of unlimited wisdom. Raju's character is indispensable to the novel and revolves round the story from a tourist guide he becomes a guide for life as that is what the essence of the guru is. Here Narayan exhibits Raju's change from modernity to traditionalism, from being the infamous and notorious

Railway Raju (traits of westernization) to a Sadhu who strived to achieve salvation. C.D.Narasimhaiah considers Raju a transformed man, in the end, a saint whereas G.S. Balarama Gupta believes, "Raju is a selfish swindler, an adroit actor and perfidious megalomaniac."³ To quote Paranjape again:

The question is not so much whether Raju is a willing saint or not because, like all of us, everyone within the novel notices Raju's reluctance, even his unfitness for gurudom. But does that really change who or what he ends of becoming, so what we have here is a real problem, one that leads up to the crux of Narayan's artistry and to his relationship to Indian modernity. Because if Raju is a fake, Narayan is putting into doubt not just an individual but the institution of guru itself. (177)

Raju seems to be the psychological projection of the typical individual in Indian society. The social norms, Raju is against such age-old institutional values, though he himself is rooted in the family tradition. Rosie's caste system is attacked by the common people as 'public woman', but Raju opposes them all and asserts that her caste is 'the noblest caste on earth'. R.K. Narayan depicted that time has changed as no one accepts Rosie according to their eastern orthodox norms but Raju faces the ups and downs, even and odds to give her the identity in the society which Raju has attributed from the modern and or western civilization.

As soon as Raju disunite himself from the society and went after Rosie, she has moral degradation and he faces harsh repercussions. When he returns to society as a Sanyasi he achieves salvation. In the words of Arun Soule:

Thus, it is seen that in the western context, the individual can grow and develop, if he dissociates himself from society and becomes individualistic: whereas in the Indian context if an individual dissociates himself from society he comes to grief, but if he takes society along with him then he will be at peace with himself and his surroundings, and will be able to grow and develop.⁴

Malgudi is a microcosm of India. Railway's presence or inclusion to Malgudi is symbolically the influence of industrial and urban society on a simple agricultural community. The cherished values of life give way to modern and their attendant evils. Raju who gave up a decent home has now picked up terms of abuse from the Railwaymen and his father's words 'just my miss fortune!' sound ominous in the light of the impending disaster. His father does not follow the orthodox Brahama calling of the priesthood. Hence it becomes ironic Raju comes back full circle to his caste occupation as a performer of sacred rites. Raju's father was a materialistic man who took the full toll of the colonial world, trade and commerce. It is the railway which brings the western world, with its westernization to Malgudi. R.K. Narayan brought western notions to the traditional Malgudi and enforces the people of the town to recoil themselves from it. The influence of the locale that opposes eastern are the westernized parts of the town where Raju and Rosie carry on their practices- the cinema hall, the Taj Restaurant and the hotel. *The Guide* not only depicts Indian society, it's customs, traditions, culture, ostentations, superstitious beliefs but also presents a clash between the traditional values which are symbolized by Raju's mother and his maternal uncle on the one hand and by Raju and Rosie on the other hand.

This latest work *The Vendor of Sweets* of R.K.Narayan came out in 1967, and the novel was published in London by the Bodley Head Limited. Its 17th report appeared in 2006. The east-west encounter is the major theme of the novel. It is the conflict between the staunch Indian or eastern father and his western- bred son, depicting the rare complexities of the Indian middle-class society trying to adapt to the changing world, blinding the eastern values with the western outlook and style.

Jagan is the most vibrant character of the novel, *The Vendor of Sweets* from the first to the last. Mali, his son who returned from America after his three years of education there has totally changed from an Indian to a western. Grace, the companion of Mali from America is undoubtedly western and rational.

The opening paragraph of the novel is highly comic, especially to western ears. To quote from the text, "conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self", said Jagan to his listener, who asked, "Why

conquer the self"? Jagan said, "I do not know, but all our sages advice us so." The listener's question and the answer of Jagan shows western and eastern ideology respectively. The occidental always thinks logically. They never blindly bow's to blind faith. Jagan has surrendered his ideas to sages and never thinks to investigate the truth in their statements. Through this swami's and the clergy exploit the common people in the east in the words of Barry Argyle:

To the western ear this hugely comic because the idea of doing anything without being able to produce a reason stronger than tradition runs counter to our notions of ourselves. Those who do we mean to think foolish. Even when demonstrably false, our reasons have to sound at least reasonable. Our listener's question, "Why"? Is the foundation of modern western civilization:, and to know that and Indian will also ask the question confirms us in our rightness.⁵

