

but has 'greatness' thrust upon him. The two locales, two time-frames and two narrators create suspense, arouse the curiosity of the reader and make it a very interesting reading.

MAIN EVENTS IN *THE GUIDE*

The novel '**The Guide**' revolves around Raju, the protagonist and his gradual transformation from a station food vendor, to a tourist guide, an emotional lover, a dancer's manager, a swindler, a prisoner and finally a saint and a martyr.

The novel opens with Raju recently released from prison, sitting on a granite slab, near an abandoned shrine, on the bank of river Sarayu. On the other side is the village Mangal, where the villagers are illiterate and superstitious. A villager named Velan, mistakes Raju for a saint and requests him to solve a problem about his sister's marriage. The problem is solved by Raju's eloquence, wit and magical personality, so Velan becomes his sincere disciple and makes the gullible villagers also believe that he is a holy man. As time elapses, all the villagers start revering him as a saint and offer him gifts and food.

The narrative shifts backward in time, as Raju becomes nostalgic and thinks of his past life -- his childhood experiences, his school life and education. He remembers his father, owner of a very small shop in his village Malgudi, and when a railway station was set up there, he managed a newly constructed shop at the station. Later on, he got the privilege of running this shop. Here, his interaction with myriad people, coming from diverse backgrounds started.

The story then moves to the present and the author tells that a large congregation from the village Mangal comes for '*darshan*' of Swami Raju. He advises the villagers to send their children to the classes to be held in the temple-hall. He talks to the villagers about godliness, cleanliness and great Indian Epics and prescribes medicines for them. Not only the children but the elders also are mesmerized by his aphoristic talks, replete with knowledge. Initially, Raju enjoys sainthood but with the passage of time, he is fed up of this artificial life and longs to be his normal self.

Again, the reader gets a glimpse of Raju's past life -- how he became a very successful and seasoned tourist guide. He procured all the things required by the tourists, satiated their curiosity with his persuasive, exaggerated talks and made their trip meaningful. He discovered that tourists possess varied interests, their financial status also differed, so he arranged their sight-seeing trip accordingly. As a guide, he met Rosie and her husband, whom he named Marco, as he looked like an eternal tourist. When Raju had the first glimpse of the charming Rosie, he had a strong feeling of attraction towards her. Marco, a cold, distant cultural historian and researcher was so much engrossed with his academic pursuits that he had no time to spare for Rosie. Raju came to know about the estrangement between the husband and the wife, and gave to Rosie what her husband had denied -- time, attention and admiration. When Rosie wanted to see the dance of King Cobra, Raju eagerly offered to take her to the area of snake charmers. As Cobra danced to the music of flute, Rosie's body, too, began to sway in rhythm and Raju realized that she was a great dancer. They shared their personal feelings with each other. Rosie revealed that she was an innate, passionate dancer, as she belonged to a family of devdasis and married Marco only for social status and financial security. Raju and Rosie developed an intimate relationship and were romantically involved with each other.

The narrative again moves to the present, the village Mangal, where Raju is considered a 'real Swami'. However, he cannot enjoy the prerogatives of a Swami for a very long time. A drought occurs in the village, as a result there is famine and scarcity of food-stuff; and villagers do not offer food to Swami Raju. Due to exorbitant price rise, there ensues a fierce quarrel between a customer and a shopkeeper; soon there are two factions at loggerheads with each other and Velan gets hurt. Velan's half-demented brother goes to Swamiji and narrates this incident. Raju, in turn, conveys a message through him that he will not have food until both the sides are on good terms with each other. Events in the novel take a dramatic turn, when the folly of a 'moron' ultimately leads to the 'martyrdom' of Raju. Velan's brother inadvertently misconveys the message to the credible villagers and says that Swami Raju will not have food until "it rains", instead of saying until "they stop quarrelling". The news that the pure-hearted

altruistic ascetic is observing fast for the cause of villagers spreads to the remotest corner of the village. However, Raju is oblivious of the fact that he is expected to act as a 'Saviour' of the innocent villagers. For Raju, now the times have altered, he is in a state of distress, his mind is tormented by strange ideas; he feels entrapped in a maze from which there is no escape. Raju is determined to confess to Velan that he is "not a saint, but an ordinary human being like anyone else" and asks him to listen to the story of his past life. However, Velan does not react as the story proceeds.

