

Course Name: The Novel and Change

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Lecture 40

R. K. Narayan's The Guide - Part 7

So, hi and welcome to this NPTEL course titled The Novel and Change. We will continue looking at R.K. Narayan's novel The Guide. So, we just take off from where we left last time, where we are looking at how ancient texts such as Natya Shastra, for instance, are used in the novel in order to supply and offer new interpretations which may be connected closely to contemporary conditions and how, again, looking back at the ancient texts, can also find a way to come up with ideas which can connect with the market, the more performative open market where the emergence of the capital through commodity formations are taking place which is why ancient dance forms and also the whole idea of spirituality are also getting commodified increasingly. And we keep mentioning how this novel was written at a time where the cult of the guru, the teacher, the spiritual seer was getting massive in western countries, not least in America when Narayan was, incidentally when he happened to write this novel. So we will just continue from that point and this is why Rosie is talking about how she can pick up ideas from Natya Shastra, the old, you know, sort of scripture about the principles of the science, the principles of education and how she can use that to picking up new ideas from there, to use those ideas, to reinterpret those ideas, to offer new methods. So, Rosie's study of the Nati Shastra may suggest an attempt to learn the conventions of an ancient form of dance which, if simply copied in a mimetic way, would preclude creative reinterpretation.

In fact, though she turns to classical writing on the subject as a source on which she can pick up so many ideas for new compositions, this is very much in keeping with the spirit of Bharat's treatise. The Natyashastra outlines a theory of rasas. So rasas roughly translate

to humours and different kinds of creative fluids through which creativity can be done. A theory of rasas of taste which though developed primarily in relation to drama and dance has implications for all artistic genres and stresses the relationship between the artist's taste and food consumption. So, it's a very interesting text those of you who read it which talks about food consumption, artistic production in a very fluid way. So the relationship between let's say proclivity, what you are inclined to do and what you end up producing. So proclivity and productivity, so all these things get connected in Nati Shastra in very organic ways and it was chiefly, primarily a treatise on drama and dance you know where We have this very methodical, theoretical way to talk about theatre and different modes of performance and production. As H. L. Seneviratne observes, the treaty sees the process of aesthetic creation as analogous to the consumption of food and how so? Just as the rasa of food or the taste or the flavor of food is in a sense derived from cooking, the gross material of the ingested food by the action of the digestive fires, the rasa of aesthetics is a fine immersion. born of the transformation of gross and mundane experience by the multistage and extractive and distillative deliberation involving anubhava and extensions of a stimulative process by suggestion, suggestive behavior, such as glances and body movements. Vibhava refers to the external stimulus and bevashara bhava which is an instance of ancillary or transient immersion, the joy in love, right. You can see how this triangulation of Anubhava, Vibhava and Bhavacharabhava, so all these come together. But the important thing over here is it is almost a culinary process through which entire emotional transformations take place.

So, there is a sense of how the raw gets cooked, how the raw product gets transformed into some kind of a final creative product and that is a complex process of transformation. That is defined and detonated in the Natashastra. That is the text that Rosie is drawing on, but at the same time she is trying to contemporanize it depending on the demands of the market of the times. So, Narayan would no doubt have balked at seeing this kind of aesthetic theorizing applied to his work, but the guide is centrally concerned with the performative aspects of identity and an awareness of this helps to pinpoint the particular quality of Rosie's dedication to performative arts, right. So, the whole idea of performative becomes important, so it is also important that we study the transitions taking place over here.

Though she is less of a chameleon than Raju, she too seems to undergo a transformation in her identity. In this case, from denigrated public woman to respected classical dancer. Now, it's important for us to pause over here and see how this transition from denigrated fallen woman, the sort of the temple dancer to a respectable celebrity is taking place in a changing economy of moral values, in a changing economy of financial values. So, we can see how the financial economy, the moral economy are sort of colluding with each other to create or promote certain kinds of performances, certain kind of identities. So, the shame-quotient or the inglorious quotient about the temple dancer narrative is beginning to give way to a more not as acceptable but also celebrated version of this kind of a persona.

And this is happening because of a devotion to older methods and her capacity to restage these in new ways. So again the reconsolidation here is important, the reconstruction here is important because what she is doing at a very very functional or performative level is she is drawing on the older treatises, the older methods, the older theories but she is obviously re-situating them in the modern theatre, quite literally the modern performance plays. Like Narayan's fiction, which transports ancient myths and beliefs into particular contemporary situations, Rosie's performances as a dancer open up the possibility of a reenactment of classical modes. So you can see how Rosie becomes a bit of an insect figure for what Narayan is trying to do because if you look at Narayan's body of work, you find that there are multiple examples of how ancient myths, Indian myths are reused, rehashed to fit into contemporary conditions. They are given new kinds of symbolic significance, new kinds of allegorical significance and similar things were happening with Rosie as well, where performances become both a reenactment of older classical traditions but at the same time it is also an attempt to fit into the demands of the contemporary market. So, the reenactment of classical myths which transforms gross and mundane experiences. Seen like this, then her career as a dancer provides a loose parallel with Raju's perceived metamorphosis into a sadhu which is the last in the series of roles that he occupies. So Raju of course is quite performative. We find that he when he was a child, when he was a boy he is known as a railway Raju because he could perform stories, he could perform different kinds of directions although he probably didn't know some of the directions some of the

times but that didn't really stop him from performing. But that just keeps getting extended till it becomes a sadhu in the end.

