

# SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS

## USED IN THE NOVEL: THE GUIDE

### Symbol: Water

At the very end of the narrative, water becomes the symbol of purification. When Raju gets down to his spot in the water to perform his morning prayer for the last time in the novel, all too weak but sincere, suddenly he says that he can feel "it's raining in the hills, I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs." This moment apparently marks his transformation and purification. The water is the symbol of purification here as Raju leaves his dishonest past behind. The water washes away the impurities of his soul.

### Symbol: Nataraja

The Nataraja statue comes up on various occasions in the novel and it symbolizes dancing as a holy thing, which contradicts the societal assumption that dancers are from a lower cast of the Hindu society. Nataraja or "the lord of dance" is a form of Hindu god; Shiva's dance is mostly destructive. This symbol marks Rosie's rebellion against social traditions and norms through embracing her true calling of dancing. In the destructive mode,

she breaks all the shackles and becomes free. She needs neither Marco nor Raju to live her life.

### Allegory: Sheep

Flocks of sheep grazing behind a shepherd outside the old shrine Raju chose to meditate in is the Narayan's commentary that people also often do the same. Soon the villagers take Raju to be some divine sage and started flooding in and crowding in front of the shrine. They listen to what he has to say and never question him. The classic allegory of sheep and their shepherd, something that is ancient and part of numerous cultures, allows Narayan to suggest that people blindly follow others in the name of religion.

### Motif: Crocodile

The crocodile motif is very prominent throughout the novel. There is a subtle suggestion at one point of the narrative that Raju might be the mythical crocodile

none had ever seen but all feared (the villagers believe it lives near the bank the old shrine was on, and Raju comes to occupy this shrine). Later, the crocodile motif develops further. There is the dead crocodile auguring the diminishing health of the society. There is then the crocodile's body revealing male and female jewelry in its belly in unequal amounts; it becomes clear that this crocodile could be the society that eats alive females more often than males, stripping them off their personalities and uniqueness. This is what happens to Rosie until she manages to free herself.

Symbol: Raju's Old Home

Rosie's discomfort with selling the old house and Raju's realization later that she seemed almost happier there even when she was being berated by his mother and uncle reveals the old house as a potent symbol of tradition, comfort, safety, and security. Outside that old house is where Raju begins to embrace even more devious patterns of behavior and lets his greed cloud his understanding of right and wrong. In the old home, his mother still had some sway, and the memory of his father did as well. Now, bereft of that connection to family and tradition, Raju is adrift.

## IRONY IN THE GUIDE

### Situational Irony: The Title

Raju was a tour guide, tried guiding Rosie's career as a dancer, and posed as a sage who was supposed to guide people to spirituality. He as the title character/protagonist never quite succeeded in his responsibility; rather, he violated the definition of guidance. Ironically, Velan, a minor character, guides the protagonist to his transformation by designating him a sage, holding him accountable, and believing in him.

### Situational Irony: Fasting

Raju telling the story of a swami who fasted for greater good is highly ironic since he finally has to fast himself. He had become used to telling stories, making up stories, and generally saying whatever sounded good to the people listening to him without ever thinking it might come back around to him. Indeed, it does karmically come back to him in the most dramatic fashion in that he has to become

the very swami that he fabricated and nearly dies (or perhaps does die) in the process.

### Verbal Irony: Raju's Intelligence

Raju hates school and does not finish it. He avoids education and scoffs at academics. His learning only comes from random books that filter into the railway station that he works at for a few years. Thus, it is amusing and ironic that Narayan writes, "The thing that had really bothered him was that he might sound too brilliant in everything he said" (24). Raju is far from being brilliant and he is mostly making up, fudging, or confusing the stories he tells to the gullible villagers.

### Situational and Verbal Irony: Marco and Raju

Marco hires Raju to help him explore the caves so he can carry out his studies. On the way to them, Marco takes the lead even though Raju is the guide. Raju calls him out on this and says he is not a guide. The irony is subtle, but it is clearly present. Raju may be the official guide but he is clueless. He can take Marco to the caves but he neither knows what the markings within them truly mean

(he grows very bored) nor does he have any idea how to guide himself through life.

## THE GUIDE IMAGERY

### Malgudi

Narayan's Malgudi is a significant fictional creation, and he takes pains in each of his novels to describe this place. In *The Guide* he writes of small shops, the new railway station, wagons and shopkeepers, and the bustling marketplace. It is this "panorama of life" (8) that enchants Raju.

### The Railway

Narayan writes, "Our world was neatly divided into this side of the railway line and that side" (27). This is a simple but potent image that creates a sense of order and neatness belied by actual life. The railway station changes everything for Raju as it brings the tourists to town that give him his reputation, and, of course, brings Rosie and Marco into his life.

## Peak House

Narayan describes the glory that is Peak House. He writes of the House's perching on the edge of a cliff looking out to a lush valley below, the glass wall, the wild life, the tall trees, the fecund vegetation, and more. This place conjures up the glory of India's natural surroundings and it is no wonder Marco is intellectually stimulated there.

## Raju as Holy Man

Narayan writes of Raju, "His beard now caressed his chest, his hair covered his back, and round his neck he wore a necklace of prayer beads. His eyes shone with softness and compassion and light of wisdom emanated from them" (69). This is an uncanny and near stereotypical image of a holy man. It is all the more amusing and compelling because it is a reminder that Raju is all surface and appearance; he is not actually a holy man but if he looks like one and sounds like one then he can beguile people into thinking he is one.

LITERARY ELEMENTS IN THE GUIDE  
( WRITING STYLE OF R.K.NARAYAN / STRUCTURE  
OF THE NOVEL)

Genre  
Fiction

### Setting and Context

Mid-20th-century India; specifically, the fictional town of Malgudi

### Narrator and Point of View

Vacillates between first person (Raju) and third person

### Tone and Mood

Tone: direct, unconcerned, ironic, delightful

Mood: easy, restless, amused

### Protagonist and Antagonist

Protagonist: Raju | Antagonist: Marco, to an extent

### Major Conflict

Will Raju truly embody the role of holy man that he has embraced for himself and manage to do what is necessary to bring about the rains?



## Climax

There are two climaxes in the novel: one when Raju is arrested, and the other at the end of the novel when he collapses into the river and says the rains are coming.

## Foreshadowing

Narayan foreshadows the demise of Raju's relationship and his time in jail throughout the first part of the novel when Raju is trying to feel out his new role as swami. The reader has the distinct sense that things did not end well for him with Rosie and that his coming to this secluded space after jail was a result of some dramatic event. Narayan bears these suppositions out as Raju begins to tell Velan his story.

## Allusions

1. Ramayana: an ancient Indian epic poem written in Sanskrit

2. Parvathi: Hindu goddess of beauty, fertility, love, divine power

3. Bhagavad-Gita: a Hindu epic written in Sanskrit

4. Othello and Desdemona: characters in Shakespeare's play "Othello"

## Paradox

Raju is a famous guide full of knowledge, intuition, and insight. However, paradoxically he does not know himself whatsoever and cannot guide himself anywhere near good decisions or enlightenment until the very end of the novel. This makes the title paradoxical as well.

## Parallelism

Rosie's life and Marco's life parallel each other after their split in that both of them achieve fame and financial comfort due to their respective arts of dancing and archeological study.

## Personification

1. "The banana worked a miracle" (33)
2. "Her art and her husband could not find a place in her thoughts at the same time; one drove the other out" (95)
3. "...he picked the most carefully packed evidence between his thumb and forefinger and with a squeeze reduced it to thin air" (177)

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