



# guide

*The Film: Perspectives*

Lata Jagtiani & Other Writers

Introduction by Manek Premchand



# *Guide*

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Manek Premchand



BLUE PENCIL

First published by Blue Pencil 2019

**BLUE PENCIL**

A Venture of Wisitech InfoSolutions Pvt Ltd

76/2, 3rd Floor, East of Kailash, New Delhi - 110065

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www.bluepencilpublishers.com

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ISBN: 978-81-939555-2-9

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## INTRODUCTION

# **The Story of a Tourist Guide Turned Dance Impresario Turned Swami**

**Manek Premchand**

**P**erhaps no Indian book written in the 20th century has been discussed or written about more than RK Narayan's *The Guide*. The author wrote it in three months while he was in the USA in 1957, staying in a 75\$-a-month room at Hotel Carlton near the University of Berkeley in California. India's prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award was given to this author for that book in 1960, which was the very first year the award was given for a novel in English. The story and its narrative have galvanised scholars, spiritual leaders and ordinary folks in large numbers, enough for many to marshal their thoughts and offer them to wide audiences across the world. Particularly striking among these thinkers have been academicians, who have attempted to examine the many extraordinary facets of this fascinating book, a literary gem that is set in a fictional small town featuring realistic and complex human beings.

The book was made into an extraordinary film called *Guide*, and not many doubt that it was this film that, in turn, catapulted the beautiful book into a higher orbit. The reference here is to the Hindi version of the film. An English language version was made too, with substantially the same cast and crew, but that one failed

to inspire, principally because of its uninspired direction by Tad Danielewski, an American of Polish origin. Additionally, since this latter version had English dialogues, it was a challenge for many Indians who tried to connect its awkward narration with their culture. On the sins-of-omissions side, while the music composer was SD Burman in both cases, there were no songs in the English version, barring the music of a snake dance and the background score. So that film is best left alone. Of interest to us here is the Hindi *Guide*, which became a critical and commercial hit and has remained a remarkable discussion point in the annals of Hindi cinema and its music. To one's amazement, this version was screened for the first time at the Cannes Film Festival as late as in 2007, a good 42 years after its initial release! This film too, like the book it was based on, has inspired thousands of thinkers—both from cinema as also from outside—to write about it. That fever refuses to come down since every now and then, some or the other curator visits this film to offer his take and spark our interest again.

In the light of such indulgence, it is interesting to consider that while so many minds came together to make the great movie *Guide*, and so many minds have written about the film, perhaps no book has featured many minds coming on one platform to offer a collaborative effort on the subject. The book you are reading is the first to bring the thoughts and feelings of many gifted thinkers to analyse this great film in its multifaceted brilliance, with each writer looking essentially at a different facet of this work of art. Inevitably, there will be overlaps here and there, in the songs, in the dialogues, the story and direction etc. That is because even in the actual filmmaking the different elements are not completely discrete. For instance, how a scene is to be shot has inputs from both the director and cinematographer, with the final call left to the director of course.

At a simplistic level, such a coming together may be compared to the apocryphal story of an elephant and six blindfolded men, each man allowed to feel the animal for a while, and then each coming away with a different version of what it was that he had touched, like a snake, the trunk of a tree, etc. But such a view arrives with a moral: that a perspective of this kind is more about our own limited view, that the others have a view as well, which could be different from ours. There is a larger message too: we see the truth better when a subject is considered from a multitude of perspectives.

At a complex level, we can compare this book's effort to when we have issues with our anatomy. For, consider when we have a chronic problem with our vocal cords, we must see an ENT specialist, not a dentist; the latter will fix our teeth and gums instead. A chiropractor may be the doctor we need to see if we have persistent back or neck pain. These are different specialisations, all part of a complex whole.

Cinema is like that too. It is a collaborative art form in which many different specialisations come together. These include cinematography, lighting, art direction, lyrics, dialogues, music, the script and screenplay, sound, acting, costumes and so much more. Now, if the artistes who came together to create a given work were alive and enthused enough to talk to us, they could have told us what happened during the creative process, what their brief was, and how they went about crafting collective excellence. In the absence of such original artistes, we can do the next best thing: invite other people who have had decades of observing a specific field of art, and urge them to curate that part of the tapestry for us. That's what has happened in this unique book. We are attempting to look at many different aspects of the film *Guide* as seen through specialists' eyes.

