

Course Name: The Novel and Change

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Lecture 39

R. K. Narayan's The Guide - Part 6

So, hi and welcome to this NPTEL course titled The Novel and Change. We will continue studying R.K. Narayan's novel The Guide. So, in this section we will focus on the narrative method in The Guide, how the first person and third person methods, how they are woven across each other, they map onto each other and how they seem to offer different functions which are contrasted but also connected in some ways. So, the contrasting as well as the connective qualities of both narrative methods. Obviously, they have some psychological implications. For instance, the first-person narrator in Raju, for instance, who talks about himself and his growing up, his entire Bildungsroman, that is entirely designed to attract sympathy. We talked about this in the last class as well. Whereas the third-person narration with which the novel ends most importantly, most famously, seems to take a more indifferent, a more journalistic stance in terms of just reporting of what is going on rather than emotionally engaging with it. So this should be on your screen. So far from being a simple account of the way in which the Picaro becomes the pilgrim which is the in nutshell the story, the Picaro becoming a pilgrim, though one can argue that this progression is inherent in the juxtaposition of the two narratives, the guide employs a complex contrapuntal structure. So, there is a contrasting quality in the two narrative methods which are sometimes in tension with each other but they are also supplementing each other in different structural and functional ways. The movement between the story of how Raju becomes a putative sadhu in the present and his account of his past, which centres on his activities as a tourist guide and his affair with Rosie, a married temple dancer from Madras, involves a dialectical interplay between the two modes of narration as well as the two actions, because there are the two interesting actions as well. So in one story, there's this

growth story of Raju where he makes a transition from being a railway guide to a tourist guide then he has an affair with a married woman and subsequently he becomes a manager as she travels up and down with an entourage to perform dance shows across India. The first person narrative clearly enlists sympathy for a character. So we talked about this already how this sympathetic quality is there in a first person narration whereas the third person narration is something which really withholds judgment as such and we talked about the braided time scheme as well. So I'm just recapping a little bit just so we can move on to the next bit which is to see how these two narrative functions serve not just dialectical stories plots and stuff but also they offer some psychological situations with which these stories can be different stories woven together can be studied in tandem with each other.

Now if we come to this point, this is page 108 which is the point that I wanted to sort of lead up to using the other examples from earlier. One clear connection between the two narratives is that both suggest the performative nature of personality and this is something we hinted at how this is a newly emerging India where even the ancient attributes, it is dance forms and you know guiding someone as a spiritual teacher. about to become performative qualities and not just that they are also about to enter the commodity market in a sense that they become purchasable functions, purchasable persona, right. So the purchasability quality, the buyability quality, the buyability quotient of these identities are very important for us to underline. For instance, a saint, the whole idea of the ancient spiritual quality of sainthood is somewhat transformed over here into a more performative quality. And of course, we talked about how this novel was written at a time in which the western gaze of the East was changing, quite interestingly, and how the cult of the Guru not just was operating on the level of spirituality, but also the level of commodity. So this commodification of the Guru becomes important here as well. So as William Walsh put said, there is an unbroken connection between Raju, the guide who lived for others, whose character and activity were a reflection of otherness, and Raju, ex-jailbird, ex-lover of Rosie, the dancer, the prophet surrounded by devout villagers waiting for a message or a miracle. In each case, he is a projection of what people need. So, this is why I spent a little bit of time recapping the two narrative methods because as you can see, the narrative method from the third person perspective, it, sort of projects Raju as someone who is about

to perform a trick, about to perform a magical, a miraculous situation except that it just holds back a little bit in the end and denies us information. It doesn't give us the full information. So this withholding of information becomes important because we are not quite sure whether Raju will actually be able to bring the rains for the drought-struck village or not. perceptive and the whole idea of identity becomes projective in quality, right. So, a third-person narrative method over here is a projective method. The first-person narrative method is a situational method.

