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Traits of Mysticism in *The Guide*

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Abstract

Mysticism is the union with or absorption into the Deity or the absolute, or the spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect. It may be attained through contemplation and self-surrender. It is also realized as an active and passive process. Mysticism is also described as a faculty and tendency that is instinctive and inherent to all persons. It leads the individual towards knowledge, love, meaning, serenity, hope, transcendence, wellness and wholeness. Mysticism is one's character or quality that makes one rise above and go beyond the barriers of worldliness, caste, creed and sensuality and become conscious of one's union with the Truth. The present paper aims to explore the traits of mysticism in R.K. Narayan's novel *The Guide*

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At the very outset it must be conceded that the title may cause eyebrows to raised and vehement objections may issue forth against the use of such terms of 'mysticism', since R. K. Narayana's work do not clearly exhibit nor expostulate meaning of the word. Thus it is necessary to consider the term 'mysticism', before any consideration can take place. On the whole mysticism encompasses a realm of experience at once autonomous which does not lend itself to compatibility with the more traditional religious beliefs and practices. The mystic is a rare soul his life is elevated above dogmas and communities. Actually when the mystic is in presence of the absolute, the self is no longer identified or categorized as a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian, male or female. The difficulty which the mystic faces is poignant when he descends from his elevated plane, in order to explain the mystic experience he takes recourse to tradition, history etc. Consequently the one becomes many and this Absolute is personified and transformed into Allah, Krishna, Rama etc. This is the generally

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widespread and commonly accepted views. However it would not be incorrect to see the mystic and his experience as just an 'Experience' arrived at without adopting any prescribed system and thus separate mysticism from the more philosophical-theological environment, so that it becomes a purely non-relational, unmediated, sort of human experience. Actually to put it on another way enlightenment can be gained without subscribing or adhering to any particular dogma.

Now in the light of this point of view, and as it has been correctly pointed out that R. K. Narayan's success lies in the fact that he fails to be involved, "achievement depends on his capacity to remain uninvolved" (*Twice Born Fiction*, 100). Apart from this Indian- English writing from the outset has always advanced (and advocated) the theme of renunciation. Meenakshi Mukherjee aptly remarks, "Renunciation has always been an Indian ideal of life, be it renunciation or worldly goods and possession, or the renunciation of selfish motives, passion and emotional bondage" (*Twice Born Fiction*, 100). R. K. Narayan did not remain untouched by this ideal either in fact he was greatly interested in it in his own way, as he was steeped in both the great epics the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as other Indian myth and legends. He deliberated on his learning formed his own vision of renunciation- a renunciation which came close to mysticism devoid of any adherence to any dogmatic principles and beliefs.

In *The Guide*, the protagonist Raju is the hero, a normal person with more than normal appetite for lucky and money, not to mention physical love. Raju is never given religious beliefs nor has he any inclination towards religion. He is happy-go-lucky for person, who chances upon a treasure inform of Rosie (later Nalini) and no matter what may happen he will not release this treasure. He is a possessive person with all the normal traits of jealous lover, as well as a demand of gratitudinal return from Nalini for having played the king make for her. Gradually Raju is confected of forger and ends up in jail. When he is released after two years, he does not return to Nalini, rather he breaks his bond with past life and we find him being confronted by Velan, by a river, sitting on a high rock, looking very grave and philosophical and uttering mystifying sentences to the awe of the simple minded Velan and the villages. Raju is not a mystic-for that matter he is far from being a true Sadhu. He has assumed the guise of a holy manor rather has it thrust upon him, so that he may fill his

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stomach without hard work and complete his life in peace. He went in and lit a lamp. He was hungry.

They had left him food wrapped in a banana leaf on the pedestal of the old stone image. Raju was filled with gratitude and prayed that Velan might never come to the stage of thinking that he was too good for food and that he subsisted on atoms from the air” (The Guide, 23). Through ironically this is what exactly happens later on. However the fake gradually beings in the Absolute, though he has not experienced it yet.

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 love, for the time he was doing a thing he was not; personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him a new strength to go through with the ordeal. The fourth day of his fast found him quite sprightly. He went down the river stood facing upstream with his eyes shut, and repeated the litany. It was set in a certain rhythmic chant, which killed his senses and awareness, so that as he went on saying it over and over again the world around become blank. (*The Guide*, 23)

At this point Raju is undergoing a mystic ‘experience’. This particular feeling of blankness can be achieved by Yogic prescription, but again this experience can also be achieved without it, and more so by devotion to a particular concept, ideal or anything. But this devotion has to arise from the very depths of the soul and leads to an inner contemplative experience “through the contemplative experience may be blank, a kind of cloud of unknowing, it is only blank. For one thing it is a blank in context of feelings and a kind of exalted serenity and the context too of the whole search, e.g. the search for God the return to God, the path of nirvana and so on. It has, that is, an emotional context and in the broadcast senses a conceptual context” (*Mysticism and Religious*, 119).