I am fortunate to have known all the contributors of this

omnibus for several years and am delighted to be a part of this journey. I have met these people and seen some of their other work. I hope that, like me, you will find plenty of merit in their narratives. In fact you too may have thoughts about this film or views about our specific prisms—after all, here too the contributors could in a sense be like those blindfolded men mentioned above. Please do write to any of us. The email address of each contributor is mentioned at the end of their story, as is a brief introduction to each writer.

Soon, I will share with you an extraordinary story I read about the music of *Guide* way back in 1974. That read transfixed me for

weeks and has become a part of my strong memories, so much so that even today I remain spellbound by what I recall reading. That read impacted



*Piya tose naina laage re*

me doubly, because earlier, as a boy, I had the good fortune to see a song from *Guide* being filmed. I had been taken to Mehboob Studio in Bandra, Bombay by two older cousins. But did I say song? It was, in fact, just the better part of one stanza of a song, recording which took all of 5 hours, but sadly, today I have no memories of whether that stanza was finally okayed. The stanza

was *Raat ko jab chaand chamke*, from *Piya tose naina laage re*, mimed by a dancing Waheeda and other ladies. I was too young to know who was sitting on that huge overhead crane which kept amazing us with its graceful movements to capture the scene on celluloid. I was also too young to consider how complex this medium was, something I realised years later; after all, it had taken a whole day to capture on film just 45 seconds of a song! However, I was old enough to develop a crush on Waheeda, sitting between breaks just 10 feet from me.

But before the extraordinary story that I read, a bit about the film's story itself, its characters and setting, and its celebrated author who wrote this tale of a charming tourist guide turned dance impresario transformed into a spiritual *guru*.

A key technique used in the film is of a frame narrative, which is when an important character in a film, play or book tells a story, and this becomes a story within a story. Here Raju (Dev Anand) in his *swami avatar* narrates his story to Bhola, a simple villager, and also Rosie/Nalini (Waheeda Rehman) narrates her own story to Raju's mother, enacted by Leela Chitnis. Through several backward-forward visuals too we learn the essential story of Raju, a tourist guide born and reared somewhere in the northern parts of India, falling in love with Rosie, a married woman, promoting her as a danseuse, and as a consequence of forging a signature, being sent to jail at Udaipur, from where we see him released when the film opens. We see in flashback how into his life enters Marco (Kishore Sahu), an archaeologist desperate to find undiscovered ruins, so that he himself may be discovered by the world at large. Just so that his home is taken care of, this male chauvinist has married a much younger girl named Rosie, mentioned above. This lady loves to dance, but coming from a family of *devadasis* (girls dedicated to worshipping God through song and dance), has no hope of pursuing her passion

unless people's attention is diverted from her being a *devadasi's* daughter to being the wife of a man of wealth and status. Clearly then, it is a marriage of convenience for both parties. As we soon get to see, it is, in fact, a marriage of irreconcilable differences, exemplified by her passion for Bharat Natyam, and his resentment towards the dance. This point could hardly have been dramatised more than in the scene showing Rosie's feet dancing to the rhythms of the tabla, while a minute later Marco uses his own foot to kick that very instrument viciously. Such differences are not lost on the charming Raju, who offers her empathy and encourages her to do something about her passion for dance. The climate is thus ripe for Raju and Rosie to fall in love with each other, a condition cemented by his wanting to help her become a great dancer; he intends to take charge and manage her affairs. So she leaves her husband and starts living her passion, over time becoming a very successful singing-dancer now called Nalini. But, after a while, we see them drifting apart, with Raju getting attached to wealth and powerful connections, while she remains grouted to her art. We observe him fixated on the idea of making money while the going is good, even if he is losing his focus, getting into gambling, mixing with the wrong kind of people, and becoming fond of the bottle around the same time. As for Nalini, she herself has lost her fire and has begun to do some soul-searching on what her relationship with Raju is based on these days. Certainly, romance has left the premises, so there's no question of any intimacy anymore.

During this phase of fragile dynamics between these two, Raju is informed that Marco wants to close the vestigial bank account he has jointly with his wife, but the bank has in its custody their jewellery worth about Rs 25,000-30,000 that can only be released and sent to her—as directed by Marco—if she too signs a letter of closure. Raju is told that after she signs, the jewellery

will be despatched to her. Raju is already aware of the fact that he and Nalini have grown significantly apart. He also knows that Marco may be a more relaxed and likeable person these days, now that his book on the ruins has been published. Nalini too, with so many professional appearances and fame in her kitty, seems done and dusted with her passion for dance. Fearing that there may be a rapprochement between the husband and wife, Raju wants to keep them apart at all costs. Thus he forges her signature for the release of the jewels. He considers that he will somehow find a way to give her the gems when they come.

