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**EXPLORING THE GANDHIAN SEARCH FOR TRUTH IN  
 R.K. NARAYAN'S *THE GUIDE***

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**Abstract:**

*Gandhism does not refer to any philosophy. It alludes rather, to Mahatma Gandhi's search for truth or satya that eventually arrives at self-discovery and self-examination. The impact of Gandhism is evident among the writers who represent contemporary Indian literature like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R K Narayan. But despite the similarities, R. K. Narayan's treatment of Gandhism in his fiction is distinctly different from that of his contemporaries.*

*This paper attempts to portray how R.K. Narayan, a keen observer, grasps and simplifies the Gandhian search for truth with the help of Raju, the protagonist of his novel *The Guide* (1958) and a typical con-man in post-colonial Indian society. Gandhi's idea of truth, from his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927), is used to understand how the authentic realisation of the truth of existence leads Raju towards self-denial wherein he transcends illusion towards the ultimate spiritual reality.*

*This paper would also provide a new perspective on how Gandhi imbues a spiritual influence on Narayan's 'Railway Raju' and the latter's embodiment of the vision of the Mahatma being conclusive as the novel progresses.*

**Keywords:** *Gandhism, Truth, Spirituality, Self-denial, Transcendence.*

**Introduction**

'What is contemporary?', one may ask. Roland Barthes, in *The Death of the Author*, acknowledges that an author is always a product of his time: the author can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original'. Historicism argues that literature is a product of its age and the meaning of a text can only be discovered by fitting it around other discourses from the same period. Hence, the answer to what is contemporary lies in its literature. Works of contemporary literature reflect a society's social and/or political viewpoints, shown through realistic characters, connections to current events and socio-economic messages. Writers look for trends that illuminate societal strengths and weaknesses to remind society of lessons they should learn and questions they should ask. Fiction especially, became the tool for social realism.

Indian writing in English began in the colonial period. In its formidable years, writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R K Narayan took efforts to establish it to the height that met with the standards of international literary aesthetics. Most of the writings was about the inevitable element in Indian history - the social phenomenon called the rise of nationalism which dealt with the themes of colonialism, exploitation and awakening and formed the foundation of contemporary Indian literature.

The focus of this paper is on R K Narayan. Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayan, born on 10 October 1906 and died on 13 May 2001, is one among the pioneers who set the foundation for Indian writing in English and whose works reverberates the ideas of Nationalism and Gandhism that were prevalent during his time. Narayan rose to fame during the rising tide of the Indian nationalist movement of the 1930s which led to India's independence in 1947. Renowned primarily as a novelist and short story

writer, his most acclaimed works include *The English Teacher* (1945), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), and *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983). Set mostly in the fictitious South Indian town of Malgudi, Narayan's works lay bare the peculiarities of human relationships and the ironies of Indian daily life, where modern urban existence clashes with ancient tradition.

### ***Exploring Raju's search for truth***

*The Guide* (1958) was written while R.K. Narayan was visiting the United States in 1956 on the Rockefeller Fellowship. While in the U.S., Narayan maintained a daily journal that was to later serve as the foundation for his book *My Dateless Diary*. Around this time, on a visit to England, Narayan met his friend and mentor Graham Greene for the first time - a meeting which resulted in the publication of *The Guide* on his return to India. Ambivalent in expression, coupled with a riddle-like conclusion, *The Guide* which won him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1958 is the most representative of Narayan's writing skills and elements.

Railway Raju (nicknamed) is a disarmingly corrupt tour guide who is famous among tourists. He falls in love with a beautiful dancer, Rosie, the mistreated wife of archaeologist Marco. Marco doesn't approve of Rosie's passion for dancing. Rosie, encouraged by Raju, decides to follow her dreams and start a dancing career. They start living together, but Raju's mother doesn't approve their relationship, and leaves them. Raju becomes Rosie's stage manager and soon, with the help of Raju's marketing tactics, Rosie becomes a successful dancer. Raju, however, develops an inflated sense of self-importance and tries to control her life and he wants to build as much wealth as possible. Raju gets involved in a case of forgery and gets a two-year sentence. After completing the sentence, Raju passes through a village where he is mistaken for a sadhu (a spiritual guide). Since he does not want to return in disgrace to Malgudi, he decides to stay in an abandoned temple, close to the village. There is a famine in the village and Raju is expected to undertake a fast in order to make it rain. Raju confesses the entire truth about his past to Velan, who had developed a complete faith in Raju like the rest of the villagers. With the media publicizing his fast, a huge crowd gathers (much to Raju's resentment) to watch him fast. After fasting for several days, he goes to the riverside one morning as part of his daily ritual, where his legs sag as he feels that the rain is falling in the hills. The novel ends leaving unanswered, the question whether he died, and whether the drought ended.