So, again we have this sense of performed spirituality. But at this point the caveat that Narayan might balk at such a reading should perhaps be remembered, since the episodes dealing with Rosy's rise to fame also contain satirical observations on the contemporary commercialization of Bharat's Natyam as the greatest art business today. A theme that Narayan also developed in his story Musical Commerce. So again it is a very interesting story Musical Commerce. You should read it if you have not. But the theme there is again something similar how the ancient art forms, ancient theoretical, philosophical forms are giving in to the greed of the market, giving in to the sort of performative, compulsive performativity of the new market, of the new nation that is India. Right, so the dance motive also has resonance in relation to the work of the third member in the guide's eternal triangle, Rosie's husband Marco. So, as I mentioned, Marco is an allusion to the first traveller from the West in that sense because Marco is also an embodiment of that gaze, you know, looking at the fossilized dead past and trying to document it without reactivating him. The couple seems to be on the edge of a reconciliation when he discovers a fresco of dance notations dating from around the 5th century. At this point, Rosie's enthusiasm for Marco's find suggests a degree of convergence between their interests. However, Marco, resistant to any suggestion that the classical and the contemporary may be related, quickly rejects this branding Rosie's dancing as street acrobatics and not art. I just want to pause here a little bit and discuss the gender angle over here because while both Rosie and Marco they are delving or engaging with ancient traditions, Marco's is more heritage, more archaeological and that somehow seems to be more respectable and more masculine in quality you know masculine respectability being obviously comparable with each other. Whereas Rosie's performance which is that of dance form is very quickly and conveniently dismissed. as street acrobatics, as lower forms of art, you know not really art, as some kind of a you know trickery, a puppet show, right which is not seen as you know for reasons best known to Marco not as high art, right. So that just again the gender you know quality is interesting over here because obviously dance in this particular case, Rosie's case is heavily gendered, it is a female who is dancing.

So that is somehow seen as not good enough to be qualified as art. So he remains sceptical about her artistry whereas the trickster Raju has a vision to see her dancing as pure abstraction. So Raju of course has ability for abstraction and the trickster narrative of Raju, the trickster mind of Raju which is also minds prone to fabulation, embellishment, storytelling somehow manages to in a way algorithmize herself and look at Rosie's dance form as a great work of abstraction. And of course, Raju will push her even further subsequently and you know make her into the celebrity that she becomes. initially evinces a clear preference for a vitality over what he says is Marco's sterility and of course the very fact that they are a childless couple is also an interesting point because Marco of course is you know the sense of sterility attached associated with Marco and the fact that he is childless, the couple is childless is also a case in point metaphorically speaking, symbolically speaking. Subsequently, Raju's estimate of Marco's work is less dismissive. Having initially seen him as a copyist, and it would seem having little regard for this particular branch of paleography, Raju later becomes more sympathetic to Marco's view that his discoveries would be responsible for the rewriting of history. Marco's claim may be inflated, but it is partly endorsed when his work on the cave paintings appears in a beautifully produced monograph titled the cultural history of South India and was hailed in the press as an epoch-making discovery in Indian cultural history. So, Marco is very much the academic writing a book, the researcher writing a book and in the end he does write a book called The Cultural History of South India which is seen as a monumental work of research, epoch-making discovery. As with Raju and Rosie, his excavation of an ancient Tamil mud opens up the possibility of transforming present experience true performative interaction with the classical past.

