

Course Name: The Novel and Change

Professor Name: Dr. Avishek Parui

Department Name: Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Institute Name: IIT Madras

Week – 07

Lecture 34

R. K. Narayan's The Guide - Part 1

So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course titled The Novel and Change. We'll start with a new novel today, which happens to be Akhenarayan's novel, The Guide. Now, before we dive into the novel, which we will in a minute, we'll talk a little bit about the context of the novel. because that's what we're doing in this course. We are looking at the relationship between the text and the context. We just finished Heart of Darkness and before that we finished other novels as well. And in each of the novels we've studied so far, you remember that we are looking at the relationship between the societal conditions, the societal changes, the cultural changes, and how all those changes are getting reflected in the text, the production of the plot that the novels are using or espousing. Now, Narayan, of course, is one of the most important figures in early 20th century Indian writing in English. So, if you look at, you know, the history of Indian writing in English, it of course starts with Vankanchandra Chatterjee, Raj Mohan's wife. But it is only in this early 20th century that it really picks up. So, we have this really big figures at that time, Raja Rao, R.K Narayan, and other people who come after that, right? So the whole idea of Mukh Rajan, of course, so the whole idea of looking at Indian writing in English as a big cultural moment, a big literary moment really takes place from early 20th century. And the novel we will study particularly for this course, which is a guide, is really a profound novel when it comes to examining the different kinds of social, cultural, political and moral changes happening in India in the early 20th century. There are lots of symbols in a novel.

The character is of course fascinating. We have the idea of the guru, the guide in the

character of Raju who is a bit of a rogue hero actually, bit of an anti-hero. So there is also some kind of a interesting representation of the classical guru culture, the classical teacher culture. and the ambivalence around that is really interesting because you never know quite know towards the end of the novel whether Raju actually acquires enlightenment or does he conduct or does he perform one last con act because he is a bit of a con man really through the novel we see that he is someone who is really trying to make quick money because this is the time in India with the markets they are opening is getting more and more plugged into the global markets as it were and tourism is picking up, you know, railways of course become a very important part. The entire, you know, collusion between the railway industry and the tourism industry and how the arrival of railways really began to change not just the physical landscape but also the moral landscape of Indian towns. Now, of course, some of you know this already. that Narayan really depicts a fictional town of Malgudi. There's no such place called Malgudi for real, but there are all kinds of speculations what Malgudi may be. For general scholarship, they assume Malgudi to be in and around the area of what we call Mysore today. So, there is that fictional chronotope that Narayan keeps representing in his novels.

And of course, what it allows him to do is to really fictionalize the real historical changes that we see happening particularly in the guide. Why the arrival of railways, the arrival of the tourism industry, the arrival of the new market of consumerism and capital, all these factors they all come together to create a new kind of financial as well as moral economy. So that that constant traffic between morality and finance, the new orders of morality, the changing orders of morality and the changing orders of finance. So, these become very important aspects when we look at Narayan's writing. So, as I mentioned already that when you use word economy in Narayan's writing, we have to use it in a very entangled, as a very entangled concept because economy here entails moral economy, financial economy, cultural economy and how also the linguistic economy, the language markets begin to change as well. So The Guide is one of the really interesting novels, really, very objectively speaking, when it comes to examining the relationship between human conditions and the changing social conditions and how the latter, which is the changing social conditions and the moral ecology or the finance ecology, it all begins to shape and reshape the human

character human decisions, human cognition in many ways. And of course, as I mentioned already, that there is some kind of a rewriting of the Guru culture, there is some kind of a, you can call it satire, you can call it critique, you can call it, you know, some kind of a reconstruction maybe. We do not quite know and that is the ambivalence in the end, that interpretative, you know, ambivalence, that the interpretative indeterminacy in the end where you do not quite know really happens when Raju almost falls at his feet and says that to Vellan that he can feel in a very visceral way that the rains are coming and that is where the novel ends. We do not know the rains really come or not.

