The Self, the Real and the Reality: A Study of Lacanian Subjectivity in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*

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Abstract: In *The Guide,* R. K. Narayan proves to be a keen and perceptive observer deploying irony and mystery to beguile the reader into an exploration of the protagonists' 'Self'. The whole story may be perceived as a quest for "the Real to attain the Self", and eventually creating one's 'Reality'. If this mystery of self-quest is examined from Lacan's psychoanalytic inspection, some new perspectives can be discovered as 'the Real' is always unattainable; it's a void, a lack. This paper aims at exploring the protagonists of R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*, as the unified Lacanian subject who are shifting their symbols incessantly to fill up the void, and to attain 'the Self'. According to Lacan, attaining one's self is a process that a person goes through in search of his/her real self. In this process a subject crosses three phases that are named by Lacan as 'The Real', 'The Imagery' and 'The Symbolic'. Again in this process of attaining self, Lacan focuses on one's 'desire' to be the driving force that involves the constant search for the Real. As we observe in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*, the protagonists- Raju and Rosie can very adequately be fitted in the chain/process of Self-Real-Reality. Both Raju and Rosie were driven/governed by their desire in search of 'the Real' to attain 'the Self' and created their lives' 'Reality' that presented us a wonderful story of life- *The Guide*.

Keywords: Lacanian subjectivity, imaginary stage, desire, concept of reality, symbolic order.

The Guide gives us a story of mainly the characters with their established social realities, but they are not satisfied with that, in the course of their life, they move to another reality. Raju, Rosie and Marco these are the characters we are to evaluate to identify how they are preceding a journey in search of the real, finding their self and creating their reality. At the beginning of the novel, we find all these characters in a stable social position considering their social context. The novel starts with Raju coming out of the prison and telling his life story before imprisonment. And his life story unfolded

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his peaceful, self-sufficient life in a secure social position living by the shop his father left for him and small family with his mother. And Rosie was also leading a flourishing life with comfort and a respectable social position. She herself chooses this life to come out of her earlier social position (*devadasi*) as it did not provide her an honourable life. That's why R. K. Narayan remarks, "my main concern is with human character- a central character from whose point of view the world is seen and who tries to get over a difficult situation or succumbs to it or fights it in his own setting" (qtd. in Khatri, 2006) who could be considered as Lacan demonstrated the subjects struggle to establish their *self*.

As we can see neither Raju nor Rosie holds the stronger ego or I (Ideal ego) to overpower the unconscious/ the void/the lack/desire. Following the quest for real self, they are governed by their desire; they started building their identity in the cultural world. This desire puts a subject in symbolic order and in a universe full of symbols, objects to satisfy the desire of the subject. But according to Lacan, desire is something that cannot be satisfied fully, because this desire is actually the desire to attain the unified self – that is the real self and get back to the completeness which it (the subject) experienced as an infant when it was not aware of the otherness. In Lacan's topology of subject formation, a subject is only unified while staying in the infant stage that Lacan named as the Real stage. The infant does not have the sense that he/she and their mother has a separate bodies and entities.In fact, the baby is only a kind of blob with no sense of individual identity or self. In this stage it's driven by only its needs and needs can be satisfied by objects. As an infant, the baby takes its mother who satisfies its needs as a part of its own body. But at age of 6-18 months the baby comes to identify its own body separated from their mother's body. Thus, the baby enters to Imaginary stage being able to recognize itself as a separate entity but with a central emptiness, void, and a sense of loss by being castrated from its mother. This castration is important in formation of 'Self'. Both Freud and Lacan emphasized in that a subject must separate itself from its mother to form a separate identity. Entering into the Imaginary order, the subject builds an idea of its own self which is 'Ego' to Freud and 'Ideal Ego' to Lacan. In Freud's view, ego helps us to know our 'self' but in Lacan's view ego is nothing but an illusion, misrecognition because "There is no image of identity, of reflexivity, but a relation of fundamental alterity" (Lacan, 1967-1968). Ego gives the subject the idea of otherness, as the infant grows up and socializes with other people except its mother, and ultimately realizes the fact that the union with its mother is unattainable. Thus, it shifts its attention towards others to search its

own Self. These others are the signifiers with what the subject tries to satisfy its desire that has been invoked from the lack of mother. At this point the subject enters into the Symbolic order. According to Lacan, human being achieves its self, being mainly in Symbolic order- "Everything which is human has to be ordained within a universe constituted by the symbolic function". (Lacan, 1954-1955)