So, the past and the present come together in very vital organic and a performative-interactive methods and not just as dualism. So and that's the other thing that Narayan's story does very well as a piece of fiction. It really deconstructs dualisms and tells us how these categories ancient and new, the past and the present not really dissimilar or as dissimilar as it would seem at the beginning. it is no coincidence that the frescoes he finds contain what Raju calls abstract verse about some theories of an ancient musical system,

since it suggests an affinity between his project and Rosie's study of the Natya Shastra. So, the musicality of the frescoes is interesting because that connects Marco's discovery with Rosie's discovery, the textual discovery of Nati Shastra. So, whereas Marco's is more of a bricks and mortar stone discovery, Rose's is more of a textual discovery and of course that extends into the performative tradition that she espouses. Beyond this it is possible to read these passages as relating to Narayan's foray into ancient Sanskrit and Tamil law which becomes markedly more evident in this period of his career. So despite this engagement with, so in Narayan's writing we find that there is this reference, a constant attempt to plug into the older Tamil lords, the folklore, the folktale traditions, the mythical traditions but to contemporize it using Indian writing in English. Despite its engagement with the classical past, the guide does not delve very deeply into the realms of Hindu mythology, a field that had already provided a coda for Mr. Sampath and a reference point for several other elements in the earlier novels, such as Savitri Motive and The Dark Room. One critic has argued that a myth of Shiva and the Ganges, though not explicit, is a prototype underlying the story of a sinner saint. and developed this by seeing Rosie as playing the part of Parvati to Raju's Shiva. Certainly, as always in Narayan, the Ganges is the archetypal river underlying the general reference for riversides that pervades his fiction. of Narayan's fictional landscapes is very, very important because the rivers give fluidity, the rivers have ancientness and the rivers also flow with energy. So, there is ancientness as well as energy in rivers.

There is kinesis in rivers and that gives Narayan the perfect metaphor to sort of map his stories which is sometimes about the ancient past but also flowing and very actively, very energetically into the lived present, right. And so, rivers become an important symbol. So, particularly in scenes set around the banks of Malgudi's Sarayu and so this suggestion seems very plausible. Yet, assuming one accepts it, mythic correspondences are only latent in the guide. So, there are mythic correspondences, there are mythic allusions but not quite as much as in Narayan's other fiction. So, for instance, Maneater of Malgudi has more myths, mythical allusions than the guide does. So, in guide it remains latent to a large degree. In Narayan's next novel, The Maneater of Mount Gudi, there is no such reticence about the use of ancient legends. So, it is there, the old Asura legend, the one who touches

himself and, you know, basically destroys himself by, you know, doing a forbidden act, etc. So, all these mythical stories are retold in *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. The mythic infrastructure of the story is made explicit and here the man-eater is every bit as ambivalent in its use of classical analogues. While it is more covertly mythical than *The Guide*, it is also a novel in which social comedy flourishes, and although in one sense the coexistence of such comedy and Hindu fable legitimises Naipaul's two readings on Narayan's fiction, the seamless way in which the overlap argues against seeing them as in any way opposed. So this is something that keep on saying and you know it is important for us to understand how the ancient and the new are not opposed to each other, right. So they sort of blend into each other and that is why the river metaphor becomes important because the rivers can bend and blend, the rivers can shape and reshape, the rivers can adjust, there is a plasticity about rivers, there is ancientness about rivers, there is an origin story about rivers but at the same time the rivers flow into the future, flow forward in time and space. So that is an important metaphor for Narayan to espouse.

The Guide is a picaresque novel. The picaresque novel is of course related to the picaresque. There is a rogue character but at the same time in this story the rogue character attempts to become someone better. *The Guide* is a picaresque novel in both of the most commonly used sense of the term. Raju is at least initially a rogue hero and the novel employs a picaresque structure particularly in the sections where it follows these excursions around Malgudi and the surrounding area as a tourist guide and is later travels as Rosie's manager all over South India, with Cape Cameron at the one end or the border of Bombay at the other and from coast to coast. So, Bombay, of course, here being the newly emerging site of entertainment. And if I let it go to Bombay, it also means that they are obviously acquiring a pan-Indian status of popularity, scale of popularity. Familiar Narayan sites do reappear. His father's shop, where Raju works in his youth, is at the seminal Malgudi location of the railway station. His period in jail is reminiscent of Sri Ram's imprisonment in waiting for the Mahatma. The temple where he lives during his sadhu phase evokes the temples in a dark room and waiting for the Mahatma. Once he leaves his father's shop, Raju travels into less enclosed spaces, depart from the dominant pattern of the middle beta novels, in which the orderly life of a small businessman is disturbed by the advent of

outside forces. In some ways, the broader geographical coordinates of the guide make it similar to *Waiting for the Mahatma*. But the contrast between the conversation of conservative Malgudi, as represented by Kabir Street in the earlier novel, and the heterotopias which challenge caste orthodoxies is, despite the impinging of Rosie's background, less marked now. An important thing over here is the heterotopia, the many spaces as it were.

