

NOTES ON THE GUIDE

ABOUT THE NOVEL: THE GUIDE

Published in 1958, *The Guide* is a novel by Indian author R.K. Narayan set in his fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. It follows the life of an Indian man, Raju, as he evolves throughout his life to become one of the most prominent holy men in India.

Narayan wrote the novel on his first trip abroad, staying in a residential hotel in Berkeley, California. However, its source was not American but Indian, and Narayan described the work as “totally Indian” (specifically, it was a drought in Mysore and a group of Brahmins fasting and praying in the river that inspired him).

The protagonist of *The Guide* is Raju, a tour guide living in Malgudi known for his corrupt tendencies. He falls in love with a mistreated married woman named Rosie, and the two begin having an affair together. However, as time goes on and Rosie becomes more and more successful as

a dancer, Raju becomes excessively controlling and soon ends up in jail because of his overbearing and greedy actions. After he is released, in a turn of events, he is mistaken as a holy man in a town he happens to be passing through. Because he decides to keep the act up, he eventually gets himself in a situation where he must fast for the length of several days, heavily publicized and lauded for his actions.

The Guide won R.K. Narayan several awards, including but not limited to the Indian National Academy of Letter's Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960 (it was the first novel written in English to win this). The book was adapted into both a movie (1965) and a play of the same name (1968).

The Guide Character List

Raju

Raju is the protagonist of the story. He was born in a fictional town named Malgudi, belongs to a lower-middle-class family, and lives with his mother after his father died when Raju was young. Raju was very smart and savvy in how he grew his father's shop, then

moving into being a famous and respected tour guide known as "Railway Raju." He loves talking and traveling to new places; he is intuitive about his customers' needs and makes himself indispensable.

Raju begins having an affair with Rosie, the wife of his client Marco, and becomes obsessively in love with her. This love for her causes him to behave greedily and selfishly, even when he and Rosie are together in Marco's absence. He thinks of her as property and does care about anything but himself, though he dedicates his time to furthering her dancing career. His desire for money is absolute and he relishes the power he attains by being the famous dancer Nalini's (Rosie's changed name) manager and lover. This greed eventually leads to the demise of his relationship, time in jail, and exile from Malgudi.

It also results in his being mistaken as a holy man. In the privacy of his own mind, Raju still tends toward selfishness and impatience, but the more time he spends with the villagers, the more he grows in character. Arguably, by the end of the novel, as a result of his fasting and praying, he achieves enlightenment and truly does become a holy man.

Raju's Mother

Raju's mother is a traditional Indian woman. She is the only one who takes care of Raju when her husband dies. She is a positive woman who is generally friendly to everyone. She permits Rosie to live with them even after she realizes that Rosie is married and belongs to a low-class dancer caste. However, she is a woman who also gossips and worries about her son's choices, especially after he begins neglecting his finances. She asks her older brother, Raju's uncle, to come help but ends up going to live with him once Raju's intransigence asserts itself. Her relationship with Raju never really recovers; she remains sad and disappointed in what he's done to his life. She does visit him in jail.

Rosie

Rosie is the daughter of a dancer and therefore belongs to a lower caste. She did not marry Marco out of love but because of his social status. Though she is fond of dancing, she sets it aside when married to Marco because he does not approve. Their marriage is not very pleasant and Rosie begins to have an affair with Raju. When Marco finds out, he abandons her. She then moves in with Raju and his mother and, with Raju's urging, takes up her dancing again. With her meticulous work and Raju's business acumen, she becomes a household name (she actually changes her name to Nalini). She and Raju become immensely rich.

Rosie is a woman of independent thought and ambition. At times she appears to be mature, but at others she behaves like a child. She is prone to dreaming and does not care very much about material things. After Raju's entanglement with the law and her coming to terms with his real character, she decides to pay their debts and leave him. She lives alone, prosperous and successful.

Marco

Marco is Rosie's husband. He does not seem to like her very much unless she is being quiet and pliable, but when he married her he was clear on not having any caste expectations. He gives her what she wants most of the time but refuses to let her continue with dancing once they married. What drives him as a scholar is his interest in the history, culture, and art of South India. Raju is his guide to caves in the Malgudi area where he finds fodder for the book he is writing, but his time in Malgudi ends in a dramatic fashion when he finds out Rosie and Raju were having an affair. He refuses to have anything to do with Rosie and leaves town without her. At the end of the novel, he publishes his book to great acclaim but decides to trap Raju by sending a legal document that only Rosie can sign, knowing Raju will most likely forge it.

Velan

Velan is a faithful, fervent man who believes in Raju's holiness and spends a great deal of time with him. He encourages other villagers to visit the Swami and soon Raju is rarely ever alone again. Though Raju confesses to him that he is not indeed a holy man and has done many bad things in his life, Velan still chooses to revere him and believe Raju's fast will cure the drought. It is Velan's unwavering faith that gives Raju the power he needs to try the fast for real.

Velan's Sister

Velan's half-sister is a minor character but she plays a major role in Raju's life as a saint. It was she who makes Raju popular in the village by accepting the proposal of the groom that Velan chose for her. This transformation surprises Velan and confirms to him that Raju is a holy man. The sister spreads news of Raju's power throughout the village as well.