Symbolic order presents a set of signifiers in front of the subject to fill up the lack or the emptiness. But these signifiers are full of shifting, sliding images that create a chain of signifiers in front of the subject. And the subject shifts from one signifier to another, tries to get back to the Real where there is no lack or loss. But as in Lacan's view Real is always in some level a fantasy and ultimately unattainable. This process of shifting from one signifier to another and trying to be settled in a specific signifier is actually what is called achieving the 'Self'. Being in the chain of signifiers the subject comes to know about things that it didn't know earlier and faces different situations that was unfamiliar to it, in this way the subject becomes adult and creates its social reality with the knowledge of its Self :

> "(T)he subject, confronted with the enigma of the desire of the Other, tries to verbalise this desire and thus constitutes itself by identifying with the signifiers in the field of the Other, without ever succeeding in filling the gap between subject and Other. Hence, in the continuous movement from signifier to signifier, the subject alternately appears and disappears" (ibid).

So, "what we call reality is associated with the symbolic order or 'social reality'" (Homer, 2005) and in this symbolic order a person continues to search the real, through shifting of signifiers and driven by desire. Desire is at the centre of our being and most essentially is related to the lack we feel to have. Desire and lack are inextricably tied together. Lacan defines desire as the remainder that arises from the subtraction of *need* from *demand*:

> "Thus desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting " (qtd.in Homer, 2005).

As the story of *The Guide* starts, we get Raju, Rosie and Marco in their adulthood. If we put them in the three orders Lacan demonstrates as the process of creating self, we find them clearly at

symbolic order. These three characters already crossed Imaginary order, taking an image of their self and entering the symbolic order, they have set themselves in the signifying chain, where a subject shifts from signifier to signifier in search of something they feel is lost from their life. As we see in Raju and Rosie, the trends of shifting from one goal (symbol) to another and creating a fantasy world, where they feel everything is under their control. But every time that fantasy world is broken, they again set themselves on the paths their desires lead them to.

To unfold the chain of desires, R. K. Narayan chooses a village named Malgudi (a fictional town created by Narayan) and places his protagonist Raju, who has been recently released from prison, sitting on a granite slab beside an ancient shrine on a bank of the river Sarayu, on the other bank the village Mangala, where people are so simple and gullible as to be made to accept for granted even the most unbelievable things. Raju is revealed exactly in his Symbolic order or turning point of his life after exercising and socializing his Ego in his past days, waiting to fill up the lack or the emptiness of his life or to get back to the real stage where there is no lack or loss to complete the circle of desires.

By recounting the time he left behind, Raju releases all the capricious desires that channeled him to come to this stage of life. He starts with his childhood when he has no sense of individual identity or self. In the process of forming the self he was only driven by the needs and his surroundings as he articulates:

> "You may want to ask why I became a guide or when. I was a guide for the same reason as someone else is a signaler, porter, or guard. It is fated thus. Don't laugh at my railway associations. The railways got into my blood very early in life. Engines, with their tremendous changing and smoke, ensnared my senses. I felt at home on the railway platform, and considered the stationmaster and porter the best company for man, and their railway talk the most enlightened. I grew up in their midst" (Narayan, 1971, p. 26).

Raju introduces with that moment of his life when he was not aware of the otherness. The intrusion of new culture, new ideologies, and new trends in society flourished by the railway, offers a new image of the self in Raju which was different from the mindset of non-descript Hamlet Malgudi. Raju boarded himself in the voyage of creating owns separate self, castrating himself from the traditional Malgudian self. In the process of parting the self and other, the first symbol against his void/ desire thrust upon Raju was his father's shop which was known as 'Hut (Narayan, 1971, p. 10). He was very

enthusiastic to serve in the shop in his father's absence. He used to wait eagerly for the time his father will go inside their home for lunch and call him to serve the customers. He felt himself important. He used to maintain an attitude of experienced shopkeeper and to uphold this attitude sometimes he ''swallowed the fourth in order to minimize complications" (Narayan, 1971, p. 11). He enjoyed his father's place in the shop. Sometimes, his father's customers greet him when they pass away. This honour became constantly Raju's desirable option to be in the shop. And his vocation as a shopkeeper is the master signifier to demonstrate how he starts to delineate his self by filling up his inner void. The desire of becoming a shopkeeper gives him the feeling of completeness as an individual self.