The narrative again shifts to the past. Raju recalls the time when he was too much obsessed with the thoughts of Rosie--he revelled in the memory of the happy moments he spent with her and anticipated what he would do with her in future. He became over-conscious of his dress and appearance and tried every strategy to impress her. He made Rosie believe that in sharp contrast to Marco, he was very passionate about her innate talent and wanted her to become an eminent dancer. Rosie decided to take her husband's consent for dancing, but his reply was negative, as he very firmly believed that good wives do not stoop to dance. He considered dancing to be below the dignity of his high-class family, so he told her that she did not possess sufficient training in dance. Rosie, unconsciously retorted by saying that when she performed before Raju in a hotel, he eulogized her talent. At this Marco became suspicious and thought that his wife had betrayed his trust. Rosie's cross-examination commenced and she finally confessed of her relationship with the tourist guide, Raju. Marco could not tolerate this infidelity on the part of his wife, so decided to depart without his wife. Rosie went to stay at Raju's place, where she persevered during her dancing sessions. Raju persistently motivated and encouraged her. Initially, Raju's mother was warm and caring towards Rosie, but she could not tolerate her dance for a long time, got irritated, called her a "serpent girl" and "demon" and cautioned her son to maintain distance from her. However, Raju did not pay any attention to this advice and transformed from a tourist guide to a skilful lover. He frittered most of his time with Rosie, did not care for his business and his career as a guide, lost his shop, faced a big financial crunch, was in heavy debt and involved in litigation. Raju's mother and uncle

thought that Rosie was responsible for the ruin of Raju, hence, they humiliated her. However, Raju stood for Rosie and his mother went away to her brother's house.

Left alone, both Raju and Rosie enjoyed living together. Rosie now resolved to give her dance performance in public. Her name was changed from Rosie to Nalini, as Rosie seemed to be a foreign name. She got an opportunity to make her first public performance in a cultural programme at Albert Mission College, which proved mesmerizing. Gradually she reached the zenith of success, she had her own identity and Raju became her stage manager. Raju charged heavy amount for each of her performance, her bank balance kept on enhancing and thus Raju succeeded in encashing her talent. They shifted to a big, posh house and led a luxurious life. However, as time elapsed, Rosie was fed up of her mechanical, monotonous and materialistic life; at times, she remembered her husband and felt that her art had become 'too much for her'.

Meanwhile, Marco sent a copy of his published book to Raju in which he had acknowledged his gratitude to him. Raju concealed this book from Rosie, thinking that the book will again arouse dormant feelings for Marco in Rosie's heart. However, when Rosie read the review of this book in a *Weekly*, she was elated and told Raju about it and later on, when she came to know about Raju's concealment of the book, she was extremely annoyed. Then, a registered letter for Rosie arrived which mentioned that after signing an application form, Rosie would be able to procure a jewellery box, which had been deposited in the bank by Marco. Raju was very possessive about Rosie, he feared that as soon as Rosie would know about this magnanimity of Marco, mentally she might move closer to her husband. So, once again he committed a serious blunder, he forged Rosie's signatures. Marco discovered this fraud, informed the matter to the police; Raju was arrested and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Although, Rosie was contemptuous of this deceit of Raju, yet she went to meet him in the prison, cried, consoled him and did everything possible to help him. Raju was very co-operative and disciplined in the prison and was considered a "model prisoner" for his good conduct and positive attitude. He thoroughly enjoyed his stay in the prison and felt depressed when he was released.

Again, the action moves to the present. Raju thinks that after listening to his honest confession about his past life, Velan will disgrace him, but to his great surprise Velan still addresses him as 'Swami'. Raju reluctantly observes the fast and acquires the facade of a saint. As the news of Swami Raju's fast has already spread, myriad people visit the place for his '*darshan*', cook food there and enjoy themselves. The sight of smoke and food makes Raju more ravenous and he craves to eat. On the first two days of his fast he has managed to eat something secretly, out of the little food he saved earlier, but after that he famishes. He feels that now there is no alternative, he knows that he will have to go through the ordeal. Then, comes a moment of revelation, when he resolves to do something for the villagers; he thinks that if his fast can bring rain, he will surely fast. So he drives away all the thoughts of food from his mind. He thinks that if by avoiding food he can "help the trees bloom and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?" With renewed strength and vigour, he goes to stand in water and prays to God to send down rain and save the villagers. He feels that he has transformed, realizes his true self and is ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of others.

Gradually, his health deteriorates and even the government gets concerned. This becomes a great national event and is covered by the press as, "Holy man's penance to end drought". An American film-maker also comes to interview him. On the eleventh day of the fast, he looks very feeble, frail and emaciated, his life is in peril and he is suggested to have glucose, but he refuses. Swami Raju desires to be carried to the river where he stands in knee-deep water with the support of two persons. He shuts his eyes, turns towards the mountains, mutters his prayers and after some time opens his eyes and says "it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs --" and then falls unconscious. The ending of the novel is ambiguous- Did it really rain or was it the hallucination of a dying man? Will Raju regain his consciousness or has he died? The author does not make this clear and there is no conclusive evidence to answer these questions satisfactorily.