### **Time for a Musical Break**

Meanwhile, things have touched a new low between Rosie and Raju, and this point is best reflected in a song, just one of the 10 remarkable songs that make up the full album of this movie, each a wonderful work of class and each injected so seamlessly into the narrative. Shailendra wrote all the songs in this film, SD Burman composed all the tunes, and in the maestro's studios, we found Mohammad Rafi, Lata Mangeshkar, Kishore Kumar, Manna Dey, and himself as a singer. The point at which we have paused for this musical break offers a remarkable Rafi rendering that starts with an *alaap* feather-touched by a vibraphone. It goes on to be backed by the euphonious employment of a tabla, a sitar, a mandolin and flute. A little later, it's the turn of the Spanish guitar and an ensemble of violins. In the 3rd and final interlude we hear a bongo with a charming saxophone, completing the story of a song that can best be called ineffable:

*Din dhal jaaye haaye raat na jaaye*

*Tu to na aaye teri yaad sataaye...*

Shailendra's words, Rafi's vocals, Dada Burman's judicious use



*Din dhal jaaye...*

of instruments, all these have been funnelled to craft a wonderful composition. Even cinematically, this is an unforgettable moment from Hindi cinema. It's a rainy night, and we see Raju recalling, through the camera of Fali Mistry, the dual role that the rains have come to play in his life, happy at an earlier time, and oh-so-painful today:

*Aisi hi rimjhim, aisi phuhaaren aisi hi thi barsaat  
Khud se juda aur jag se paraaye, hum dono the saath  
Phir se wo saawan ab kyun na aaye?  
Din dhal jaaye...*

Sadly, Raju's misguided forgery is discovered, and earlier if it was over between the two as lovers, it is now curtains between them as professional partners. He ends up in jail. After his release, he wants to forget the past and start life afresh, so he walks away from his town as if he wants to escape from both

his hearth and past as far as possible. He trudges day and night, through changing seasons. He soldiers across towns and villages, over hills and a river. We find him resting under a tree and lying under a bench in a park, only to ride on the back of a bus, dangerously clutching the rungs of its ladder. And as we see him get away from it all, we hear *Dada* Burman's voice in the background in the song *Wahaan kaun hai tera, Musafir, jayega kahaan?* In fact, Raju's entire journey across seasons and places is encapsulated during the journey of the song itself. This is a clear case of cinematic excellence, Raju's mind constantly engaged with the words of this song as he attempts to uncouple from his past. This excellence is augmented by the fact that the nomad can hardly sing his feelings himself since he is grieving and worn out. But his *mind* cannot be too tired to feel these thoughts, so Vijay Anand sets up the song in such a way that it appears as if an invisible, higher force asks Raju where he is headed and what the rush is about, hence the advice: *Dum le le ghadi bhar*, take it easy for a while.

During this odyssey, as he adds distance between himself and his familiar abode, Raju's clothes and body slip into visible decline.

### **Clothes Make the Man**

*Vestis virum facit* is an old Latin phrase that means clothes make the man. Clearly, the impact of making a good impression by way of what one wore was not lost on great classical writers. But beyond making a good impression, it is also true that clothes help us identify different professions, regions, and cultures around the world. In our narrative, the homeless and rudderless ex-convict, unshaven and unkempt after weeks of wear and tear, already has the look of a *swami*'s frugal simplicity in place. One

day he is asleep on the narrow terrace of a derelict temple when a holy man passing by spots him and covers him protectively with a saffron shawl. It is this act of kindness that accidentally helps build for Raju the incipient image of a *sadhu* because it is with this saffron shawl draped around his shoulder that he is discovered sleeping the next morning. Bhola, the villager who discovers Raju thus is impressed with this visitor's easy wisdom and charisma and is convinced the man is an elevated soul. Such an early impact is easily possible, because, as RK Narayan says about Raju in the book, "He could not open his lips without provoking admiration". It helps Bhola's belief further the next day when his half-sister, stubbornly resisting the idea of marriage till then, is convinced by Raju to tie the knot, an effort that takes him just a few seconds. The delighted Bhola gifts the discovered *swami* a pair of *khadau*—wooden slippers that have been associated with holy men right from Vedic times. With that accessory, Raju's *swami* look gets a greater endorsement. From this point on, the herd mentality takes over, with the entire village of Rampuri joining Bhola in the belief that this is a godman. Some are born as saints, some achieve sainthood, but in rare cases, some have sainthood thrust upon them. The last is what has happened here.