There are various verbal encounters between Jagan and Mali, Mali and Grace and Jagan and Grace. The dialogue which throws light on Jagan's Gandhian principles is, "I have discontinued sugar as you know. I find twenty drops of water quite adequate and that is the natural way of taking in the sugar we need?"⁶

Jagan felt disappointed when he reads the letter. The sacred book of Hindus have presented the five deadly sins and in the first is the killing of the cows Jagan was an orthodox Hindu, a pure vegetarian and a staunch follower of Gandhian philosophy, who believed in ahimsa. This ideology of Jagan stems up as his profession is selling sweets; running his business without the help of, machines. Jagan is assumed to be against all types of machinery, In other words against the advent of industrialization. Jagan's faith in Gandhian theory is pronounced when R.K.Narayan describes his quest for "truth" and "simplicity" "in the key areas which is the exhibition of eastern culture and ideas.

The encounter between Jagan and his son arises in the third chapter. When Mali goes against the system of education and wants to travel to America. Mali's arrogance and his audacity towards his father shows his character and nature to life. Even though after his mother's death, his father nourishes him but all his hard work to attire good values in Mali goes in vain. Mali is an amalgamation of all western values. He abhors whatever, is traditional so he formulates "I cannot study anymore" (23) which once again revokes his anti-traditional attitude. He has complete antitheses of 'east' and 'west', thus repeats the force of binary opposition. He believes in extravagant elaborateness and acknowledges western culture, tradition, and their way of living. The flamboyance of his spirit is due to the impact of westernization. Mali's statement "I can look after myself." (24) clearly evokes his change and his struggle as a modern man to get an individual identity.

An American girl, grace, wanted to be a pure Indian daughter-in-law to Jagan. Thus she dressed herself with saris and does all the work in the house. She started clean the Jagan's room and washed the vessels in his kitchen. Jagan's protests were unheeded. "She clashes the broom raked every corner of the floor saying "father ,you think I mind it? I do not. I must not forget that I am Indian daughter in- law" (62). Jagan wanted to the whereabouts of Grace. Hence he told her, "it is a custom in this country to inquire where one was born and bred and is who generally, then we go on to other things." (64). The encounter of East and modern West is expressed in this conversation. The use of socks by Mali in India can be treated as a western influence. The eastern do not use socks and they have their own reason for not using it. Jagan, a Gandhian, dislikes this act of Mali in his house. But he dares not to speak it out Mali. To quote from the text:

He noticed that Mali wore socks under his sandals and wanted to cry out, "socks should never be worn because they are certain to heat the blood through inference with natural radiation which occurs through ones soles, and also because you insulate yourself against beneficial magnetic charges of the earth's surface. I have argued in my book that this is one of the reasons, a possible reason for heart attacks in European countries. (68)

R. K. Narayan has made deliberately Jagan speak such unreasonable things. The author wants to

speak the truth through comic situations and dialogue.

The gap between Jagan and Mali starts expanding more when his son communicates about different gadgets like Gramophone, Polaroid camera etc. He discloses his knowledge about, "The Grand Canyon and Niagara and the statue of liberty and the traffic Jams in New York." (61) Mali's character, nature, attitude and self-conceit everything affects the innocent continent of Jagan. Hence it is clear Mali believes in westernization. His interest in western goods and techniques exhibits his transformation.

At evening when grace was not with Mali, Jagan asked him where she was. Mali answered that she had gone out.

Where, at this time of night?

She can go where she pleases. Why should anyone question her?

Where does she go? why does she go? Is she unhappy here?

Mali rose to his feet and said, "Who are you to stop her from going where she pleases? She is a free person, not like the daughters in law in our miserable country." (126-127)

There is a clear conflict between east and west. Jagan, a pure Indian does not think a woman going out alone at night. Whereas Mali, a modern man who spend some years in west thinks that women are as free as men and they can go anywhere at any time as men do.

The Vendor of Sweets contains the test of a relationship and the generation gap between the father and his son. It is the story of the East versus the West. When one goes through, these obvious contrasts, he should not fail to notice the similarities. In the words of Barry Argyle:

Nayaran is interested in the similarities in states and feelings that might have been the same; but by using a modish vehicle he not only disguises his true concern ... but also creates a tension between the apparent and the real. This tension duplicates the novels theme, which is the search the search for real values among many that are spurious or outworn.⁷

In Jagan, the reader may note of an autographical element. He can be called an alter ego of Nayaran in some aspects. At last, we can come to the point that the novel contains multifaceted ideas ranging from Indian women in their post-marital life to Nayaran's emphatic consideration of east and west conflict.

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