

“R K Narayan’s Guide: A Comparative Perspective on the Film and the Novel”

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Abstract

R K Narayan as a supreme ironist who exposes the absurdities of our situation with his gentle humour. The only criteria on which we can assess R K Narayan’s works is his simplicity. Most of his novels are not admired for the action or plot but for the gentle irony and comic touch. It is an open ended novel where nothing is ever revealed. If you think it is right, it will be so. So what does happen? Does Raju die? Does it rain after all? Has the mask become so overpowering, that it takes over Raju’s real character and establishes it as the truth? What indeed does happen?

Guide is an unsung classic of Hindi cinema, starring major Bollywood star Dev Anand. It's a beautifully-produced modern love story and focuses on what happens when a tourist guide takes up with an ex-dancer who has been abandoned by her archaeologist husband and then guides her career as she becomes a musical star.

Full Paper:

“R K Narayan’s Guide: A Comparative Perspective on the Film and the Novel”

There is a common view of R K Narayan as a supreme ironist who exposes the absurdities of our situation with his gentle humour. Noted critic M. K. Naik wrote a whole book celebrating Narayan's ironic vision. Indeed, most readers, especially Western ones, notice and admire Narayan's exaggerated portrayal of Indian characters. His language and style are oriented towards this exaggeration. He does not resort to the serious sermon like prose style like all other contemporary Indian writers. We rarely find a serious discourse in his works. We get a simple communicative English in his novels. The only thing that makes his noteworthy is his comic muse. It deals with ordinary or less than ordinary people.

The only criteria on which we can assess R K Narayan's works is his simplicity. Most of his novels are not admired for the action or plot but for the gentle irony and comic touch. Graham Greene and William Walsh appreciated works on these grounds. This paper deals with the comparison of his novel *The Guide* with the film adaptation of the novel.

Technically, *The Guide* is an advance on the earlier novels: the present and the past are cunningly jumbled to produce an impression of suspense and anticipation. We begin with Raju's release from prison and Velan's recognition of a 'Swami' in him. The earlier history of Raju is supposed to be related by him to Velan much later, when the fast is in progress.

The zig-zag narration gives a piquancy to the novel without quite confusing the reader. We are enabled to see the action as Raju sees it, and as the later Raju Sober, sees the earlier Raju Drunk. Raju lacks the sheer exuberance and vitality of Narayan's other characters. Marco is also only a two dimensional figure, rather than a character. Rosie is a reader's predicament. Various elements are quite strangely mixed in her. She remains dusky rather than bright, being seen through the film of a lover's muddled infatuation. After all the alarms and excursions, all the excitement and

suspense, all the regrets and examination, Raju realizes that “neither Marco nor I had any place in her life, which had its own sustaining vitality and which she herself had underestimated all along.” Rosie’s own summing up is masterly. “I felt all along you were not doing right things. This is Karma. What can we do?” There is thus no failure of nemesis in *The Guide*.

Raju is doubtless half knave, half fool and he remains such when he allows himself to be mistaken for a Swami, a spiritual Guide, by the simple people of Mangala. Some days later, he is trapped into commencing his fast; a change comes over him: He fasts, and he prays, and he enjoys this experience. He is now – at last – dead to his old self, he is like one reborn. Some are born saints, some achieve sanctity and some have sanctity thrust upon them. Perhaps Raju is one of these last. Narayan’s irony, skill in characterization or his ease in telling a story can be absorbed even by a lay person. However, the most interesting and intriguing part of the novel is the ending.

It is an open ended novel where nothing is ever revealed. If you think it is right, it will be so. So what does happen? Does Raju die? Does it rain after all? Has the mask become so overpowering, that it takes over Raju’s real character and establishes it as the truth? What indeed does happen? I am no optimist and can enjoy Narayan’s dark irony as he traces the making of a Mahatma in this novel. However, I like to believe that Raju’s was a case where the physical guide indeed became a spiritual guide, a Swami. Just as in the case of Girish Karnad’s *The Fire and The Rain*, here too, the mask has taken over the character. But it is not just a passive taking over. In Raju’s case, the character has acquired the mask and become one with it. Raju’s salvation lies in his courage to accept all his follies and repent for them.

I personally never found Raju as immoral because in the initial part, Rosie's status as a wife is so pitiful that I almost wanted Raju and Rosie to fall in love. Hence I don't see Raju's downfall as a punishment for his immorality. Raju's tragedy was that he could never say no. He just accepted all that was thrust upon him and thus played different roles. Hence he became a shop owner, a tourist guide and later on an agent to Nalini alias Rosie's dance performance. However, not taking a decision is a decision in itself and indeed, if Raju couldn't say no, also means that he wanted to say no.

