R. K. Narayan is a leading figure among the Indian writers. The immense panorama of futility and anarchy shaped his literary personality. In the English period, the quest was for new society but later on, it became a quest for a new life in the full form to a journey from the aesthetic, through the ethical, to the religious state. Since the quest motif is well established in literature, its operation has a well recognized modality. The usual pattern is that the quest begins with a departure from the ordinary, the common and the accepted order. What follows next is a long and deep retreat inwards, deep into the psyche leading to a chaotic series of encounters. These encounters may be terrifying to begin with, but lead to a new harmonizing personality with new courage. In a nutshell, the three fold mythic pattern is separation, initiation and then return. Joseph Campbell describes such a pattern in the following words:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of a supernatural wonder. Fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from his mysterious adventure with the power to bestow hoofs on the fellow men.

In the novel The Guide, the quest motif is studied and interpreted through Raju, who is a central character. The novel begins and ends with him and the entire story is mostly a playback of Raju’s past life. Raju does not seem to have any specific quest till he is forced to fast for twelve days, when he comes to realize that his fasting is enormously important to thousands of drought – stricken villagers, he resolves to fast in earnest. It is for the first time in his life that he transcends his petty self and begins to think about the lives of others. At the very end of the novel, Raju utters these words, “Velan, it’s raining in the hills.” This utterance can be interpreted in two ways: it may be the obsession of a half conscious mind, or it may suggest some sort of clairvoyance. It is clear that Raju towards the end of the novel is a transformed person, although the nature of this transformation is not very clear.

Raju’s transformation from a railway guide to a transcendental ‘guru’ is worked out through a neatly woven pattern of ironic implications, but the irony is not as simple blend of the comic and tragic. It raises certain question about human nature, motives and actions, compelling us to ponder over the problems such as appearance and reality, ends and the means.

And it is at this point that the penance of purification through fasting is thrust upon him. Raju now realizes that he has worked in to a position from which, he cannot get out. He now sees the enormity of his creation; he has created with his puny self. Raju is called upon by the community to undergo an act o various sufferings to purify the sins of the villagers. During the early days of the fast, Raju contemplates ribbing away from the whole drama. What keep him back are not the practical considerations but very surprisingly the faith of the people. Raju is tremendously moved by the big crowd of women and children, big and small touching his feet. At last the collective faith of the people transform Raju from what he really is, into a worthy object of its devotion. Towards the end, Raju loses the feeling of an actor performing an act; the act becomes the reality; the mast becomes the man, and Raju- the guide turns in to a Guru. He seems closer to the fulfillment of his quest, as C.G. Jung has established in his theory of quest archetype:

The hero himself appears as a being of more than human structure. He is distinguished from the very beginning by the God like characteristics. Since he is psychologically an archetype of the self, is numinous, sort of God, or having some share in the divine nature…At this time, he identifies his personal and super personal atman…Whether his fasting has really brought rain or not, it is ambiguous. The superb ambiguity serves its purpose. More important is Raju’s moment of transcending the faith of people around him which drives him on until he identifies himself as an instrument of their will?

“If by avoiding food I should help trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not to 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 first 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 ordeal.
This is the moment of illumination, a moment in which an individual acquires the powers to go beyond his self. He goes down to the river; stands facing up the stream with his eyes shut ad repeats the litany. It is no more than a supplication to the heavens to send down rains and save humanity. He tells his life story to Velan, his chief disciple confessing the reality of his life. Going through the event of life, his confession helps him to understand himself better. And when he has unfolded the whole gamut of truth before Velan, he has no doubt the feeling of removing one by one all the layers of disguise from his true self. Raju goes through “an archetypal situation” encountered in many novels which is generally “a sacrifice done in order to gain divine power, for example, fasting unto death t end a draught....”

Raju- Rosie relationship also highlights realization of Raju’s quest. It is a stage of “perilous journey” and “the preliminary adventures”. Narayan has used flashback technique in this novel to highlight Raju – Rosie relationship in different phases. His meeting with Rosie, the artistically inclined wife of Marco, gives a new turn to his life. Raju finds in Rosie a “potential bride”. From here a sea-change takes place in his life, and we hardly find a connection between his previous life and life here onwards.

