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## Negotiating Death-Rebirth Archetype In R.K.Narayan's *The Guide*

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**Abstract:** This diligent enquiry has been attempted to show how Raju, the hero of the novel, *The Guide* by R.K.Narayan becomes an archetypal hero with special reference to the death rebirth myth. An archetypal hero is the ideal masculine type who sets in his life with a journey, goes through initiation and finally sacrifices himself to save the land and people. The transformation in the hero's life causes the rebirth or resurrection of the hero. And this paper again focuses on how Northrop Frye's archetypal schema of the seasons aligned with a literary genre such as summer, autumn, winter and spring can be found in the character of Raju.

**Keywords** Archetype, initiation, resurrection, transformation, quest.

An archetypal hero is one who begins his life with his quest, goes through initiation that is separation, transformation and finally returns and sacrifices himself to save his land and people from plague and famine. In the initiation stage that very transformation causes the death and rebirth of the hero. This paper has been attempted to show Raju the guide in *The Guide* by R. K. Narayan as an archetypal hero specially focusing on Raju's quest for identity, Raju's separation from his near and dear ones, Raju's transformation from a fraud to Saint, Raju's return to the locality and finally Raju's sacrifice for the sake of the villagers in Mangal. In short, how Raju becomes an archetypal hero is the center of this paper.



Archetypal literary criticism focuses on recurring myths and archetype in the characters, images, symbols in the literary work. Etymologically the term archetype is derived from the Greek word "arche" that means "beginning" and "typos" that means "imprint". Beginning denotes the character of an early stage in the evolutionary or historical development of something; imprint literary denotes a mark or outline on a surface. Hence, archetype connotes something imprinted from the primitive stage. The works of Canadian literary critic Northop Frye contributes a lot for popularizing archetypal literary criticism in the 1940s and 1950s. Two other academic disciplines of archetypal literary criticism are social anthropology and psychoanalysis. The Scottish anthropologist Sir James George Frazer's work deals with mythology and archetypes focusing particularly on material terms, while the Swiss-born founder of analytical psychology Carl Gustav Jung's work is immaterial in focus.

The Scottish anthropologist Frazer's seminal text on myth *The Golden Bough* focuses mainly on the practices and mythological beliefs shared consistently from primitive religions to modern religions. According to Frazer the death rebirth myth is present in almost in all cultural mythologies and this myth is associated with the growing seasons and vegetation. Frazer cites the death rebirth of the Greek mythology Persephone. According to Greek mythology Persephone once was taken to the Underworld by Hades. Her mother, Demeter was the goddess of the harvest. Being sad Demeter struck the world with fall and winter. In the underworld Persephone ate six of the twelve pomegranate seeds which were given to her by Hades and in consequence of it she was forced to spend half the year in the underworld rest of the year Persephone was allowed to be with Demeter and enjoyed the spring and summer or the rebirth in the death-rebirth myth.

For Northrop Frye, in the death-rebirth myth is not ritualistic as Frazer sees in agriculture and harvest, rather this myth is involuntary and therefore it must be done. In this archetypal schema Frye uses the seasons aligned with a literary genre such as comedy with spring, romance with summer, tragedy with autumn and satire with winter. Summer season in the seasonal calendar is the culmination of life and the romance genre culminates with some



sort of triumph, usually a marriage. Therefore summer or romance indicates the fall or demise of the protagonist. Hence, autumn or tragedy shows the movement towards the defeat of the hero. Winter is bitter and dark and it is known for its darkness, dissolution, the return of chaos and the defeat of the heroic figure. The hero remains absent in this stage. Spring season or comedy is characterized by the birth of the hero, his revival and his resurrection.