We do not know whether Raju, like I said, performs one more con man's show. We do not quite know and that ambiguity, that interpretative ambiguity at the end of the novel is what makes it so complex, so fascinating because this is an India, this is a newly emerging nation state where all kinds of identity markets become very complex and very, very deconstructive in quality, where the shift from the static stable ontology to a mutable ontology when it comes to ontology of identities, ontology of economy, ontology of moral vocabulary, So all that shift is taking place in the novel. So, in many sense it is one of the most powerful novels to study if you want to examine the relationship between human behavior, human identities, human decisions, human morality and the changing notion of the marketplace in early 20th century India. So that is the long and short of, of course we will spend more time looking at the changing societal conditions of 20th century India which is reflected in Narayan's novel but this is just to give you a primer in terms of how we will study, how we aim to study this particular novel. So, on your screen there is an essay, a really interesting essay by Alpana Sharma, Nippling, where there is a contrast or some kind of a comparison between Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan. Of course, the real trust area of the essay is looking at the modern English discourse in colonial India. So what happens to language? What happens to the changing notions of language, the changing vocabulary, really, in this sort of modern emerging aspirational India, the post-colonial India in some sense, right? Because this novel is written, you know, when India obviously becomes a nation state on its own. But there is this massive aspirational economy, and in many senses, a very new country. So that tension and sometimes collusion between ancientness and newness is something we find happening again and again in R.K Narayan's writing,

especially in the guide, where as I mentioned there are these ancient archetypes which are reused, the idea of the guru, the spiritual teacher, the enlightened person etc. So, all those archetypes are reused, but at the same time they are also plucked into the newly emerging aspirational economy, the newly emerging market vocabulary that India is finding herself gravitating towards because it is a new country with an ancient attribute. So that tension which is also collaboration sometimes gets really interestingly represented in Narayan's writing, not least in this novel, *The Guide*. So Alpana Sharma Knippling writes this really interesting essay called *RK Narayan, Raja Rao and Modern English Discourse in Colonial India* and this is published in one of the finest journals in the field, *Modern Fiction Studies* and this should be on your screen. So let's take a look at the beginning of the essay, where it gives you some sense of the historicity of Indian writing in English. The historical beginnings, of course, it started with the famous or infamous, the Macaulay Minutes which was designed really to create this breed of Indians really who would speak English, write English and essentially serve as bureaucrats, the in-between men as it were, who would help the British govern the country better.

So, it wasn't really a benevolent mission, it was more of a strategic mission, a strategic action plan as it were. The Macaulay, you know, the mission of educating English to Indians just so they become the right kind of people to act as the link between the governed and the governor. Of course, in writing in English can be traced back to that moment and where more and more writers are writing in English, of course, when it comes to, by the time you come to Narayan and Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, there is very much the emergence of unique Indian writing in English, which is not necessarily the same as British English or American English. It is beginning to carve unique and very complex and very rich identity of his own. And of course, by the time we come to someone like Salman Rushdie, we have a complete polyphony of this new language, the Indian English language, where it is sort of plugged into Hindi, plugged into Bollywood, plugged into all kinds of local registers as well, which Rushdie of course calls by this fascinating term *chutnification*, this entire hybridity of language, the polyphony of language, the asymmetric entanglements of different kinds of linguistic registers which celebrate impurity, which celebrate heterogeneity, which celebrate the sort of carnivalesque

polyphonic you know politics of writing. But as Sharma Knippling reminds us and this should be on your screen. Indigena's Indian novel writing in English dates back to at least the mid-19th century. Its origin owes as much to the educational reforms called by both the 1813 Charter Act and the ensuing 1835 English Education Act of William Bentinck as to the circulation, representation and purchase of English literature and culture among members of the Indian upper classes in a 19th century India. So again, the 1835, you know, Bentinck governed, you know, colonial empire in India, which wanted to create or wanted to sort of internalize, people internalize the superiority or the cultural supremacy the cultural artifacts and verticals of English really. So, which is why Shakespeare started to be taught in many Indian universities around that time.