So, there is this idyllic, sleepy, conservative Malgudi and there is this heterotopic city spaces, right, but they are not really mapped so differently as earlier and there is a sense of blending in of the two spaces. So there is a brief return to Narayan's drawing of demarcation lines between the established center of Malgudi and the more modern areas of the town. While during the period of Rosie's career as a dancer, the couple moved into a stylish house at New Extension. Now this is important, the New Extension being a new neighborhood where elegant, posh, money people live. So, we can see how there's a sense of know gentrification happening in Indian cities at this point of time where they more well they get to live together in a small space and enclosure which has got more facilities. So, the gentrification narrative is part of the capitalist industry around building right. So, the construction industry is kicking in in a big way and this you know emergence of the construction industry is obviously connected to other forms of industrialization including in this particular case that of performing arts. So, where the couple move to a stylish house at new extension, while Raju's mother is evicted from the family home. So, again very symbolically Raju's mother has to leave the family home, the old ancestral home. That's sort of the end of one world order as it were and the beginning of a new world order and both the world orders are represented by domestic spaces, very different domestic spaces.

However, ancestral continuity plays a less significant role here and the place where Railway Raju comes most, seems most at home, the station is after all as a main point of entry and exit for the town, a transitional site. So, the physical and cultural geography of the guide distinguishes it from the majority of Narayan's earlier novels. where the protagonists often feel the other space begins just a few blocks away from their home. So, we stop at this point today, but it is interesting to see how the physical and cultural

geography are blending together, right, where there is a sense of other space which is quite close to what the subjects inhabited. The sense of self and other is beginning to dissolve, right. So, the self is always in a very problematic proximity to the other which is why you find even in terms of moral balances the saint and the sinner are very problematically close to each other where the seer and the cheater are problematically proximate to each other, right. How the ancient texts and the performative prosthetic performance are again in very close connection to each other. So the same sense of speciality, the same sense of closeness and juxtaposition is there in the special politics and guide as well, where we see how people or spaces are both pristine, hygienic, ancestral, old world patriarchy but at the same time they are also connected in different ways to other world orders which can create and when you say other there is both the possibility of promise as well as precarity. So, the risk can come from the other, there is a danger or a threat which can come from other. So, among other things this you know the entire market economy in the guide, the entire vocabulary in the guide, the entire economy of values in the guide is both aspirational and precarious.

So, it is something which is episodic in quality, like the railway towns, census space and time where people come and go, tourists come and go. The sort of liminality about the space, if you will, is a bit of a no space. It is a heterotopia as well as a no space where no one really lives in the station as it were. People just come and go episodically. But we find with the creation of what is called super modernity. These no spaces become more and more frequent. We have these elevators, these escalators, the railroad platforms, the bus stations. So, all these liminal territories where people wait to go to somewhere else, all right and that that sense of liminality is very much there in the guide. So, what we see in the entire novel and we just end reading this point for the session is how this is very complex and reflective of a changing India where these liminal spaces, these aspirational spaces, these anxious spaces all connected together in very very complex asymmetric ways. So this new movement towards a new you know energy economy or economy energy is not not exclusive because it also sort of brings together its own set of anxieties, its own set of you know aporias if you will, its own sense of vulnerability and of course what happens in guide is that you know while Raju starts making a lot of money, a time comes when he gives into greed and that giving into greed by forging the signature of Rosie is the beginning

of his downfall right. So, there are these ancient elements of hubris and hamatia, error and judgment, all that is there, but at the same time all that is located and situated in a very modern landscape, a very modern moral landscape, where there is a lot of greyness, where there is no character in the guide which can be seen as either fully black or fully white, but there is this moral ambivalence, this sort of spiritual ambivalence with which the story really, you know, foregrounds itself.

And nowhere is this ambivalence more dramatically or spectacularly represented than the end of the story, where Raju looks at the sky, tells Velan that he can feel the rain coming up his feet. And then he collapses by sagging down. So, we saw in the last class and a couple of classes ago where this contains the child imagery as well as the seer imagery and how this degree of infantilization he has to be carried like a baby at the same time the sense of you know spirituality that he seems to be acquiring we do not quite know if it actually acquires or not. And the fact that Narayan chooses to bring back the third person narration at the end is also an important narrative decision because he wants to leave it suspended in time. So the last image we have is Raju falling at his feet. with the announcement that he can feel the rains coming up his feet and again we don't have a conclusive evidence about this and this inconclusive ending of guide is very appropriate given that how ancientness and newness how you know intimacy and hostility how the old world order and the new world order how the heterotopia and the ancient side, they all connected in this very very interestingly changing moral, physical, financial economy which is modern India, the newly emerging nation state of India which still carries you know lot of interesting features and components from his ancient you know civilizational past. So, there is this mythicity, historicity, materiality, performativity. So all these come together in the guide which makes it such a wonderful novel really and such a complexly written novel to study social changes, cultural changes, moral changes really. and how the same tradition, the same performance, the same text can be reinterpreted in so many different ways corresponding to all these different landscapes of morality, economics, culture, politics and so on. So, we will stop at this point today and we will continue with another reading in the subsequent sessions. Thank you for your attention.