An archetypal hero possesses some special traits or characteristics such as (a) the hero leaves family and lives with others (b) hero's traumatic event leads to his quest and the hero's life is changed, (c) the hero has a special weapon, (d) the hero proves himself on his quest, (e) the hero takes a journey and unhealed wound, and finally (f) the hero is rewarded spirituality at the end of his life. According to Joseph Campbell the heroic journey follows ten steps such as - the call, allies, the preparation, guardian of the threshold, crossing the threshold, road of trials, the saving experience, the transformation, the return, sharing the gift. Let Raju guide, the hero of the novel *The Guide* be studied in terms of these characteristics. The hero's quest is known as the call and this call may be a deliberate decision or the hero may have no choice for this call. In the novel *The Guide* Raju sets in a journey with Rosie willingly. Allies are no other than the individuals who assist the hero during his journey. Here Rosie accompanies Raju. Preparation refers to the mental preparation before launching the journey. Raju also becomes psychologically disturbed before initiating his journey as he has to leave his mother. Guardian(s) of the threshold is the obstacle that prevents the hero's journey at the very beginning. These obstacles may be physical barrier or psychological such as fears and doubts. Crossing the threshold refers to the hero's winning over the obstacles. Raju here ultimately overcomes the obstacles and finds a new and unfamiliar world. Road of trials indicates the series of difficult experiences and the hero encounters them with intelligence and determination. Raju here faces bitter experiences and suffers much. The saving experience refers to the special person with whom the hero meets and his life turns. In the novel that very person is Velan. The transformation of the hero may be physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Here transformation is the major theme. The return refers to the rebirth of the hero. Raju comes back and sees the life differently. Finally, sharing the gift is



the gift of experience, knowledge and wisdom that are shared by the hero with the broader community. In *The Guide* Raju sacrifices himself for the sake of the broader community.

In the novel *The Guide* Raju can be studied from an archetypal perspectives following certain characteristics such as quest, initiation and sacrifice.

### Quest

... The quest was for new society but later on, it became a Quest for a new life in the full form to a journey from the Aesthetic, through the ethical, to the religious state. Since The quest motif is well established in literature, its operation Has a well recognised modality. The usual pattern is that The quest begins with a departure from the ordinary, The common and the accepted order. What follows next is a Long and deep retreat inwards, deep into the psyche leading To a chaotic series of encounters. These encounters may be Terrifying to begin with, but lead to a new harmonizing Personality with new courage. In a nutshell, the three fold Myth pattern is separation, initiation and then return. (Bhatia 121)

Quest is simply a journey or an effort in pursuit of a mission. The journey may be physical or psychological. Quest like heroic character is present in the character of Raju, the center character of the novel, *The Guide*. Now, what kind of quest is it? Is it a physical journey or mental journey? What kind of special weapon does he possess during his quest?

In the novel, *The Guide*, the quest motif is studied And interpreted through Raju, who is a central Character. The novel begins and ends with him and the Entire story is mostly a playback of Raju's past life, Raju does not seem to have any specific quest till he is Forced to fast for twelve days, when he comes to realize That his fasting is enormously important to thousands of





Drought-stricken villagers, he resolves to fast in earnest.

It is for the first time in his life that he transcends his

Petty self and begins to think about the lives of others. (Bhatia 121)

The weapon that he possesses during his quest is not a material one rather his gift of gab by dint of which he wins over the obstacles. Another perilous journey and the preliminary adventures can be found in Raju's life:

Raju- Rosie relationship also highlights realization of Raju's quest. It is a stage of "perilous journey" and "the Preliminary adventures". Narayan has used flashback Technique in this novel to highlight Raju-Rosie relationship In different phases. His meeting with Rosie, the artistically Inclined wife of Macro, gives a new turn to his life. Raju Finds in Rosie "a potential bride". From here a sea change Takes place in his life, and we hardly find a connection Between his previous life and life here onwards."(122)

### **Initiation**

The three fold myth pattern is separation, transformation and return. Separation is very important for a hero's quest or journey. In the novel Raju guide becomes separated from his near and dear ones for several times; each and every separation molds his character.

### **Separation**

These three fold myth pattern correlates each other. Separation causes transformation and return is the consequence of transformation. Raju leaves his mother and lives with his beloved Rosie, a married woman. And thus separation leads him to face a perilous journey and the preliminary adventures. He becomes separated from Rosie and this alienation leads him to imprisonment. Being physically and specially emotionally detached from Rosie, Raju feels insecure and commits a serious blunder that results his punishment. And finally he separates from all his near and dear ones during his prison- life.



## Transformation

Transformation is the major theme in the novel, *The Guide*. Raju guide is a dynamic character. Raju starts his journey of life as a shopkeeper. Then he becomes Railway Raju .By dint of his efficiency in speech he acts as Raju guide for the travelers. At the arrival of Rosie the heroine of the novel Raju acts as guide particularly for this couple Rosie and her husband. As time passes Rosie gets separated from her husband and Raju and Rosie live together. Then Raju becomes the guide of Rosie's dancing. As a tour guide and lover, Raju is quite impulsive, unprincipled. When Raju commits forgery he becomes imprisoned. After getting released from imprisonment Raju lives in a village named Mangal. There as a holy man, Raju is careful, thoughtful, and self-disciplined. Raju fails to avoid the unshakeable faith of the villagers and he realizes:

He felt that he had worked himself into a  
Position from which he could not get out.  
He could not betray his surprise. He felt  
That after all the time had come for him  
To be serious - to attach value to his own words. (Narayan 109)

Naturally he feels inclined to fast for their survival. Finally he sacrifices his life for the sake of the villages.