So, as you can see, the circulation, representation and purchase, it becomes some kind of a commodity. English literature begins to become a commodity in the Indian market, of course with a political motive, a political mission. which is to make Indians internalize that as some kind of an artifact like culture, artifact-like quality. So, while we are not at liberty to assume that novel production in Britain and colonial India underwent simply parallel routes, we may still argue, for the possibility, in the case of English writing in India, of a nascent space in which British and Indian social codes and value systems began to intersect and mutually determine one another. So again, there's a lot of intersections and convergences going on. So, I just mentioned, for instance, the arrival of railways in sleepy Indian towns like Malgudi, the fictional chronotope that Narayan offers. But even that, when you see something as material as the arrival of railways, arrival of train for the matter, the massive cultural change that takes place, you know, right after the cultural, economic, social, political, economy changes that take place, because the railways, of course, creates, generates a very unique economy of its own in terms of the tea shops and coffee shops and you know different kinds of markets which open around the railway centers which obviously correspond to this very episodic arrival and departure of trains. So, we can see at the level of time too, the level of temporality too, there is a lot of changes taking place because from this sort of leisurely long drawn out temporal structures we have more episodic structures where the entire rhythm of the town, the entire mercantile rhythm or human rhythm of the town They rely heavily on the arrival or departures of trains. So you

know the timetable of the trains for instance they shape and reshape and profoundly govern the sequences and the schemata really the temporal schemata as it were of those towns right. the entire temporality or the divisions, the markers of temporality in those towns are determined by train metaphors, right.

So, you know the timetable, the train and the cultural, social behavior and actions of those towns, they correspond to each other in a very complex way. So at a very theoretical, philosophical level what that means is the idea, the sense, the experience of time begins to change and you can see how even at a almost neural cognitive you know, quality or threshold, we begin to see that change happen in a very, very interesting way, perhaps permanent way as well. So, there is this episodicity, the episodic quality, which is very much there with the arrival and departure of trains. So that's the intersection that has been hinted at over here. So, more specifically, the translation of certain progressive British social codes and cultural values of the Enlightenment into Indian terms entailed something like a new episteme, a new knowledge network, episteme being a knowledge network, knowledge structure, within whose rigor Indian writers started to produce novels assuming a critical stance towards what were now conceived as backward Indian social and cultural practices, right. So, there's this critique that is very much there, especially in Raja Rao, Mulk raj Anand and R.K Narayan's writing where the assumption that Indian social structures are backward, the assumption that Indian moral structures are backward. So that assumption is critiqued and ironically and appropriately using the language of the colonizer, right. So that is quite literally the empire writing back, the empire critiquing back. So, there is a sense of subversion that is taking place quite literally.

I mentioned Bankim Chandra and there's reference to Bankim Chandra's novel as well, Rajmohan's Wife. So Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's 1864 novel Rajmohan's Wife, for instance, utilizes a social reformer's zeal in his depiction of a middle-class Hindu woman's abuse by her husband. However, by the early twentieth century, many writers began to insist on the Indian content of their material, an increasingly prevalent tendency, no doubt by the corresponding rise in Nationalism, and all the organized movements of civil disobedience. So, as you can see, the reason why I chose this essay is it really gives you a

very fair picture. very fair flavor really in terms of how the rise of the Indian writing in English, particularly the novel, should be seen, should be historicized, should be situated with the different directions that the freedom movements were taking place, the nationalisms, the new networks, new narratives of nationalism were taking place. So, there is that really interesting correspondence going on over here. between different organized movements in politics and culture and how the different narratives of novel writing at that time were connected to that, were plugged into that political discourse. So, Narayan of course inhabits that tradition and it is within the folds of this complex history that we may understand the imbrications of the discourses of nationalism, colonialism and modernity in the Indian colonial context. All these big things, the big issues over here nationalism, colonialism and modernity should be understood only in relation to their correspondence to the different cultural and social changes that were taking place at that time. cusp of change happening around the time in which these people were writing Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao.

