



Decoding Class - Consciousness in R.k. Narayan's “ The Guide”

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ABSTRACT

India is a country full of diversity in terms of geographical location, religion, caste, class, creed, rituals language, physical appearances, attires etc. and more or less these differences contribute in our thinking, personality development, behavior, actions etc. Now, there are both the positive and negative sides of such differences, sometimes the negative being more apparent. Such divisions not only exist but maintain a hierarchy in society and unconsciously we are always aware of our relations with others in that hierarchy.

Narayan's stories seem to be concerned with simple problems of middle-class people and their solutions in a humorous way. But he is not completely away from serious concerns like caste, class and gender rather he did engage with these issues. Malgudi is divided on class lines, with the elite living in lowly Extension and the lowly living elsewhere, in or off Ellaman street. In ‘Waiting for Mahatma’ Gandhi goes to the home of the poorest of the poor avoiding the Municipal Board Chairman's hospitality. Swami and his friends go to the poorer quarters to fight with the coachman's son. In ‘The Guide’ also Narayan does study “... economic problems minutely and exquisitely and thereby frame several economic groups. While Marco and Rosie represent the well-to-do class, Gaffur and Joseph denote the low wage-earners. In the character of the sait, the money - lender, we find a wealthy person who amasses and hoards wealth thriving upon the troubles of other persons. Then there are the rich lawyers who make huge amount of money at the expense of the clients.”(Sarkar,01) There is always a latent spirit of struggle among all those classes or continuous attempt by them to upgrade their class maintain it. Such unconscious attempts by all the three main characters of the novel cause complexities in their lives and decide the plot of the novel.

The present paper deals with decoding the psychological working in all the three main characters and some other characters of the novel in context of their class in society which is not only confined to the economical similarities among a group of people but also the similarities in terms of thinking, beliefs, gender, background, upbringing, place etc. Unknowingly they are always aware of their class and their actions and dialogues are always more or less influenced by their class-consciousness. It is this knowledge which silently creates ego, love, ambition, greed, jealousy, hatred, devotion, atonement etc. in them.

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Introduction: Besides, the Marxian class-differences people in India are very much conscious about their religion, rituals, caste, creed, gender etc. and it's impact can be perceived in our social, personal and sometimes professional life too. One of our unique features is that we can be found in between a struggle to mitigate the differences among us and to safeguard them too. It is some kind of force which divides people and keep them in particular compartments. ‘ Imbalance of these forces brings social tension and disturbance.’ (Yadav and Dr. Singh 17 vol.7).Lack of right kind of education and intolerance aggravate such situation. It does not mean that these compartments cannot be or should not be broken. We need to break them to provide greater space and opportunity to mankind. Let us decode the reasons and effects of such class-consciousness among people in the present novel.

Marco marries a highly qualified beautiful woman to match his class but then his sense of superiority (Rosie is a devdasi's daughter) causes complexity in his marital life. Rosie marries Marco without thinking much because she just wants to get out of her defamed class

but later she finds mental incompatibility with him. Marco even tries to suppress her talent to protect his social-status. Raju has always been attracted to glamour and status and this infatuation brings him closer to the wife of a rich man. He uses her to fulfill his ambition of becoming a rich man. His ambition, jealousy and a feeling of insecurity leads him to forgery and then to jail.

Marco talks as less as possible to everyone in Malgudi as they are inferior to him in terms of class. He seems to be a victim of superiority-complex. He at a lesser degree resembles 'Arun' of Vijay Tendulkar's "kanyadan". Unlike Marco Arun belongs to a lower class who cannot have a peaceful life with his wife Jyoti who comes from upper class. His class-consciousness causes him inferiority-complex. He tortures and even beats his wife to feel equal or superior to her. Jyoti's father who dreams of changing society agrees her daughter's choice to marry someone from lower class but his dream got shattered to see the outcomes. Similarly, Marco marries Rosie to show his modern outlook but then could not give her equal status. She becomes only a show-piece in his life. Though Narayan has focused on his studious nature and academic ambition as the reason of his mechanical relation with his wife but we see that "*anything that interested her seemed to irritate him.*" (70) He ostracized the traditional culture of her class i.e. dancing when she asked for his permission to explore her talent. He insults her by comparing her art to 'acrobatics' and a 'monkey's performance'. She is forced to live a submissive life. She could never feel the conjugal bliss with him. She says, "I'd have preferred any kind of *mother-in-law, if it had meant one real, live husband.*" (78) Marco wants Rosie to live within certain limits and rebukes her to even think of comparing herself to him. He scolds her, "*Oh, you want to rival me, is that it?*" (121)

Marco's treatment to Rosie shows another class-division i.e. the class of men and that of women. Both species are equally conscious about their role and that's why sometimes one class enjoys the undue privileges just because of a particular gender while the other suffers for the same. Though such consciousness is just a make-belief, just because of the way we are made to believe about our gender since childhood. Rosie, who is an educated woman always cares about her duty as a wife and Raju's mother carries traditional Indian rules set for women. Like Marco Ramani also scolds his wife Savitri now and then in "The Dark Room". When Babu's health is down Savitri tells him to take rest and not to slink off the school. Hearing this Ramani's remark is: "*you are too ready with your medical certificate*"(01) She is meek enough to never interrupt the running commentary with an explanation to her husband. As in the words of Ramani, "*saving up energy by being silent.*"(01) In 'My Days' Narayan writes:

" I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of women as opposed to man, her constant oppressor.... Man assigned her a secondary place and kept there with such subtlety and cunning that she began to lose all her notions about independence, individuality, stature and strength. A wife in an orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances." (01)