The ending is perhaps the most tricky. If I say that I believe in Raju's transformation from a swindler to a saint, I will be accused of being too naïve. If I don't agree with it, I will be labeled as an atheist. And I am neither, so I will leave the interpretation of Raju's character to the reader. But I would like to believe that Raju never died. In fact, with a flair for drama, I believe that it rained just when Raju fell down, thus assuring the world of Raju's sacrifice and salvation.

"Yes, it did rain. I hope it rained. You know as well as I do, that the world needs rains like this, rains that reinstate your faith in human potentials and the mercy of the supernatural. It had to rain. There is no doubt about it. It did rain, after all"

"Guide" the Film:

Guide is an unsung classic of Hindi cinema, starring major Bollywood star Dev Anand. It's a beautifully-produced modern love story and focuses on what happens when a tourist guide takes up with an ex-dancer who has been abandoned by her archaeologist husband and then guides her career as she becomes a musical star. It has much in common with classic Hollywood romantic musicals in the way it seamlessly incorporates songs and musical numbers into the action and charts the success of its female star. It adds to this rags-to-riches show biz story some characteristic

Indian twists which give it greater scope and deeper meaning.

Based on a novel the film stars Anand as Raju, a glib, well-liked freelance tour guide who takes visitors, Indian and foreign, to historic sites around Delhi and tells them stories--some true, some embellished--about these magnificent places. When Raju takes Rosy (Waheeda Rehman), the ex-dancer, under his wing it causes a rift between him and his mother, friends and co-workers, so he leaves with Rosy and helps her to embark on a career as a singing and dancing performer.

However, as Rosy achieves stardom, Raju falls into bad habits, palling around with the money men, drinking and gambling heavily. Eventually, he is arrested for forging a check and is sent to jail. When he gets out he starts life anew and wanders alone far and wide before winding up in a remote desert village where, thanks to the endless stream of pearls of wisdom he dispenses, he is taken as a holy man.

In the midst of a terrible drought, he is compelled to embark on a fast so as not to disappoint the villagers who believe his fast will bring rain. All the while, Rosy and his mother are searching for him.

The story is not told in quite this order. We first see Raju as he is getting out of jail and we first see Rosy as she begins her search for him. The story then unfolds in flashbacks from both his and Rosy's perspectives. If there is any flaw in the narrative structure, it is that the exploits of Raju in his reign as holy man, or "swami," are given short shrift while the love story tends to bog down during the lovers' disillusion and drift apart. We needed to see more of Raju's life in the remote village. Given that the film is only 170 minutes (rather short for a Bollywood film),

another half-hour of storytelling would not have hurt.

Still, it is an accomplished work, boasting all the class, elegance and artistry of a classic Hollywood or European drama and few of the notable excesses of Bollywood films. It maintains a discreet cinematic distance that keeps the emotions in check while adding richer layers. There are songs and dances, but not too many, and they are all beautifully shot and staged, particularly the lavish, lengthy sequence showing Rosy's rise to stardom as a stage performer. The two leads, Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman, are both genuine movie stars in the classic sense and carry the film as well as any of their counterparts in other cinemas. Rehman, for one, has a presence which clearly recalls such Italian actresses as Sophia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida. For those who are new to Bollywood, this film is a useful way to explore the roots of the Bollywood musicals that are finally attracting serious attention among film fans in the U.S.

"Guide" is by far the best movie ever made. The credit of the success of the movie goes as much to Vijay Anand and Dev Anand as to the writer. We must not forget S.D Burman Da 's music. This is a thought provoking movie. It has the power to arouse the sub-conscious ethical senses. All the new directors have to learn a lot from this movie. Movie making is not just copying Hollywood. You can proudly say that Guide is a Hindi movie.... made in India. The concept of guide was far ahead to the contemporary movie making. It was made not only for that generation but for generations yet to come, just with enough impact to change lives..

In India, this movie is considered a textbook for directing films. I would say it's a textbook for acting, editing, song-writing, and music direction. If Vijay Anand's direction made this movie a classic, S.D. Burman's music made it unforgettable.

Of course, before the movie came R.K. Narayan's story of Raju, the guide; a story that lent its honesty to the film: The protagonist is not infallible, he is human. He doesn't get everything right. He is not loved by everybody. He cheats, albeit in love, and pays the price. He attempts to cheat again when he tries to run away from the village where he is being considered a saint and is being expected to fast for rain. That's when he realizes he has run enough attains peace.