Time flies and all is fine in the village till a drought occurs, with no water in the village. At this point Raju is urged to go on a fast, something the villagers believe will bring down the rains, because when a holy man fasts, God listens more. It is this part of the movie, where the reluctant *swami* initially wants to run away from such a harsh test but later embraces it—if only so that he does not let thousands of villagers down—that elevates this film into a divine experience. At this point, the director splits the hero into two conflicting roles in a brief face-off. "*Zindagi pighal kar prakash ban gayi aur sachchai mera roop hai...tan rahe*

*na rahe, main rahoonga*” says the newly liberated *swami* to his mortal counterpart, who wants to live. Continues the realised soul, “*Tum ahankar ho. Tumko marna hoga. Main atma hoon. Amar hoon...Na sukh hai na dukh hai, na deen hai na duniya, na insaan na Bhagwan. Sirf main, main, main, main*”. In the end, the rains come as the transformed man departs from the world. It’s synchronised beautifully and filmed sensationally.

While the story of the novel *The Guide* was written by RK Narayan, the screenplay and dialogues of the film *Guide* were



*Sirf main, main, main, main*

written by Vijay Anand, who also directed the feature. This film has a run time of 2 hours and 50 minutes and was released on 6 February 1965. After a slow start, it became a hit and immediately an answer to critics who considered Dev Anand just a glamorous, stylised star, and not a gifted actor. However, the success of this film did not silence RK Narayan, who was unhappy with the treatment in both the versions. Even two years after the films’

release, in May 1967, he wrote an article entitled “How a Famous Novel became an Infamous Movie” for *Life* magazine.

Many liberties have been taken in the film, making them significant departures from the book, even if that just has to happen, the two mediums being so different from each other. Among other things, the novel leaves the reader guessing as to what happens to Raju at the end of the story. Does he die or not? Does it rain either, or not? This ending was endorsed by the celebrated author Graham Greene, who was Narayan’s friend, and whose opinion the latter requested, before sending his manuscript to the publisher. In the film, however, the rains come and Raju dies, the only significant film Dev Anand’s character died in during his entire career; he did die in a feature or two much after his prime was behind him, like *Anand Aur Anand* (1984), where he synchronously introduced his son Suneil Anand in a film that lacked any mentionable merits.

There are other liberties taken in the film, some of which may have peeved RK Narayan no end: the film’s setting is not a fictional village called Malgudi, supposedly near the Madras-Mysore border in the south, but some unnamed place in the country’s Hindi belt. Raju spends his term in jail in Udaipur, Rajasthan, not in the south of India. After his exit, the ex-convict lands up in a village called Rampuri, not in Mangal, as mentioned in the book. The key villager who ‘discovers’ Raju as a *swami* is not named Velan, he is called Bhola. When Velan, unable to convince his half-sister to get married, brings her to the *swami*, Raju speaks to her from afar; in the movie, Raju puts an arm around Bhola’s half-sister and advises her *sotto voce*. In the book, Marco arrives at Malgudi first, his wife Rosie many afternoons later. In the film, both of them detrain together. In the book, RK Narayan writes about Raju: “His beard now caressed his chest, his hair covered his back, and around his neck, he wore a necklace of prayer-

beads”. We don’t see any of these three to be the case in the film.

Writes Trisha Gupta in “60 Years of RK Narayan’s *The Guide*: A tale ahead of its time” (*Hindustan Times*, 28 October 2018): The book’s Rosie is full of plans; Raju need only support them. But Vijay Anand’s film, keenly aware of his conservative audience, turns his Rosie into a bundle of nerves who tries three times to commit suicide, only to be saved each time by Raju, and berated: “*Tumhaari haalat aaj yeh is liye hai ki tumne apni haalat se baghavat karna nahi seekha*”.

There are many more changes, but that area is really beyond the pale of our exercise here, so we must stay essentially with the Hindi film and look at it, finally, as a standalone work of art.