So, they both depict the point of time, the slice of time right before independence as well as the point of time right after independence. So that 10, 20 years before and after that liminal grey zone is something which gets represented again and again in the fiction of this time. So, I would argue now what, you know, the writer says over here, he sort of gives you a diachronic idea in terms of how Indian writing in English may be studied and situated. I would argue that in order to effectively read early Indian literature in English for the purpose of this essay, early signifies the period of the 1930s and 40s. That's what is meant by early 1930s and 40s. One needs to see how in this period the alliance of nationalism and colonialism produced India's modern moment, right? Like I said, you know the temporality, the cultural movement of modern India was through the alliance of nationalism and colonialism. So, the whole idea of breaking away from the shackles of imperialism, breaking away from the tyranny of colonialism. the different nationalist discourses which are prevalent at the time to make that departure happen. So that is the zeitgeist, that is the cultural momentum as it were which gets represented in Indian writing in English. That acknowledgement of that presence should be there and even the most superficial reading of this fiction, this subset of fiction. So, and this is what is meant by

modernity you know. So the idea of modernity in India is quite complex because it sort of includes pre-colonial as well as the post-colonial. So there is a very big temporal shading that is happening over here. By shading I mean integration of different components and shading obviously means if you use a sort of metaphor of art and painting, the mixing of colors as it were, the mixing of different kinds of flavors, different kinds of you know content, different kinds of priorities and impetus. Indeed, the uneven terrain of Indian colonial history on which numerous nationalist struggles for independence were played out in the mid to late 19th century yields nothing more startling than a picture of this very alliance between nationalism and colonialism, which in a sense secured India's modernity in the early 20th century.

So, India's modernity, of course, is a very complex cultural condition and there's a sense of, you know, coming together of opposites, as it were, in Indian modernity, which is why it is such a difficult thing to define. It is not really modernity in the European sense, because there is both nostalgia as well as aspiration in Indian modernity. So there is looking back, it's a pre-colonial past, which also gets integrated as well as the aspiration of a post-colonial nation. So both get really interestingly connected to what we call Indian modernity, which is why it is so different from the idea of European modernity. It is far more complex, far more heterogeneous and far more textual and palimpsestic in quality. However, the alliance of nationalism and colonialism will not seem quite so startling if you remember that both these ideological formations had a shared stake in the larger Western bourgeois discourse of progressive liberal humanism emerging as a symptom of modernity in 1930s and 40s. So, there is that spectral presence of progressive liberal humanism which is there in the idea of modernity but of course it's much more complex than that. In the studies of the strategic exclusion of the subaltern from national narratives of emancipation, such Indian Marxist historians and theorists such as subaltern studies historians and Gayatri Spivak have pointed out that nationalism or the organized resistance to imperialism will itself always participate in the cultural aspects of imperialism as long as an organized resistance to imperialism is a bourgeois movement, right. So, there is that critique of imperialism or resistance imperialism, how you know it can sometimes be a very, very upper caste, upper class privileged position to take. So, there is that tension as well. It was really inclusive in

that sense and some of that critique also gets directed to any writing in English. If you look at the writers writing at the time, Narayan Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, they all come from very elite backgrounds in some sense by contemporary standards. That elitism, that privileged position, the privileged perspective is something that is also there in their writing. Okay, now we'll skip a little bit. And come to the last bit of this page, where there is reference to Narayan and Rao and how the writings may be compared and contrasted in very interesting ways.

So, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, two early Indian writers in English, productively demonstrate how the literary project participated in the modern moment inaugurated by the, by the complicitious absence, embrace sorry, by the complicitious embrace of the discourses of nationalism and colonialism. So, the complicity or the complicitious quality of nationalism and colonialism is something which you find quite strongly in both Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan's writing. So, the important thing over here is the idea or what is meant by complicitious right, because the idea of complicity or being collusive or being collaborative is something which we have to unpack while reading Narayan's writing. So, you know the two novels mentioned over here Narayan's English Teacher and Rao's Kanthapura. Now it's a very interesting choice because English Teacher of course as you can see here is this Macaulay man. Here is someone who has read English, learnt English, wants to pass it on you know through the reading of Shakespeare and Dickens and all the rest of it. So, there is that very very strong colonial legacy or colonial action plan which is getting embodied in the presence and the figuration of the English teacher. And he contrasts that with Raja Rao's Kanthapura. which again is a fictional town but it is very much in sort of historically located in the Gandhi movements, the Gandhian movements and non-cooperation at that time, right. So, the resistance against the British in a non-violent way. So, there is that idea of colonialism and the need to break the shackles of colonialism but at the same time there is this newly emerging nation with its entire economy of aspirations and ambitions and fears and anxieties and all that gets represented in very, very interesting ways in these two novels. Narayan's The English Teacher and Rao's Kanthapura, English Teacher written in 1945, Kanthapura written in 1938, are novels produced at a time when the most volatile positioned themselves vis-a-vis British colonialism and internationalism.