Gaffur

Gaffur is a chauffeur in Malgudi and friend of Raju's (at least until Raju alienates him by focusing everything on Rosie and begging Gaffur for money to jumpstart

her dance career). He is a decent man with common sense and is wary of Raju's involvement with Rosie, knowing it will not end well.

Velan's Brother

A rather unintelligent and useless young man, his main job is to drive cattle and he rarely engages himself in other, more highbrow activities such as seeing the Swami. However, he comes to Raju when the village is embroiled in fighting during the famine. When he relays this information to Raju, Raju tells him to tell Velan and the others he will not eat until they stop fighting. When the brother relays the message, he implies that the Swami will not eat until the rains come, thus beginning (against his will and wishes) Raju's fasting.

Raju's Father

A friendly and loquacious man, he runs a small shop in Malgudi. He loves spending hours and hours talking about the townspeople's various affairs to the chagrin of his wife who wishes he would come home to eat and sleep. He is given proprietorship of a larger shop once the railway station is built, but turns it over to Raju because he misses conversing with his friends. He dies when Raju is a young man, leaving him with a decent bank account

and half of the house.

Joseph

Joseph is the caretaker at Peak House whose modesty, efficiency, and surreptitiousness inure him to Marco. Joseph admires Marco but dislikes Rosie, thinking she is disruptive. He is very dedicated to his job and his clients.

Raju's Uncle

A tall, imperious man, he is the eldest brother in the family and manages all of the financial and interpersonal affairs. Wealthy and powerful, he doesn't often visit his sister but she calls on him to help knock sense into Raju. The uncle tries, but finds his nephew immature and intransigent. He focuses on ousting Rosie, but this does not work either. Finally, he returns home and brings his sister with him.

The Sait

The Sait is a former friend of Raju's who is also his creditor. Raju owes the Sait a great deal of money and his laissez-faire attitude about it earns him the Sait's ire.

The Sait takes Raju to court and threatens to take the house, which Raju later sells.

Raju's Lawyer

A bona fide celebrity, Raju books him for his forgery trial even though he is very expensive. The lawyer is savvy at spinning his tales, and manages to get Raju only two years instead of seven.

Malone

A pink-cheeked American documentary filmmaker, Malone seeks to film Raju-as-holy-man in his fasting and praying rituals. He is energetic, exuberant, and dedicated to his craft.

Mani

Mani is Raju's secretary once he becomes rich from Rosie's dancing. Mani is kind and well-intentioned, but annoys Raju when he accidentally tells Rosie about Marco's book. He is the only person to visit Raju in jail but is flustered by his former employer's delight in prison life.

SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

The novel begins on the outskirts of the quiet village of Malgudi, where a simple villager named Velan mistakes Raju, newly out of jail and resting at the ruins near the river, as a holy man. Velan is reverential toward Raju and tells him of his problems, namely that his half-sister refuses to marry the man selected for her. Raju does not really care but since he is lonely, he is happy that somebody is talking to him. He thinks about how he just got out of jail and of his time before then as a famed tourist guide. Raju lived in Malgudi with his mother and father. He grew up as the train station was being built and eventually, after his father's death, came to run his father's spacious shop. He loved talking to people and was quite popular as a guide; his nickname was even "Railway Raju."

The next morning Velan brings his sister to Raju and he tells her placidly that "What must happen must happen; no power on earth or in heaven can change its course, just as no one can change the course of that river." She is impressed and after her meeting with Raju she agrees

to her family's wishes. This begins Raju's journey as a holy man. Dozens and dozens of villagers gather to see their Swami. They decorate the ancient temple, bring him food and gifts, encourage their sons to read and learn from the schoolteacher in Raju's presence, and generally seek Raju's counsel about all manner of things. Raju is concerned about his pretending but is often impressed with his own sagacity and decides he must stay here to avoid going back to his old village. He grows a long beard and long hair and becomes used to saying profound things.

After a few years, the rains disappear and famine and strife begin to affect the villages. Velan's never-do-well brother comes to see Raju and admits that people are fighting due to the famine. Raju is distressed by all of this commotion and orders the brother to give the message to the people that they are not to fight and that he will not eat until they stop fighting.

When Velan's brother finds Velan and the other elders, he is embarrassed that he mentioned the fighting to the holy man so he says simply that he told the Swami that there was no rain. He then repeats the part about Raju not eating so Velan and the others think Raju is about to undertake the sacrifice of fasting and praying until the rain comes. When the people pour into Raju's area to look upon him and thank him, he realizes something strange is going on. Velan excitedly reminds him of what he'd said one time about this fasting and praying, and Raju rues that he made this up a while ago.

That evening, Raju wonders if he ought to run away but remembers the women and children and their gratitude and decides he must see this out. He calls Velan to him and begins to tell him his life's story. Velan listens gravely.

Raju tells Velan of his childhood, his time at school, how he built up the business after his father's death, and how his fame as Railway Raju increased day by day. Most importantly, he tells of how his life changed when he meet Rosie. This is what Raju recounts...

