

Nature's Narrative: A Study of Ecocriticism in R. K. Narayan's novel *The Guide*

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Abstract— R.K Narayan, a renowned Indian novelist graced Indian literature with many novels and short stories. His masterpiece *The Guide* (1958) portrays various natural aspects through characters like Raju, Rosie, Marco and place like Malgudi. The novel focuses on the unconcerned issues like destruction of the nature and environment brought on by people's inhuman activities.

This article is a study of eco-critical dimensions of RK Narayan's novel *The Guide*. Through the green lens this paper explores how the novelist employs natural environment, its surrounding not merely as background but as an inseparable part of the narrative to influence the readers as well as the characters of the novel. As usual like all the novels, *The Guide* also set in the fictional town of Malgudi. Narayan very carefully connects the human experiences with the natural world, especially through Raju, the protagonist of the novel. His journey from a tourist guide to spiritual guide constitutes the plot of the novel.

This article explores the spiritual kinship between Raju and the natural world he roams around. Narayan shapes the identity of Raju through the scenes and symbols like river, railway track, drought, the temple. The novelist uses natural elements as objective correlative to reflect the broader themes of salvation, redemption, spirituality etc.

The critique explores the river's symbolic presence in the lives of Malgudi. It represents the collective consciousness and ecological well-being. Through this ecocritical perspective Narayan portrays the human's inhuman actions to destroys nature in the name of civilization.

The paper demonstrates everything from the ecocritical framework to illuminate the readers as well as the critics to consider the environmental discourses with high seriousness. It emphasizes the role of literature in restoring the ecological consciousness for a harmonious coexistence with the natural world.

This research paper aims to evaluate the novel *The Guide* from an ecocritical perspective. It is to done to show how ecocentrism replace the role of anthropocentrism.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, nature, literature, man, Malgudi, man vs wild.

I. INTRODUCTION

In simple words Eco criticism is a critical perspective to evaluate a text to explore the intimate connection between man and nature. It mainly aims to protect mother nature from the danger brought on by the so- called civilization. Ecocriticism was defined perfectly by Cheryl Glotfelty in the following words:

“What is then ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth centred approach to literary studies”.

Again if we look into the definition of Abraham and Harpham readers will better understand eco criticism in a better way:

“Ecocriticism designates the critical writings which explore the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the damage being wrought on that environment by human activities”

The eco critical perspective was set at the opening paragraph of the novel. The kinship between man and nature was mentioned in these beautiful lines:

“The branches of the trees canopying the river course rustled and trembled with the agitation of birds and monkeys setting down for the night. Upstream beyond the hills, the sun was setting” (5)

Natural elements like river, hills, sun, trees, rustic life all have become living entity in this novel. From the very childhood Raju had spent lots of his time in the dear lap of nature. Raju describes to Velan how the railway tracks were laid and how the trains arrived in the platform.

“One fine day, beyond the tamarind tree, the station building was ready. The steel tracks gleamed in the sun; the signal posts stood with their red and green stripes and their colourful lamps; and our world was neatly divided into this side of the railway line and that side”.(37)

Malgudi, an imaginary small village town is portrayed as the locale of this beautiful novel. Raju, the hero of this novel first met Rosie, the heroine as Railway Raju, a tourist guide. Marco, husband of Rosie came to Malgudi to capture the photograph of the carving design of the ancient caves of Mempi Hill. And Rosie came with her husband to see the snake dance, especially for King cobra dance. The village life of Malgudi can be sensed from the character like Velan and his simplicity. The normal simple life of Malgudi is shattered with the advent of railway. It forced character like Raju to abandon his traditional profession and adopting the role of tourist guide. The untouched and pure quality of malgudi life is now trying to negotiate with the changes brought up by colonial encounters. The charm and atmosphere of malgudi is beautifully expressed by R. K. Narayan at the beginning of the novel:

"Malgudi, the small south Indian town, nestling at the foot of the Western Ghats, with its seven crumbling temples, its one-street bazaar, its inexorable weather, and its tight-lipped people, is a place of timeless tranquility."