Now about the 1974 story I mentioned earlier. As many of us know, Navketan was started in 1949, and it celebrated its silver jubilee in 1974. In one of the issues of *Screen* magazine (the film weekly was a broadsheet in those days) that year, there was a full-page story dedicated to Navketan, the people behind the banner, the films they made, the composers who they worked with, and other cast and crew. It examined their trials and successes and so on. In the middle of this page was a boxed story that was dedicated to the music-making of the film *Guide*. I was not able to find that story when I turned into an author many years later, nor can I locate it today. So I cannot back this story up. But some photographic images affect you so much, they cling to your heart forever. I do remember reading the story a few times over that week, getting misty-eyed and then mentally filing it away for whatever it was worth later. The story had an interview with composer RD Burman, who spoke to *Screen* about when the film was being made. His father SD Burman had a heart attack after just one song had been recorded for the film (I don’t remember reading which song that was). The senior Burman was rushed to a hospital and while they worked on him for him to be ok,

he was advised complete rest for at least 4 months, maybe more if needed. By complete rest they meant no rehearsals or music sittings too, forget actual recordings.

As you know, those were the days of music being a key to the success of films. And you also know that a song is recorded first, and then it is filmed. I'm sure you know too that 4 months is a very long time to rest a composer; producers are always in a rush in an industry that keeps looking at the clock. Such a delay can be very costly for a producer.

In this story on *Guide*, RD Burman went on to say that when his father was taken into Breach Candy Hospital, filmmaker Dev Anand was in the USA in talks with Pearl Buck and Tad Danielewski. He rushed back to India and was driven straight to the hospital, where *Dada* Burman was confined. After a few days, the senior composer advised Dev Anand that since he himself would not be able to work at least 4 months, Dev should take someone else to do the job. "No, *Dada*. No way!" replied the producer. "Okay Dev, if you insist, and are worried about me, take Pancham. He is good too." "*Dada*, Pancham is very good, don't I know that? One day I will work with him too. But this film has you in my mind. Only you, *Dada*." "*Arre* but Dev, what is this obstinacy? What if something should happen to me?" "*Dada* nothing will happen to you. You will be fine soon, and we will shoot the non-song scenes meantime. But if you want an answer, God forbid if something should happen to you, we will go release the film with just that one song." (This was the essential exchange. As I mentioned earlier, I am depending entirely on my recall here).

*Dada* recovered, of course, and went on to craft excellence in all the songs of this film. He lived 10 more years, making astonishing tunes till the end of his life, something very rare in filmdom. That's his story as we see it. But this narrative also spoke

volumes about Dev Anand, the producer of *Guide*, acting out of conviction, addressing the situation from a position of a man centred in his thoughts, no different from the centred *swami* that he played when his transformation was complete.

You wonder where Hindi cinema would be without the music of *Guide*. Where would we be too? Certainly not here, sharing our thoughts on this remarkable film. The movie was great on many fronts, but many of us cannot imagine its greatness without its music. But my mind is open. I do believe that Raju was finally fit to be raised to sainthood, never mind his past. In the same way, I am open to considering *Guide* is a great film even without its music. But for that, I'll need a film *swami* who is centred enough to advance a strong argument to convince me that *Guide* was a great film even without its music.



Manek Premchand was born in Delhi but substantially raised in Mumbai, where he lives. He has authored several books and anchored hundreds of music shows and events. He has also written hundreds of music-related articles for a variety of newspapers. Besides these he has sometimes been featured on television and has been a radio host across platforms, including on WorldSpace Satellite Radio. He is also a Faculty at Xavier's College, Mumbai.

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## Guide: A Perspective

Lata Jagtiani

*“Few understand the power of thought. If a man goes into a cave, shuts himself in, and thinks one really great thought and dies, that thought will penetrate the walls of that cave, vibrate through space, and, at last, permeate the whole human race.”*

*–Swami Vivekananda*

The effort to deconstruct a colossus like *Guide* is so daunting that, at first, one fears to begin, and then, having started, one doesn't quite know where to end. A task of this magnitude is a worthy challenge for followers of Hindi cinema. It is not only curiosity that is driving people to solve the complexity of *Guide*; it is the fact that the film gains in respect with time and also that the film promises to become the biggest classic the Hindi film industry has ever created. To understand this epic film, a few of us have contributed our perspectives in this compilation.