So, it situates the character. It is an insertive method. it inserts the persona, it inserts the ego into the narrative which is sort of the embedded like quality of the insertion, whereas the person speaking is embedded or nested within the narrative, whereas the third person narrative is a more projective in quality, it projects the persona, it also makes it more performative in that way. So we can see how the different psychological narrative functions are at tandem with each other, sometimes supplementing each other, sometimes in conflict with each other. Perceptive though this is, it only partly explains the complex interrelationships between the two narratives that make up the guide. Interaction between them also occurs in a number of other ways. Most notably, in parallels between the interests of the characters of Marco and Rosie, the issues that emerge are the third-person narrative of Raju's passage into sainthood. So, we talked about how the character Marco, who is Rosie's husband, is an interesting allusion to the first European traveller to come to the East, Marco Polo. And again his gaze is very western, it is very, very reifying, it is all about measurement and metrics and documenting. So there is a degree of deadness about the gaze and we will talk about, in a while we will talk about how Marco seems to be only interested in dead things, dead stones, dead particles. There is a degree of fossilization in the knowledge network that Marco is trying to create, right. So everything should be dead and documented. But Raju, of course, and Rosie along with Raju, they are more into this sort of the performative active quality. So there is a tension there as well. So, Rosie's dancing and Marco's archaeological work initially seemed to be diametrically opposed. So, you know, at a very superficial level, you know, Rosie is obviously performing dance and there's an activity around it. whereas Marco's gaze or Marco's entire surveillance or survey of ancient archaeological remains, they seem to be obsessed with dead nests in a certain

sense, fossilized quality, the fossilized furniture from the past. So when Raju asks Rosie what interests her, she replies anything except cold old stone walls, right. So this is where obviously Marco, her husband, is more interested in, the cold old stone walls. And both her sexuality and her ambition to be a professional classical dancer in contemporary South India seems to be at odds with Marco's absorption in what Raju sees as a sterile past.

So, this is what I mean when I say there's a degree of fossilization that takes place in Marco's focal vision because everything about the past that he's interested in is essentially dead. It's essentially fossilized, essentially sterile in quality. And if you contrast that with Rosie's projective imagination where she's trying to perform, her body, her art, her craft is all very life oriented towards life, whereas Marco is more oriented towards death. So there is that sense of temporality as well, the temporal difference. So dead and decaying things seemed to unloosen his tongue and fire away his imagination, rather than things that lived and moved and swung the limbs. So, obviously dance would not attract Marco at all. So things which moved and you know breathed and you know swung the limbs were no interest to him. So, they come across as an ill-matched couple who represent a contrast between Stasis and Kinesis. So, Marco is more about Stasis, is about that unmoving immutable past, hence the word fossilize is important for him, whereas Rosie is more about Kinesis, is all about performance and movement and life and you know the whole idea of activity. A dead past and a living present. Raju's narration tips the balance firmly in favour of the latter. So Raju obviously associates himself with Rosie. Despite his familiarity with the ancient cave paintings that Marco was examining, he is dismissive of the mythic past, seeing it as ossified and irrelevant to contemporary living. So there is this decoupling that he does between the ossified fossilized past and the you know the living experiential now and that that difference is important because obviously the living experiential now is performed by Rosie through her dances. And this is a quote which tells us something about Raju's mind.

I was bored with his ruin-collecting activities. The wall painting represented episodes from the epics and mythology and all kinds of patterns and motives with men, women and kings and animals in a curious perspective and proportion of their own. and ancient like the rocks.

I had seen hundreds like them, and I saw no point in seeing more. I had no taste for them, just as he had no taste for other things. So, there is that sense of taste, sense of curiosity which is coming into being. And of course, Marco's case is entirely directed towards the past. directed towards dead things, dead matter, which Raju finds absolutely uninteresting. And also, this sort of repetitive quality over here is interesting because Raju is of course a tourist guide and he has seen these things many times over. So, these things cease to surprise or even attract him. So, in contrast his fascination for Rosie not only leads them into his affair with her but also into his becoming the agent who secures her rise to fame as a dancer. So as I mentioned the profession of an agent for instance was unthinkable in you know in India twenty thirty years ago. Right, but here we have a newly emerging India, newly liberal economy which is opening up all kinds of professional possibilities. So to become an agent or performer is also a very lucrative profession to have. So there is what, that's what Raju ends up becoming until of course it starts stealing money from Rosie and then of course it gets caught for forging a signature and then of course that is his descent into nothingness and paradoxically that also elevates them, if it really does, towards sainthood. So, dance may seem to be a secondary concern of the novel, functioning mainly as a medium for developing Rosie's character, but it is a significant subject in its own right and the details of Rosie's training as a career as a dancer afford Narayan with an opportunity to draw on his lifelong interest in Indian classical music, especially the Carnatic tradition of South India. So there is this ancient tradition of Carnatic music and of course Rosie is a performer in dance. So that ancientness is brought in but also what that allows Narayan to do is connected to the newly moving India in terms of the futuristic quality of these art forms. So, Rosie's success as a practitioner of Bharatanatyam, generally considered to be the oldest and most traditional of all the six major forms of Indian classical dance, and so widely performed, in Tamil Nadu and so she trains herself to be proficient in this ancient art. She is undergoing a you know she is undergoing a possible transformation which is analogous to Raju's in a later action.