Gandhi is a universal icon of peace. He taught millions the lesson of truth, non-violence and self-reliance. He has influenced almost every walk of contemporary Indian life. Literature said to be the reflection of society, therefore mirrors it. Many Indian writers have written on Gandhi and his philosophy, with a few recreating Gandhi through historical fiction. R. K. Narayan is one of the most prominent contemporary Indian writers who has embraced the Gandhian philosophy. This paper is an attempt to explore the novel *The Guide* and analyse how R.K. Narayan grasps and simplifies the Gandhian search for truth through the protagonist, Raju.

According to Gandhi, truth or *satya* was the eternal principle of life. He considered it as the regulating force in the universe. It is synonymous to God and amounts to sincerity of heart and inner force of soul that implies the discovery of one's own self. One can see how Gandhiji balanced his social, political and spiritual life on the foundation of truth. According to the Gandhian concept of truth, "The instruments of the quest of truth are as simple as they are different"(1). Narayan substantiates this fact in his novels through the characters in search of truth and self.

The sense of search in *The Guide* culminates in a different sphere of reality, a space which conforms neither to an unqualified form of tradition nor to the codes of a mechanised society, but to a process of an evolving possibility, a plane of transcendence from the designated subject position. This transcendence leads Raju into an authentic realization of the truth of existence. Raju's job as a guide, his feelings for Daisy which leads him to promote the dancing talent in her and a need for complete control

over her, leads to self- deception. He consciously dissociates himself from his native roots, somewhere trying to mimic Marco, Rosie's husband, which eventually leads to his moral degradation brought about by his penchant for appearance rather than reality.

On the contrary, Raju's mother represents a stark contrast to him. According to S. Girija, the Gyan-Jyothi that the mother believed in, will remove ignorance and enlighten the mind. Her belief was, “. . . if there was one good man it would rain for his sake and all the world would benefit . . .” (29). Though the rest of the novel portrays a vivid picture of Raju's journey into self- delusion, the novel finds the conviction of the mother coming true towards the end, as there is a teleological progression in the character of Raju in terms of his values of his spiritual tradition. Narayan narrates, “for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested”, (237-238) which explains how Raju had an urge to merge with an ultimate spiritual reality. This ending in the novel unmistakably substantiates a denial of self.

In Raju's end, we can see a new beginning. A strong emergence of a transcendent reality that is characteristic of Indian spiritual culture- where the illusion merges with reality. The mask that he puts on becomes the essence thereby justifying the Indian spiritual goal of Advaita or non- duality in existence. Gandhi said, “I believe in advaita. I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent”. Therefore, it is Raju's denial of self which promotes oneness in him and serves as an impetus to serve the ignorant people of the village by fasting for 12 days and praying to the almighty for the arrival of rains on the drought filled land.

Gandhi equates the Self with Truth or God and goes so far to insist that prayer is the worship of the Self, an invoking of the divinity within, a petitioning of “my Higher self, the real self with which I have not yet achieved complete identification”(44). This theme of transcendence, from Raju to Swami, manifested not just in the latter's worship of an external divinity but rather, the realisation of a higher self and tapping into the inner sanctum is, according to Gandhi, identical with Truth.

### Conclusion

Therefore, what one sees as a transformation from a railway guide to a swami is not just one of consequence but rather, an inner self that set out to search for truth. One cannot negate the detail that Narayan has inculcated the Gandhian search for truth into the psyche of his titular character and Raju in turn, is rooted and nurtured in the Indian ethics and philosophy and is therefore Gandhian in his own particular manner. He turns out to represent every Indian who seeks truth amidst chaos or rather every disillusioned human being who epitomizes the disillusionment of the masses who fail to comprehend and assimilate the teachings of Gandhi to the danger of trivializing Gandhism.

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