*Guide* resembles Madhubala: she was so beautiful that she continues to inspire many to write about her. They wax eloquent: an admirer may think her beauty lies in her perfect nose, another, in her laughter, a third, in her eyes, a fourth, in her smile, and so on. So much has been written about her, yet none succeeds in capturing her mystique. Likewise, all studies, no matter how diligent and honest, fail to capture that special quality of this Navketan classic: it allures and fascinates, but it persists in remaining enigmatic. The mystery grows, and so do the analysts who find themselves

spurred on to greater efforts to find what makes *Guide* tick. This study, too, stands in the long line of those brave studies; it is yet another effort to hold a moonbeam in one's hands.

Of course, because *Guide* is a multilayered film, it is the perfect treasure hunt for students of cinema. Like a perfect tease, it seduces us; we go forward, but it slips away just when we thought we had it in our grip. Hypnotised by it, we return to it just as the hypnotised Raju returns to Rosie. Raju couldn't have enough of Rosie, and, we, of course, still can't have enough of *Guide*.

The 3-hour Hindi *Guide*, shot in colour in Udaipur and Bombay's Mehboob Studio, was released on February 6, 1965. Initially, after its release, it stunned audiences: they resisted it. In his autobiography, *Romancing with Life*, Dev Anand wrote, "The initial reaction on their faces was that of numbness...There wasn't a scene in the film in which the audiences clapped, the film left them stunned. Could it be that the film was an utter flop? This time there were no calls...it was as if all our telephones were dead...The results at the box office were mixed to start with. Soon *Guide* started being talked about as no other film was. As times passed, people found more and more meaning in it, and enjoyed seeing it again and again...it was declared an all-time classic, for all ages and eras. The film became a legend."

In 1966, *Filmfare* gave the film seven awards, the most significant being the Best Story award to author RK Narayan. The other awards were for Best Film, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Director, Best Dialogue, and Best Cinematography. RK Narayan was no stranger to awards: in fact in 1960 he had received the Sahitya Akademi Award for this very novel. Dev Anand was no stranger to the award either: he, too, in 1958, had received the Best Actor award for *Kala Pani*. Suffice it to say, both the movie and the book conquered the nation, each one a brilliant classic

in its own field.

In an interview to *Hindustan Times* on September 26, 2008, Dev Anand remarked about the Cannes Film Festival: “Last May my *Guide* was screened in the ‘Classics’ section, 42 years after its release! I was overwhelmed by the response from a largely European audience. And to think that back in the 1960s, I was dissuaded from making the film because Raju was not a hero in the true sense.”

### **The Origins of the Novel *The Guide***

Let’s take a step back and find out how RK Narayan got the inspiration for this novel which produced not one but two classics, one in literature and the other in cinema.

In his autobiography, *My Days*, RK Narayan wrote that sometime around 1956 or 1957 he had been musing over the subject of a new novel, “about someone suffering enforced sainthood.” At that time he was living in his hometown Mysore where there was a drought; even the huge Krishnaraj Sagar reservoir nearby had dried up. On that dry water bed, the townsmen discovered an ancient temple. Nearby were corpses of dehydrated crocodiles, an ominous sign that they were heading for a famine. The municipal corporation resorted to rituals and prayers, while a group of *sadhus* stood praying on the dry bed of the river Kaveri. They participated in a ritual that required them to stand submerged knee-high in water. The *sadhus* stood thus, fasting and chanting mantras for eleven days and nights and, finally, to the people’s joy and relief, on the twelfth day the rains came. The fear of famine vanished. The writer in RK Narayan was intrigued by these events and stored them at the back of his mind.

He also added in his autobiography that in 1957, when he

was in New York, he met a very efficient American tourist guide; RK Narayan described him as “witty, smart, familiar, factual.” He remarked that the guide’s “smooth speech was more picturesque than the sights he was showing, conjuring up history and archaeology out of thin air.” Raju’s character was taking shape in his mind.

RK Narayan travelled to Berkeley in California, where he rented a room in Carlton Hotel and wrote the novel at a furious pace, completing it in three months. The novel consisted of 11 chapters, containing 80,000 words. Once done, while travelling back by train to New York, he read, for the first time, the manuscript of his novel. In his book, *My Dateless Diary*, RK Narayan wrote that the landscape flew past him but he remained glued to the novel: “Still I am quite absorbed in *The Guide*, I realise with a great deal of relief, for the first time, that it does not bore. The industrial area, for one, doesn’t interest me, for another I find Raju’s career more inviting.” This was characteristic of the modest novelist who downplayed the brilliance of his creation. He quietly patted himself on the back.