Let us look at some of the more obvious aspects of the movie. Only the genius of S.D. Burman could create "Din Dhal Jaaye", "Tere Mere Sapne", and "Piya Tose Naina Laage Re" - all for the same film! It is rumored that R.D. Burman ghost-composed some of the songs (especially "Aaj Phir Jeene Ki") as his father had taken ill at some critical point in the film. Regardless of which Burman did it, I am thankful for what he did. Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman are very good actors. With this movie, Dev Anand silenced his critics. His acting, especially in the last part of the movie, is heart-wrenching. The movie entertains the audience by taking them through a wide gamut of emotions, it stimulates them spiritually and philosophically (Indian faith vis-à-vis western Existentialism are discretely referred in the movie). Even technically it is a good movie.

Each scene seems to be individually composed and you can see the effort that director Vijay Anand and his crew have put in. Raju speaks to us in one of the scenes "there is not much difference between me and you". And as he speaks this you see the statue of Krishna in the background and Raju's index finger stretched as if holding a Sudarshan Chakra. Subtle things like these that impress the audience can be understood only by watching the movie. The name "Guide" itself conveys a different meaning at different times in the movie; a railway guide, a

personal guide and then a spiritual guide.

It is very sad that a brilliant director like Vijay Anand could never come out of the shadows of Navketan and despite giving us some of the most important and influential movies of our times he did not get much attention by the mass movie goers in India. People in the West respect their classics and make an effort that Billy Wilder, Hitchcock, Orson Welles, Chaplin etc. are not forgotten. New directors openly admit how much they have been influenced by these people. But in India, what is not on MTV is not worth remembering. In another 10 years no one will remember Vijay Anand.

Guide is an impeccable work of art, and it is not simply a movie. The audience sees it as a lifetime achievement for all those who were a part of it. Vijay Anand who was popularly called Goldie(movie director),shows his class and commitment to prove himself even when the English version of the movie directed by Ted Danielewski failed earlier. It was a just a five minute song that Yash Johar (PRO for production) showed to the distributors before they were convinced that the movie is a classic.The photography,art direction and production of the movie sets it apart from other movies of its era and at the same time puts it right up there on a different level.

“Guide” is the soul of Indian Cinema and serves as an inspiration to many. This movie is the answer to the critics of Dev Anand For who doubted his talent and originality. Anand(Raju), this is the answer. Waheeda Rehman(Rosie) has herself confessed that Guide was the best ever role that she performed. S D Burman's heart rendering music and Vijay Anand's vision have made this a landmark accomplishment for Indian Cinema.

This film featuring Dev Anand in the title role is a film with a philosophical bend so well blended with the storyline that you may very well miss it if you are not a good cinema reader... this film is a story about a young charismatic guide who earns his living by guiding art lovers through the ancient relics of Ajanta and Elora-a very ancient cave sculpture site. He falls in love for a very talented but uncared wife of a sculpture researcher who suddenly on his visit to this relics stumbles upon a priceless discovery of very ancient cave sculpture..his passion for his work and the consequent neglect of his wife sets the stage of a accidental love between the guide and the young and beautiful wife aptly portrayed by the charming Waheeda Rehman.This love is a result of the appreciation and recognition of the potential of the talented wife who has a penchant for dance and music...The saga unfolds and leads to the lady becoming a famous dancer thanks to the management of the guide who is now totally in love with the dancer....The husband repents and tries to woo his wife back and dedicates the original manuscript of his work on the cave sculptures to her and the guide...also he sends her the royalty earned from his work...the charmed lover the guide in order that the wife may not return to her husband...endorses the check on her behalf by forging the signature...so that she does not know about the change of heart of her husband...this lands him in soup and he is arrested on charges of forgery...she refuses to bail him out just because he had acted wrongly...the story takes a philosophical turn and the happy go lucky guide wanders off after the jail sentence..the wife does love the guide and waits for him but he goes away disenchanted with his life...he reaches a desolate village and with his knowledge and wit finds himself as a guide of the ignorant people..they put full faith in him and turn to him in any crisis...but then the village faces a famine and they ask him for rain.....that is not in his control but the villagers have faith..they ask him to go on a fast to woo the god...he pleads but the faith of the villagers forces him to take a fast..not eat anything or drink anything till it rains...he sets the stage

for his death...but he knows he is a farce and does not want to die...then comes the struggle between his conscience and his outer self...this is the best part of the film and this is what makes it a classic.....tears flow in my eyes and there is rain.....but the man dies...the guide guides himself to glory..from powerlessness to strength...from life to death.....see it to love it.....

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