The description of the Peak House of Mempi Hill deserves special mention. As a tourist guide Raju knew how to study the mind of the visitors. Narayan describes the peak house just like nature poet:

“The Peak House was perched on the topmost cliff on Mempi Hills – the road ended with the house; there was a glass wall covering the north veranda, through which you could view the horizon a hundred miles away. Below us the jungle stretched away down to the valley, and on a clear day you might see also the Sarayu sparkling in the sun and pursuing its own course far away. This was like heaven to those who loved wild surroundings and to watch the game, which prowled outside the glass wall at nights”. (75)

Now I will try to analyse how Narayan beautifully expressed human emotions through nature. When Rosie’s marital life was in crisis with her husband Marco Narayan refers to the storms and thunders reflecting turbulence:

"As Rosie's relationship with Marco deteriorated, the skies over Malgudi seemed to mirror her inner turmoil. Dark clouds gathered like ominous omens, and the distant rumble of thunder echoed her troubled heart."

This is a perfect example of pathetic fallacy. Here dark clouds and distant rumble of thunder stand for the heartbreaking relationship of Rosie and Marco. The phrase ominous omens and troubled heart compel the readers to understand the struggle of Rosie.

Again nature responds to the emotional crisis of Rosie to make the readers understand the wound that she carries with her day by day:

"Amidst the chaos of her troubled marriage, nature responded with its own unrest. The heavens wept in sympathy with Rosie's tears, and the gusting winds whispered secrets of her troubled soul to the surrounding trees."

Here the beautiful line heavens wept in sympathy with Rosie’s tears is very heart touching making the readers feel empathy for Rosie. The nature highlights the deplorable plight of Rosie in a best possible way.

RK Narayan very craftly portrays river Sarayu as a symbol of purity and turmoil. The inner conflict of Raju and his struggle of morality and identity can be felt in these lines:

“As Raju grappled with his inner turmoil, the serene flow of the river Sarayu served as a stark contrast to the chaos within him. Its clear waters reflected his desire for purity, yet its unpredictable currents mirrored the turbulence of his conscience."

The serene flow of the river Sarayu suggests the moral purity and inner peace that Raju is searching for. Narayan utilizes river Sarayu as natural tool to express the journey taken by Raju: "As Raju navigated the complexities of his dual identity, the river Sarayu became both a sanctuary and a battleground. Its tranquil surface belied the inner turmoil raging within him, reflecting the constant struggle between his past and present selves."

Raju’s transformation and cyclical change of nature: RK Narayan employs the seasonal change as a metaphor for the changes and transformation of Raju from tourist guide to spiritual guru. The climate change works as metaphor for the development of Raju’s character in the novel. For example, as the season changes from spring to summer to monsoon, Rajus life similarly goes

through the phases of development, turbulence, stagnation and renewal. For example, Narayan very craftly expresses this development in these lines:

"As the monsoon clouds gathered over Malgudi, Raju's demeanor shifted like the changing seasons, his once carefree attitude giving way to a newfound introspection and sense of responsibility."

Narayan in the last half of the novel mentions about the drought, the crisis of water. now as a modern reader we know that deforestation is the main reason of drought. The so-called civilization is the main reason of environmental degradation. The villagers are the victims of this so-called upgradation:

"Cattle were unable to yield milk; they lacked the energy to drag the plough through the furrows; flocks of sheep were beginning to look scurvy and piebald, with their pelvic bones sticking out". (93)

The entire ecosystem was in danger due to the shortage of water. The novelist very carefully pointed this problem in these lines: "Someone brought the news that upstream a crocodile had been found dead on the sand, having no watery shelter and being scorched by the sun. Someone else came with the news that the fast-drying lake bed in a nearby village was showing up an old temple which had been submerged a century ago, when the lake was formed". (103)

Raju towards the end of the novel decided to perform fasting to bring the rain to get rid of this drought. He thought:

'If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?' 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 time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him a new strength to go through with the ordeal". (246)

The last words of Raju brought hope to the villagers. He claimed to see rain:

"Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said, Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs –he sagged down". (256)

II. CONCLUSION

To sum up, RK Narayan's novel *The Guide* highlights the kinship between human world and natural world. it not only shows the journey of Raju but also treats nature as our friend, philosopher and guide. The draught brought upon the human world in this novel is the result of of the inhuman activities done to the nature in the name of civilization. The deplorable plight of the villagers, the animals, nature etc. in the novels invites the modern readers to look into the ecocritical crisis with deep concern and sensitivity.

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