So there is this volatility, this episodic quality, this mutability which is there and again that is interesting for us to remember because the novel itself lends that mutable, the mosaic of different kinds of movements, different kinds of moods, different kinds of momentum, right. And that mutability, that mosaic of movements is exactly what makes the novel so attractive to these writers at that time.

And that platform can also accommodate the tension or the collusion between nationalism and imperialism and colonialism. But with the exception of waiting for the Mahatma, neither colonialism nor nationalism occupies a central position in Narayan's novels for the matter any later period. Now, if you remember, one of the things I may have mentioned at the beginning of this course, that when we read society through literature, when we read culture through literature, we have to pay equal attention to what is not represented in fiction, in the plot and sometimes in fact what is not represented becomes more important than what is represented, right. So, the idea of the absence or the figuration of the absence or the articulation of the absence becomes very important while we read really good works of fiction or poetry for the matter, right. So why is it, the obvious question is why is it that colonialism or nationalism don't occupy central positions in Narayan's writings but very peripheral positions and sometimes they come in tangentially but they never really become the primary tropes or the primary verticals in Narayan's fictions or fiction. So, conversely questions regarding colonialism and nationalism do occupy a large part of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. But they are treated in such a way that they are deferred rather than addressed. So, there is this sense of deferral in Raja Rao's writing. So, there is an addressing of colonialism and nationalism, but it's an inadequate, almost lethargic address, right.

So it's not really a direct address. And there's a sense of procrastination in that kind of writing, which again, of course, is quite strategic. We're not saying this as a critique of Rao or So why does it get procrastinated? Why does it, why is there a delay in describing or depicting the entanglement of colonialism and nationalism? So, the deferred address is important for us to notice. In both Narayan's *The English Teacher* and Rao's *Kanthapura*, then, aspects of colonialism and nationalism are engaged in a sideways fashion, indirectly and obliquely. So, you know, if you look at someone like Saman Rushdie, modern reading

of Rushdie, he encourages the idea of reading sideways rather than reading directly or reading, you know, in a linear sequential fashion. So, the preference to read sideways rather than sequentially is important because sideways reading can help us integrate incompatible elements, right. So, that incompatibility begins to become you know addressed. So, what are the incompatible readings, incompatible interpretations, even those could be woven in very interesting readings of the novel. So there's an indirectness and obliqueness and of course sidewaysness, sideways reading habits which are being encouraged by the very nature and plot of these novels because as I mentioned, there are some very tangential references to some very burning questions at the time, some very oblique references, very very peripheral, sometimes almost superficial references to some really burning pressing issues of the time. And obviously the question is why? So why are these pressing issues, why are these questions about representation, nationalism, colonialism are not taken head on by these writers? So what is going on really in terms of the artistic choice or the narrative choice to not foreground that element. So again, these decisions are both artistic as well as political right. So, there is this strategic situatedness which is going on in terms of what you situate, what you re-situate right and the politics of situatedness, the play, the interplay of the situated, re-situated and de-situated become really important in Narayan and Rao's fiction. Because as I mentioned at the beginning, some of them are writing about ancient attributes using a new vocabulary and that the tension, the collaboration between ancientness and newness is what makes this writing, this subset of literature so fascinating in quality. So we will stop at this point and we will continue with this essay in the subsequent sessions. Thank you for your attention.