In a 1996 interview to *Frontline* magazine, he observed, “You become a writer by writing. It is yoga.” The humble RK Narayan never quite realised that he was an alchemist of words; how else could the base metal of his words turn to golden fiction? Yet, in spite of his vivid imagination, even he couldn’t have imagined that his creation would become a classic twice over, once in print and then on celluloid.

### **RK Narayan’s Novel *The Guide***

RK Narayan’s novel *The Guide* is the story of a young man called Raju, a school dropout from a fictional small town called Malgudi. As an extrovert he loved the outdoors, so when he grew

up, he became a tourist guide. Raju observed, “It is written on the brow of some that they shall not be left alone. I am one such.” Popular with everyone, especially tourists, Raju’s reputation spread. He was both a fascinating talker and a great listener. He was deeply interested in people and adapted himself to them. Tourists loved him because he even went so far as to advise them on their personal problems.

But all this was to change one day.



Raju, Marco and Rosie

“My troubles would not have started but for Rosie,” Raju observed. An archaeologist named Marco arrived by train and immediately sought Raju out; Marco was in search of hidden caves and treasures, and Rosie was his wife, a *devadasi* who loved dancing.

As soon as Raju’s eyes fell on Rosie, he was captivated. He took turns: he guided Marco to an archaeological site, and then he took

Rosie, at her request, to see a snake charmer. When he saw Rosie move like a dancer to the snake charmer's tune, Raju instinctively felt that she was "the greatest dancer of the century." He was bowled over. After this, he detested her husband Marco even more.

Rosie's character in the novel was quite different from Vijay Anand's Rosie in the Hindi version of the film. In their conference paper, *RK Narayan's The Guide: An Emergence from Diffidence to Assertiveness*, Jeya Santhi and Dr R Selvam observed, "Narayan's new woman is bold, self-reliant and assertive. She struggles for freedom, asserts equality and searches for identity."

Rosie's discovery, her passion for dance, coincided with Marco's excavation and discovery of the caves; on his part, Raju, too, discovered his complete obsession with Rosie. He gave up his mother who rejected his extramarital relationship with Rosie whom she referred to as "the snake woman," then he gave up his shop by the railway station, fought with his friends and got into debt. In short, his familiar world collapsed but he was happy because he had Rosie.

All three in the love triangle were passionate and obsessed, yet it would be Raju who would truly go through a lot of suffering before he could escape the love triangle. Marco and Rosie intensely loved their work, but not so much their partners. Rosie, unlike Raju and Marco, was a woman in a man's world. Her journey resembled that of most Indian women who attempt to navigate their way forward, flirting sometimes with Eastern traditions and, at other times, with Western values.

Marco abandoned Rosie; Raju gave up being the town guide. He became Rosie's promoter and manager. Rosie's career took off and, sadly, in direct proportion to it, so did her contempt for Raju. Consequently, their incompatibility intensified and, with it, so did his insecurity. He didn't want her to have groups of friends which excluded him but she refused to drop them. On her part,

she disliked his friends and his drinking and gambling. Worse, she was repulsed by his physical advances. The self-confident Raju changed; he became jealous and fragile. Even when he was gentle with her, she made him feel inadequate. But what made matters even more difficult was his realisation about Rosie: “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 had regained her sense of self-worth. The neglectful Marco had failed to squash her life-force when he had attempted to limit her to the role of a homemaker; she had escaped it when Marco had abandoned her. But once Raju came into her life, she wanted to spread her wings wider; she was not content merely to be a dancer and his lover, the only two roles he wanted her to play. However hard he tried, he failed to restrict her. In his possessive way, he sparked a desire in her to escape the routine, to shape her own identity and destiny.

From the egg, larva and pupa stages, Rosie had emancipated to become a dazzling butterfly. Both men had failed to control her, blinded as they had been by their narrow visions which saw what they wanted, and not what she wanted. It was thanks to Raju that she had evolved, yet neither Raju nor Rosie could have anticipated how her success would change them. Raju went from bad to worse while Rosie went from strength to strength. The butterfly had outgrown the glass jar of relationships: it was ready to escape and fly away at the first chance it could get.