Now this is interesting thing. So there is this transformation that Rosie is going through from becoming this sort of submissive wife to an archaeologist husband you know to becoming this performing dancer who acquires a lot of fame and wealth and we can see a

similar, very dissimilar but structurally similar movement happening in Raju as well where he transitions from being a railway guide to becoming an agent of a celebrity dancer and then of course towards becoming a saint-like figure. We don't quite know whether he actually becomes a saint but he definitely moves towards that in that direction. Additionally, dance is a trope for a performative identity more generally and Narayan seems to be tracing correspondences between ancient thinking on the nature and significance of Bharatanatyam and its manifestations in the present. So how the ancient nests of Bharatanatyam, the ancient craft of Bharatanatyam is transitioned into a commodity which is part of the celebrity market industry. Right. Raju's possible metamorphosis takes place After the submerged ancient temple reappears, Rosie becomes a star performer of a classical art form that saw a resurgence at the beginning of the 20th century and so the novel also deals with the relationship between ancient and modern thinking in the sections that focus on her career. So at some level Rosie transitions from ancient to modern and Raju transitions from contemporary to a supposedly ancient figure. So they crisscross each other in terms of a metamorphosis. Marco may be the professional archaeologist of the novel but Raju and Rosy are also involved with excavations of the past. So there are different kinds of digging up happening over here. There is a literal digging up that Marco does in terms of you know bringing out the buried history, the buried past but also Rosy and Raju they bring forth the elements of the past. So Rosy of course brings forth Bharatanatyam, the ancient classical dance and she makes it into some kind of a commodity, some kind of performative commodity. Whereas Raju, you know, recovers a sense of sainthood. We don't quite know whether it's actually sainthood or not, but there is definitely a mimetic transition towards sainthood. Rosie is one of a number of Narayan's female characters who are confirmed categories.

So, it's difficult to pinpoint what kind of a character Rosie happens to be. partly but not exclusively because of their caste backgrounds. She is like Shantabai in a dark room, both educated. She has an MA in economics and a woman who feels she has a stigma attached to her because of her caste background. So here also there is some interesting information know reflection of a modern India where the caste background is also seen is seen as a sense of awkwardness and discomfort but at the same time there are all these different

kinds of mobility and agency, acquirement processes which are available in terms of women getting educated or going for education. So Rosy as we know has an MA in Economics. So that in a way undercuts the inglorious feeling that she may have about her caste but not quite. So there is an awkward ambivalence between her caste background and her professional achievement which is that of an academy professional achievement which is that of an MA in Economics at the same time a successful Bharatanatyam dancer. So she comes from a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers and she explains to Raju is consequently viewed as a public woman. So, this again, is an ancient profession where women of certain families were seen as part of a temple dancing troupe and despite the fact that it was a temple this woman looked down upon as Devdasi's for instance that name appears in the novel as well. Devdasi is traditionally it means a servant for the God and of course it has different connotations and different cultural context. It can also mean the quote-unquote fallen woman right because she is a woman who doesn't really have a steady home but someone who keeps performing dances for the public. So not quite the respectable profession as it were. His infatuation with her makes him dispute this categorization and he both tells her that she belongs to the noblest caste on earth and asserts that caste discrimination is a thing of the past. So again, this is the India which is very very keen to move on from the past.

It wants to leave behind some of the bad baggage of the past and Raju of course voices that very very vociferously where he says well, we need to move on into some kind of an uncomplicated future. And the only way to do it, the easiest, the best way to do it is to leave behind some of the undesirable components of the past. Others including his mother and his domineering uncle who later appears on the scene in the role of a protector of the family honour. So he takes away Raju's mother when it is found out that Raju has done some mischief. So he, the uncle, the domineering uncle is his old patriarch, the old school patriarch who protects her sister, his sister and takes away Raju's mother, you know his sister being Raju's mother and a domineering uncle, they have a different view of a Devdasi. The novel which sees her from Raju's unreliable viewpoint remains ambivalent on the issue of a status. Unreliability of the narration is important because, I may have mentioned this already, one of the things that this novel does very successfully is it brings

together supposedly reliable narration along with an unreliable narration. It juxtaposes both these narrative methods very close to each other in very proximate ways. The important thing here is the unreliability of Raju or Raju's narration makes him more human and that's how he attracts empathy and sympathy from the readers.