One day, a stern and dry academic tourist named Marco arrives and enlists Raju's services. His wife Rosie arrives not long after. Raju sets them up in a hotel and from there, after dropping Marco to admire old friezes, he takes Rosie to watch a king cobra dance to a flute. Rosie sways to the rhythm and Raju learns she is a dancer. He finds her beautiful and enticing and falls in love with her. He praises her dancing. He sees that she and Marco have a terrible marriage and fight constantly; she married him because he was rich and did not care that she was from a lower caste. He confesses his love for her and eventually the two start sleeping with each other.

Raju becomes more interested in Rosie than his shop or his friends or his mother. He cares little for tourists and they have to go away disappointed. Though Marco has no idea what is going on between Raju and Rosie, caring only for his caves and friezes and virtually letting Raju

become a member of his family, Raju still cannot relax because it seems like distance has made Rosie fonder of her husband. She often worries that she is doing the wrong thing. Raju earns her affection back by telling her she must take up dancing again and that he will support her. She is elated and begins practicing. However, she needs to secure permission from Marco and he has always been antipathetic to her dancing, considering it base and useless.

Rosie prepares to spend a few days with Marco at Peak House and broach the subject. When Raju comes to fetch her, he can tell something is terribly wrong with the couple. Marco tells Raju his services are ended, and Rosie yells at him to leave.

Back home, Raju has a miserable month where nothing provides him solace. He cannot stop thinking about Rosie. His business continues to fail. To his delight, though, Rosie shows up at his doorstep one day and Raju announces to his mother that she will be staying with them. Rosie tells Raju that when she brought up the dancing to Marco, he did not like it and she accidentally mentioned that Raju did. The story of their affair came tumbling out and Marco cut her off completely. After three weeks of silence and completely ignoring her, he packed up and left for their home in Madras and told her she did not have a ticket. That was when she came to Raju and his mother's house. Raju promises to turn her into a star.

While Rosie works hard, Raju's mother and the rest of the town cannot help but gossip about her. Raju loses his store and wonders how he will make money. He is taken to court for his debt but even though his mother angrily pesters him he cares little. He only wants to help Rosie become a famous dancer.

At her wits' end, Raju's mother asks her elder brother, a wealthy and commanding man, to come to the house to knock sense into Raju. It does not work, and despite the myriad of insults and threats, all that happens is that Raju's mother decides to go away with her brother; she cannot bear to see Raju throw his life away for Rosie.

Raju is sad about the state of affairs with his mother, but devotes himself to Rosie and her career. He suggests she change her name to Nalini and she agrees.

Rosie/Nalini becomes very popular with her art of dance and, with Raju's guidance and maintenance of her schedule, they both are earning money. They move into a huge house and begin moving in elite circles. Raju and Rosie's relationship becomes a bit strained and he can see that she is unhappy, but all that matters to him is earning the maximum amount of money.

One day, Raju's secretary Mani drops off a book for him. It is by Marco and is his long-awaited cultural history of South India. There is a brief thanks to Raju in it for his guide work. Raju is puzzled and decides to hide

it from Rosie. When Mani tells her of it somehow, she demands Raju show her. She is happy for her husband, which makes Raju furious.

Not long after the book incident a letter arrives for Rosie but Raju sees it first and opens it to see correspondence from a lawyer that states: "Madam, under instruction from our client, we are enclosing an application for your signature, for the release of a box of jewelry left in safe custody at the Bank of -----, in the marketplace. After this is received we shall proceed to obtain the other signature as well, since you are aware that the deposit is in your joint names, and obtain the release of the said box, and arrange to forward it to you under insurance cover in due course." Raju is thrilled that there might be expensive jewelry but he does not want Rosie to see the letter because she might become emotional. He cannot stop thinking about it, however, and finally forges Rosie's signature. He expectantly waits for the arrival of the jewelry box.

After several days of waiting, Rosie is giving a performance and Raju is watching. During the dance, the police superintendent comes with an arrest warrant against Raju for forgery. He realizes how grave his offense was but feels immense self-pity. When he tells Rosie, she soberly says it is karma because she had a feeling he was doing wrong. She says she will take care of their debts but the relationship is over.

Raju has his trial and has to spend two years in jail. There

he is a model prisoner and actually grows to enjoy the peace and regularity of jail life. He learns from Mani that Rosie has settled in Madras and is doing well.

Raju concludes his tale of his past life and he again tells Velan that he is not a holy man but a common man like everyone else. Velan is unaffected by the story and promises never to say anything to anyone. Raju realizes he must go on with the fast.

A newspaper article garners a great deal of attention and people begin flooding Malgudi to pay homage to the holy man trying to end the drought. Crowds swarm around Raju and he wishes for some peace and privacy. His body begins to weaken and sometimes he is bitter against Velan for starting this whole thing. However, he finally decides this is his calling and he will fast properly and will devote himself to this with all care and energy.

On the eleventh day, doctors suggest that Raju is dying and must stop the fast; a government telegram concurs. However, in the evening, with the help of Velan and others, Raju gets up and walks to the river. He prays and then opens his eyes, looks about, and says, "Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs" and sags down.

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