It was this escaping that Raju tried to stop when things soured between them. When Marco sent Raju a copy of his freshly published book in which he had dedicated a section to him, Raju, terrified of losing Rosie, hid the book from her. Later, he received a bank document which required Rosie’s signature for the release of her jewellery from her joint account with her

husband. Afraid that he might lose her to Marco because of this generous gesture, Raju forged her signature, thinking he would find a way to sort out what he thought was a minor transgression on his part. Sadly for him, he got arrested and was awarded a two-year jail sentence. On her part, once Rosie discovered Raju's forgery, she abandoned him. She chose not to see his forgery for what it was: his desperate attempt to cling on to her; instead, she chose to see him as a gold-digging mercenary who had been caught red-handed.

His mother left him because of Rosie and now Rosie rejected him because of the forgery. In the novel, neither of them returned to Raju once they left him. Once in jail, Raju enjoyed himself. He was his charming and popular self. He even remarked to someone later, "It is not a bad place, friendly people there, but I hate being awakened every morning at five."

After his release, Raju didn't want to head home to ignominy, so he wandered around, till one day he was mistaken for a *sadhu* by a simple and trusting villager called Velan. The villager shared his troubles with Raju addressing him as "*swami*" and Raju, whose natural charisma and glib wisdom made him a different kind of guide, helped him and also the other villagers of Mangal navigate their lives out of their troubles. Soon, his circle of followers widened, people from nearby villages began to attend his 'discourses' and hung on to his every word and every silence. At first, he resisted the loss of freedom that his being a *swami* entailed, but in time, he succumbed to the simple love and affection of the villagers. He had found a home with Velan and the other villagers, and he obediently played the role that destiny or Velan had designed for him. After all, he had nowhere to go, and nobody was expecting him anywhere. Like it or not, he was now a *swami*.

Then, after some time, there was a drought. On the dry water

bed, a temple was discovered, crocodiles died of thirst and famine seemed nigh. Raju, the fake *sadhu*, was now expected to fast for twelve days in line with the Devaka story his mother had told him and which he, in turn, had narrated to the villagers. It was a story about a holy man's fast for rains. RK Narayan's reluctant holy man finally found himself starving to honour the faith and trust the villagers had reposed in him.

This was very hard on Raju, but there was an awakening within him as a result of the enforced fast. He began to introspect and ask himself, "If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?" At that juncture RK Narayan observed that Raju was undergoing a transformation, "For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort; for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him a new strength to go through with the ordeal." People from all over India came to do *darshan* of the holy man who was sacrificing himself for them. Crowds gathered and Mangal became a tourist destination. But the holy man was dying; the doctors feared his blood pressure and kidneys were failing, even as the man himself was refusing all nourishment, including glucose and saline. He was determined: under no circumstances would he break his fast.

The novel ended mysteriously with Raju opening his eyes, looking around and saying to Velan, "Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it come under my feet, up my legs—" And RK Narayan ended the book with three words, "He sagged down."

This is the enigmatic and ambiguous ending: did the rains come or not? Did Raju die or not? Did the novel end with hope or despair? The answers remain, till date, a mystery.

## Enter Dev Anand!

In his autobiography, *Romancing with Life*, Dev Anand mentions that in 1962, after having showcased *Hum Dono* at the Berlin Film Festival, he was in London for a few days. It was there that a friend recommended the novel *The Guide* to him. He obtained the novel and began reading it. He was so captivated by the story that he exclaimed, “I read it at one go, sitting on the balcony of my suite which overlooked Hyde Park.”

Too excited for words, Dev Anand decided to film *The Guide* simultaneously in English and Hindi. He flew to New York (it was his first visit to USA), roped in the Nobel Prize winner Pearl S. Buck and director Tad Danielewski to write and direct the English version respectively, and then he flew to India to meet RK Narayan, the author of the novel.

RK Narayan described their meeting in his home-town Mysore, in his write-up ‘*Misguided Guide*’ which was published in

*Life* magazine and which later became part of the compilation of essays in his book *The Writerly Life*: “A small group of autograph-



Dev Anand in *The Guide* (English)

hunters had gathered at the gate of my home in Yadavagiri. Dev expertly eluded the inquisitive crowd, and we were soon closeted in the dining-room, breakfasting on *idli*, *dosai*, etc... Within an hour we had become so friendly that he could ask without embarrassment, ‘What price will you demand for your

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