At the very end of the novel Raju utters these words,  
"Velan, it's raining in the hills." This utterance can be  
Interpreted in two ways: it may be the obsession of a  
Half conscious mind, or it may suggest some sort of  
Clairvoyance. It is clear that Raju towards the end  
Of the novel is a transformed person, although the  
Nature of this transformation is not very clear". (Bhatia 121)

## Return

In the archetypal three fold pattern return simply doesn't mean come back, rather it has a connotations of resurrection or rebirth. Like an archetypal hero Raju reappears with a



new identity. Traditionally it is taken for granted that the country people suffer for the sake of the King's blunder. Here the same thing happens with a different manner. Raju commits a blunder and the people of the village suffer but the difference lies in the correlation between Raju and the village. Raju is not the king of the village or native of the village, but unknowingly Raju takes shelter in the village. The archetypal myth occurs when Raju sacrifices himself like the traditional hero in order to save the people. Raju's new life and new identity is no doubt a rebirth or resurrection. Raju is no more a rogue; rather he is a saint.

This resolution gave him a peculiar strength. He  
Developed on those lines: 'If by avoiding food I  
Should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow,  
Why not do it thoroughly? 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. (Narayan 237)

### **Sacrifice**

The word sacrifice is a loaded word. Even during the fasting Raju is not ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of the people. He tries his best to escape but he fails to do so. As it is found:

Each role is assumed as a direct result of Raju's  
Inability to disappoint other people's expectations.  
For example, he becomes a tourist guide as a result  
Of people's constantly asking him for direction; he  
Becomes Rosie's lover almost because of her husband's  
Neglect, and then her business agent when he realizes  
The seriousness of her ambitions ... Velan expects





Guidance of the "holy man" he meets near the  
Shrine and Raju cannot disappoint him. "(Driesen 167)

However, finally he accepts the fact as he confesses "I am only doing what I have to do; that is all. My likes and dislikes do not count". (Narayan, 243). He earnestly tries to save the villagers. Like a saint he is even ready to die. As a "Saviour" he is expected

...to stand in knee deep water to look the  
Skies, and utter the prayer lines for two weeks,  
Completely fasting during the period - and lo  
The rains would come down, provided the man  
Who performed it was a pure soul, was a great soul. (Narayan 109)

Let Raju's archetypal hero like character be studied in terms of Northrop Frye's archetypal schema on season - summer, autumn, winter and spring. Raju's early life is full of summer and romance. Raju is the center of attractions for his parents, friends, travellers and specially for his beloved Rosie. Autumn or the season of fall happens in Raju's life when Raju commits blunder and becomes prisoner. This part in Raju's life is called tragedy. After that winter comes and traditionally in archetypal pattern during this period the hero remains absence. During his imprisonment the hero Raju is not present in the locality. Finally spring comes and Raju returns with new identity. It is Raju's new birth or rebirth. Raju the hero again becomes the center of attractions

King Oedipus, the king of Thebes, possesses the characteristics of the archetypal hero and he can be considered as an archetypal hero. As it is found: "Oedipus ... is a hero who starts his quest, goes through initiation to gain knowledge and at last sacrifices himself to save his land and people from plague and famine" (Anbaran 7). Being a king he can deny punishment, blinding and banishing himself; again he can hold his dynasty but for him his people and fertility of land are much more important than any other thing. In the novel Raju also sacrifices himself for the sake of the villagers as it is said: "... For the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested" (Narayan 238).



Therefore, Raju, the ideal masculine type and the hero of the novel can be considered as an archetypal hero with special reference to the death rebirth myth of the three fold pattern archetype, Joseph Campbell's heroic journey and Northrop Frye's archetypal schema of the seasons aligned with a literary genre such as summer, autumn, winter and spring. Raju's resurrection and spiritual gain is highly archetypal. Though the villagers do not suffer for the sake of Raju's blunder, Raju earnestly tries to save the people. Thus, Raju proves himself to be an archetypal hero with his heroic sacrifice.

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