So, it remains ambivalent on the issue of her status but exhibits little of the attempt to police caste boundaries that informs much of Narayan's early fiction. And Rose's character more generally is presented in a positive light. So there is this effort in Narayan's writing as well to move away from the prison house of caste, from the boundaries, from the confines of caste. Unlike the siren figure shantabai, who serves as a foil to the more orthodox, though equally complex Sabitri, In the dark room, she is represented as a woman who demonstrates both professional and personal integrity, behaving impeccably towards Raju after he has been dishonest towards her. So, there's a sense of civility that's ascribed to Rosie and that obviously undercuts in a stereotypical perception about the fallen woman. So, there is civility, there's honor, there's respect there is dignity in her behavior. At the same time, she is someone who wants to transform, who is happy to transform her craft into some kind of a purchasable commodity through performances. So, Rose is defined by her dancing. And when, with Raju's help, she embarks on a study of Bharatanatyam, her absorption in her art seems to distance her from the temple dancer's stereotype, with its lowly associations. So, as I mentioned, the temple dancer, we have sometimes carried associations of a fallen woman, right. That is something which is subverted in this novel because Rosie obviously makes a departure from that and she retains, I mean her entire training is from that tradition, but at the same time she acquires respectability, she acquires agency. So that undercuts the doom narrative about caste. The next novel, *The Maneater of Malgudi*, Narayan would include a character, Rangi, who, though not unsympathetic, more straightforwardly embodies the traditional association between temple dancers and prostitutes. Rosie's training to become a serious exponent of classical dance is, however, built around a study of Sanskrit texts, particularly the methods embodied in the classic works on the subject, Bharat's *Natya Shastra*, or *A Science of Drama*, without which she feels it will be impossible to keep the purity of the classical forms. Now, Purity over here you can see how the movement away from the stereotypical notions of purity impurity of

caste associated with caste, purity over here is pushed towards art you know in terms of how the human subject irrespective of the caste can try to procreate or try to protect the purity of the craft form.

So, there is a you know differential quality over here. So So coupled with this, in a passage which reads as a fictional equivalent of Narayan's decision to enlist a scholar to help him with his own study of Sanskrit texts, she asks Raju to find her a Sanskrit Pundit who can read episodes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata to her. So again the whole idea of getting someone who can read out the ancient texts is important because at some level it means but its texts are becoming, the ancient texts are becoming less and less readable and its readability depends on a very selected few people who are still trained in the classical tradition. So we see over here it is some kind of a shift in knowledge narrative, a shift in the epistemic pattern where no longer are those ancient texts studied anymore but it has moved towards a more performative iteration of identity and textuality. So, Narayan's study of ancient texts led to retellings of the epics and other mythic tales and fictional works in which they are transformed in contemporary situations. So, Rosie's study of the Natya Shastra may suggest an attempt to learn the conventions of an ancient form of dance, which simply copied in a mimetic way would preclude creative reinterpretation. So, the very fact that Rosie wants to read Natya Shastra and interpret it in her own light is obviously an act of agency, an act of acquired, having acquired agency, right. So that becomes an important point over here as well. The fact that women have the mobility, the agency, the epistemic agency to read any book of the choice that also obviously portrays, is reflective of a very very contemporary modern India where things are opening up for everyone despite the backgrounds. In fact, though she would turn to classic writing on the subject as a source from which she can pick up so many ideas for new compositions and this is very much in keeping with the spirit of Bharat's treatise. So the whole idea of newness becomes important where even the ancient texts offer new interpretations and then again in a very textual way this is the really interesting interplay between ancientness and newness which you find coming again and again in Narayan's novel both in terms of social ways, economic ways, the political ways, the cultural ways, but also the textual ways, how the ancient texts of wisdom and storytelling in India are now reinterpreted by women, men from all kinds

of backgrounds. And that those reinterpretations are pushed forward in time. So that becomes a new way to design and push forward a certain kind of memory, right. So not just a pure hygienic memory catered to certain caste positions but also more liberal, more opened up, more carnivalesque if you will cartography of memory or map of memory through which new interpretations can be done, new interpretations can be offered. So we stop at this point today and we continue with these readings. in subsequent sessions thank you for your attention