As far as Raju is concerned we can see that he understands the class – difference in terms of riches from early childhood. In the beginning Raju's father sends him to the traditional school (Pyol school) whereas Raju wants to enjoy the glamour and ambience of Christian school (Albert Mission School). Referring to the teacher of the Pyol school Raju's father says, " Many students who have passed through the hands of this master are now big officials at Madras, collectors and man like that..." (25) Thus we see that to upgrade the status of own family Raju's father hopes his son to be rich, to be among high-class people. Unfortunately Raju could do nothing great as such. But the teachings on importance of money and status got ingrained in him very early and his this longing becomes very clear in the later part of the novel. He has no passion for tourism, guiding, cultural-heritage, natural-beauty etc. In one of the fascinating passages Raju articulates:

" you may want to ask why I became a guide and when. I was a guide for the same reason as someone else is a signaller, porter or guide ." (26)

Raju's life changes with the arrival of Rosie in Malgudi. After seeing her he feels embarrassed at his plain appearance. Says Raju, "*the moment she got down from the train I wished I had hidden myself somewhere.*" He is effortlessly drawn towards her beauty and status. Though she is married he misses no chance to appreciate her charm. He touches her pain by saying that he does not believe in caste-system. But unlike Raju, Raju's mother is not at all comfortable with Rosie when Rosie comes to live in her house. She does not want Rosie to spoil the sanctity of her family and class. She categorizes Rosie as 'dancing-woman' and 'snake-girl.' She even calls her brother to warn Raju to stay away from Rosie. Her brother scolds Rosie badly, "*you are not of our family? Are you of our class?*" He again waited for her to answer and answered himself. "*No. Are you of our caste? No. Our class? No...After all, you are a dancing girl. We do not admit them in our families. Understand.*" (135)

Again in the view of Raju's mother Rosie now belongs to a different class, the class of those women who are abandoned by their husbands. In this class be it the fault of women or not they are considered guilty and are punished too. People criticize and avoid them. They are not allowed to mix with the main stream of society without a pinch of salt. To Raju's mother such women are not worthy enough to live with because they are bent on to destroy any life that comes in contact with. Raju's mother put two choices in-front of Raju that he will have to choose either his mother or Rosie. Raju could not leave Rosie and so his mother left leaving Raju teary eyed.

There is another character Gaffur who belongs to that class of people who use the terms like 'modern' and 'educated' for women in a very derogatory way. For them one should keep away from modern educated women. One cannot live in peace with them. They cannot be

'good' wives or mothers. They don't feel obliged to follow the age-old norms set for women etc.etc. That's why we see Gaffur advising Raju now and then and warning him against Rosie. But Raju compliments the dance, beauty and everything about Rosie. He fights the world and bear loses in business just to be with Rosie but then his love for Rosie is replaced with his love for money. The way he makes Rosie work like a machine one can doubt whether he actually loved her ever or was just using her all the while for his own self, to uplift his own image and class in society by earning as much as possible. He became a money-monger. He says to Velan. *"It seemed absurd that we should earn less than the maximum we could manage. My philosophy was that while it lasted the maximum money had to be squeezed out. We needed all the money in the world."* (152)

Resie confides her inferiority complex to Raju when once Raju asked her why she married Marco. She says, *"Can you guess to what class I belong?" "We are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilized."* (77) she saw an advertisement in a newspaper, *"wanted: an educated, good looking girl to marry a rich bachelor of academic interests. No caste restrictions..."* (77) Thus she met Marco. She did not think much over any other thing as everybody was excited to know that someone from their community was going to marry a man of high social-standing. We, as readers can feel how she was overpowered by her class-consciousness that she wanted to get rid of her defamed class at any cost. But Marco and Rosie were poles apart and their incompatibility ruined her married life. Marco could never appreciate her talent and by doing the same Raju made his way to her heart.

When Marco is angry with her over her affairs with Raju and leaves her she follows him like a dog to be forgiven and accepted again. Though she cries out while making love with Raju, *"After all... After all...Is this right what I am doing? After all, he has been so good to me, given me comfort and freedom. What husband in the world would let his wife go and live in a hotel room by herself, a hundred miles away."* (102) One can feel that it was not solely due to her sense of guilt for infidelity but also because in her hearts of heart she has always been thinking her marriage as a favour done to her by Marco, to emancipate her from her low class and for that she should have been always obliged to him. Such beliefs doubles her pain of atonement and it is this reason that she never utters any bad word for Marco when he abandons her completely. Rather, she justifies his decision and always feels obliged and devoted to him so much that Raju feels jealous.

Marxists theorize that unequal social-structure is a functional component of society that inspires people to struggle to fit into upper class and attain the stage of happiness and satisfaction but the ultimate peace and contentment is not possible in this material world. Material accumulation is a never ending thirst which is quenched only after the sense of rejection takes place. With the sense of rejection for material world comes the sense of self-realization. In "The Guide" this last stage of Maslow's theory i.e. self-realization is attained by all the main characters of the novel when the long deposited ice of abasement, ego, ambition, greed and hatred is sublimed into vapour of self-realization. Rosie attains it by exploring her art and Marco through his book where in spite of all that happened he does not forget to acknowledge Raju's help. As far as Raju is concerned he achieves the self-realisation when he is genuinely moved by the simple faith of the villagers. "All of Raju's earlier apparently immoral actions are reversed by an ultimate moment of revelation of his godly self. He sacrifices his life for the faith of the villagers. Though rain may not come but Raju becomes a Mahatma." (Panda, 31) At last "... he can feel the rain of blessing enveloping his body and soul." (Panda,31)

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