By blankness the person acquires a number of meta-physical qualities, “by its transcendence of distractions and appetites beyond ordinary feeling whether positive or negative, and by being so serene, has its own kind of bliss....Not the bliss of supreme conjugal love; nor the bliss of supreme conjugal love; nor the bliss of heady worldly achievement; but the rupture of great music or great painting.... But rather it is the bliss of a kind unshakable consciousness, because there is no ‘because’ (*Mysticism and Religious*, 119). Thus we see that what Narayan is driving at is that Raju although he had been selfish and

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given to worldly pleasures and carnal love, he has received his punishment. Now he is more repentant it is done consciously, rather the reproaches of his soul places him in such a situation where he suffers greatly, two instances; first, when Raju, the swami, is forced into a vow of fasting for rain he feels the pangs of an innocent person being indicated for theft, “people all the time watching and staring, lynx-eyed, as if he were a thief...Lying on his mat, he brooded. He felt sick of the whole thing when the assembly was at its thickest could he not stand up on a high pedestal and cry “Get out, all of you, leave me alone, I am not the man to save you. No power on the earth can save you if you are doomed. Why do you better me with all this fasting and austerity?” (*The Guide*, 235).

Here Raju is tormented in his soul but at least, he recognize not only himself but also the Universe, Man at large. Does not Raju echo Hamlet’s dilemma and Dr. Faustus anguished soliloquy at the end of the play? The anguish and doubts are presented without commentary as it would have lost its impact. It is in moments like these that Raju ‘the hypocrite the false’ is elevated to the heights of great tragic heroes, facing the boundary situation where he must make a decision, either to go forward or retreat. If (and as Raju does) he crosses the boundary he finds himself not only knocking at the door of mysticism but also setting the wheels of tragedy in greater motion.

Secondly we see that his suffering due to hunger though physical, assumes a metaphysical significance; “He banged down the aluminium vessel in irritation and went back to his mat. What if the vessel did get shattered?” (*The Guide*, 236). it was not going to be any use. What was the point of pampering an empty vessel? When he was seated, Velan asked respectfully, ‘What was that noise, master?’

The last line is Raju’s comment on himself it may be read as sarcasm as well as a bitter confession of a truth that he has now come to know. In its microcosmic light the lines may be taken to mean that Raju is far from having any macrocosmic experience, certainly that is true, he has not come near any macrocosmic experience but all this is preparation for the Ultimate Experience; The Ultimate Truth. All this is being prepared sub-consciously, otherwise why did not Raju declare that he was a fake, it would not have amounted to much or even better he could just do a vanishing trick, the moment the proposal of fasting came his way. Yet he goes through it all- why? Can a fake really do all this? The answer can only be in the negative but at the same time one realizes that a transformation is taking place, Raju is

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washing away the ‘bad images of his life and coming closer to an understanding of the universe which is at once unworldly. Therefore “It is thus not in appropriate to interpret this sublime and superior indifference as a kind of transcendence of ordinary concerns, a rising therefore above what is worldly. Thus it is valuable on a kind on super scale, beyond ordinary computation of satisfaction and dissatisfaction” (*Mysticism and Religious*, 127).

Thus we notice that Raju through dilemma’s and doubts, suffering, wastes away his outer life- the life he has already lived and now he was attaining the experience of beyond – a blessed enjoyment. “This enjoyment is something Velan cannot take away from me” (*The Guide*, 238). further in Malone’s question Raju states that “I am only doing what I have to do that’s all, my likes and dislikes do not count.... Again when he is asked “Have you always been a yogi?” “Yes, more or less?” (*The Guide*, 243).

What Raju is stating is that he has been a Karma Yogi doing what was demanded of him without any force thoughts about the results, and now ultimately he experiences the Ultimate Reality and as such is rewarded with the rain which he feels is “Coming up under my feet, up my legs” (*The Guide*, 247).

Therefore we note that Narayan achieves mysticism- a mysticism which “is not an explosion from the subliminal state, as James say but the overflow of super conscious love into the heart of man. In moments of spiritual crisis and convention, pangs of remorse are followed by feeling of redemptive assurance” (*Mystics and Mysticism*, 50-51).

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