The Marco- Rosie relationship is a study in marital disharmony. Raju gets an opportunity to exploit the situation for his own personal advancement. On discovering Rosie’s potential dancing talent, Raju starts taking more and more interest in her activities and encourages her to step in to the professional world of dancing. Raju spares his time and energy or her dancing practice. He inspires Rosie to practice wholeheartedly and give her a new name “Nalini”. He organizes Rosie’s first show in a college function and it proves a great success, which works as a great incentive for Raju to organize more commercial shows on a larger scale.

In the transformation of Raju, one can see the created object transcending its creator. The sainthood that Raju has created out of his deception ultimately transcends his control and obliterates his former self. The theme gains its strength through repetition, because earlier, in the Rosie episode, the same pattern has been established. The parallelism between the Rosie episode and the final episode of Raju the holy man is too pronounced to be accidental. In both cases, the first phase involves a little struggle, but in both, one launched in the field, Raju has never to look back. In both cases he becomes a public man eventually. In one, he makes a slip and lands himself into prison, in the other, owing to misunderstanding, he is pushed into fasting, which at first appears an experience as disastrous as a prison sentence but in one way it is a purification of his sins.

It is quite clear that the recurrence of the same is depicted in the different social situations. The character of Raju, who is finally shown as a saint, a blessed one, has nothing saintly during the course of his life. It has been clearly brought to the notice of every reader by R. K. Narayan that Raju undergoes a great change at every stage in his life.

The above interpretation reveals Raju’s different stages in which his quest for self is realized. These different stages pass from his father’s assistance to full time independent railway stall holder, from the stall holder to a seasoned guide, from the guide to a lover and manager, from the manager to a model prisoner, and from the model prisoner to a saint finally. It is significant here that each change adds to his personality and realization of his picaresque quest, so that until his final transformation as a saint he has lived a rich and full life. He has not gone to transformation through an intense love relationship as Krishna does, but he lives each stage with fullness and gusto.

Raju’s greater realization of self draws heavily upon his function of extroverted sensation and pragmatic thinking. As he passes through the different stages of life, he develops the richness of feeling. In his final stage, he develops a spiritual insight, rich in feeling and intuition which can be best interpreted with Sri Aurobindo: Arisen from the lower mental to this spiritual nature, he is delivered there from all egos. He himself as spiritual being, in his essence one with all existence in his active nature a power of the one god head and an eternal soul of the transcendent Infinite…..He lives and acts as a soul and portion of the universal consciousness and power, a spiritual Ananda. His action becomes the divine action and his status the highest spiritual status.

Another character in The Guide, whose quest for greater reality of life is as strong and deep as that of Raju, is Rosie. She has a quest right from the beginning – she wants to excel in the art of dancing. When she becomes a famous dancer, she remains dissatisfied, nothing else matters to her except the art of dancing in is purity. Rosie remains more or less the same throughout the novel, whereas Raju dies a totally different person from the one he has been earlier. She is born into an orthodox, illiterate and cast ridded community. The general atmosphere and public opinion has not been conducive to the expression of her hidden qualities. And when she gets an opportunity in the inspired company of Raju, she becomes an artist of national name and fame. Her popularity spreads far and wide. Rosie studies well and gets master’s degree in Economics. She gets married to an archeologist, Marco.

Rosie is an emancipated woman whose past is totally buried, though she cannot suppress her individual aspirations completely. But the conflict in Rosie’s personality is between her deep and irrepressible attachment to dancing and her consciousness of the traditional responsibilities of an Indian wife. Having been born into the traditional family of dancers, she carries this instinct even after marriage consciously or unconsciously. After getting married to a very renowned personality she decided to sacrifice her traditional art and profession. But Marco is a strange kind of personality who would not substitute her dancing instincts with love and protection.
His sole passion is his scholarly pursuit of archeology. He is a “stock type” having his own identity, “Dead and decaying things seemed to unloosen his tongue and fire his imaginations, rather than things that lived and moved and swung their limbs.” (The Guide, 75)

Rosie is emancipated enough to protect her individual being, which cannot find fulfillment in her mechanical relationship with Marco. After all she is a young beautiful lady with unbounded emotions. Her hitherto suppressed instincts find expressions in her love for dancing. Rosie’s life undergoes a significant change, when she comes in contact with Raju, ‘the guide’. Her companionship with Raju is a stage of the “Perilous journey” and “the preliminary minor adventures”. At her first sight at Malgudi railway station, Raju becomes the victim of her fascinating beauty and decides to win her over in every way. The frequent quarrels of the couple and Raju’s presence close at hand, provides him with ample opportunities to declare his love. To his surprise, Raju discovers in her a potential talent of classical dance and exploits her weakness to make his romantic advances. The attachment to Raju is caused not by romantic infatuation, but is an early offshoot of her struggle to realize individuality and to give expression to her suppressed instincts – the emotional quest for Rosie. He becomes the first person in Rosie’s life to give her compliments for her talent and beauty and she starts responding. The journey towards the quest gains the Godspeed now. They start living together. Their relationship takes on a different character. From being primarily personal, it becomes official. Rosie has a great talent as a dancer and with Raju’s unstinted support she applies herself rigorously to develop her art. Very soon, she achieves the heights of success and becomes a great artist and Raju thrives as a successful entrepreneur.

The quest of Rosie fails here too. She soon loses interest in dance when it is commercialized by Raju. He is an adventurer and all his talks of art and love for Rosie prove to be so hollow and insincere in the light of the sordid use to which he had put Rosie’s talent. The archetypal Indian woman emanates out of Rosie. Now another “psychic content” arrests her. After a brief romance with Raju, her thoughts turn to her husband. The refrain ‘after all, he is my husband,’ runs through her mind all the years of her separation from him. The novelist sums up the tradition of centuries and her genuine regard for him, when Rosie says, “It is far better to end one’s life on his door step” (The Guide, 52).

If Marco’s neglect of Rosie is inhuman Raju’s relationship with her is even worse. Raju uses her as a ladder to affluence and popularity. Raju makes a commercial use of her passion. She has craved for love, admiration and understanding from Raju but she is disillusioned when Raju does not turn out to be that. She deeply regrets her decision to have come to him.

Rosie still has a high respect for her husband even after he insulted her and neglected her. When she comes to know that Raju hides the complimentary copy of Marco’s book than she gets very angry and quarrels with Raju for his meanness. Truly enough, Rosie’s morality is intact, though she is very much disgusted with the cool, placid and scholarly nature of her husband Marco. She is in a fit of dejection, gets infatuated by Raju, but once she discovers that Raju has been all along an “alazon, cheat and hypocrite and not worthy of her trust, she lands him in to prison for forgery, gives him due punishment.”

It is obvious that Rosie’s quest for life is physical, emotional and intellectual, not touching at all the spiritual chords. Compared with Raju, her quest is realistic, practical and pragmatic. She attains a greater degree of self – realization after the separation from her husband Marco, and in the company of Raju, who stands for enthusiasm, warmth and thrill in her life. She seems to derive a great amount of fulfillment of her quest when she achieves popularity and prosperity as a dancer under the name of Nalini. Then, Rosie’s quest is not materialistic but is an intellectual quest as stated by Raju:

Nalini cherished every garland that she got at the end of a performance; usually she cuts it up, sprinkled water on it and preserved it carefully, even when we were in train. She said, holding up a piece of garland and sniffing the air for its fragrance. ‘To me this is the only worthwhile part of our whole activity’ (The Guide, 194).

It is obvious from the foregoing interpretation of the quest theme in The Guide, Raju and Rosie has undergone significant transformation and development in their life process. Raju’s transformation is great and rapid because he has the zest of life.

References
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