It is mentionable that Raju had been always driven by his desires from the very beginning of his schooling. His father wanted him to be well-educated. But Raju was not serious about his study and for that reason his father left him with the remark, "I have better things to do of a morning than make a genius out of a clay-head" (Narayan, 1971, p. 12). Instead of studying, he loves to play and loves to be in the shop most. With intrusion of the train, his life begins to run. His father decided to take another shop in the railway station. Lacan asserts that a subject moves in the process of signification to reveal their core emptiness. And Raju starts to move through this process also; he says "All this business expansion in our family helped me achieve a very desirable end—the dropping off of my school unobtrusively" (Narayan, 1971, p. 38). Thus he shifted his desire from school which was actually the desire of his teacher almost imposed on him and set it finally on the shop. This way, he introduces his individual self which was waiting to run after desires. His father's death means to give fulfillment of his desire. But Lacan explained desire to be unfulfilled and recurring. So it creates an unsatisfied self, who carries a void within and shifts the desire towards a new symbol. After the death of Raju's father when Raju owned the shop, he started to feel a lack of interest in it. He himself admits: "I bargained hard; showed indifference while buying and solicitude while selling. Strictly speaking, it was an irregular thing to do" (Narayan, 1971, p. 43). Raju's reality in the context to Malgudi shows that he was in a safe position of life; if he maintains his shop skillfully he has nothing to worry about future and can lead a happy family life just like his father. But Raju denies that reality and goes for a creating a new reality following his desires.

After his father's death, his desire shifts to pick up a bundle of assorted books and learn from the scrap about the old temples and

ruins and new buildings and battleships and soldiers and pretty girls. As Raju has no fixed desire to be filled up, he shifts repeatedly until he reaches his symbolic juncture of life. The visitors who used to stand before his shop and ask "How far….is….?.' or "Which way does one go to reach…..' or 'Are there many historical spots here" (Narayan, 1971, p. 49)? Raju got a new break in identifying his self. He becomes 'Railway Raju' (Narayan, 1971, p. 52)—the guide. Becoming a guide was also very interesting in Raju's life. He did not intentionally get involved in this work. In the beginning when the visitors asked him about the places, Raju even gave them false information and he did not do it to misguide the visitors but just to heighten his importance among them, he enjoyed their attention-- "It was not because I wanted to utter a falsehood, but only because I wanted to be pleasant" (Narayan, 1971, p. 49). This momentary pleasure of being important led Raju towards another signifier of the symbolic order. The point we may notice here is Raju's response to that unrecognized self of himself denying a safe and recognized self. This was Raju's choice driven by his desire and set him to create a new reality of life:

> "This sort of enquiry soon led me to think that I had not given sufficient thought to the subject. I never said, 'I don't know.' Not in my nature, I suppose if I had had the inclination to say 'I don't know what you are talking about,' my life would have taken different turn" (Narayan, 1971, p. 40).

The materialist world leads Raju to grow from his infancy (real stage) to his 'Imaginary stage'. Being able to recognize the self as a separate entity, Raju begins to feel the emptiness or the void again that was refilled with another character Rosie who herself is in the transition to find the 'Self' and establish the 'Reality'. Rosie, despite being an M.A. in Economics and a talented dancer sacrificed her 'Self' to form a new identity of class and cast by uniting herself with Marco. But as she hails from the class of 'Devdasis', she is categorized as a low caste. Even Marco, who willingly ties wedlock with her in spite of knowing her origin, affirms patriarchal norms by forcing her to lead a submissive life and also forbids her to perform dance in public functions. The lack of material satisfaction creates the desire to be wealthy, affluent and the status she needs. Marco's status and position drives the desire of Rosie in process of creating an individual self. The family of Rosie was ready to sacrifice their tradition to fill up the void they are experiencing. On the other hand, Rosie remarks that Marco "…was living… all alone, no family at all; he lived with his books and papers" (Narayan, 1971, p. 76). This characteristic difference between Rosie and Marco brings a cataclysm in their wedded life. The complexities of Marco and

Rosie's marital life create an empty space to be filled up. And this empty space magnetizes both Raju and Rosie to recognize their new shifting of desire.

Rosie is one of the vital symbols in formation of Raju as a subject because to Raju, Rosie is an embodiment of emotion and sentiments. The subjectivity that Raju now wants to form is centered on Rosie. Raju says "The only reality in my life and consciousness was Rosie' (Narayan, 1971, p. 104). But Rosie's desire acts like an ambivalent as she shows excessive consideration for her husband on the hill. In the midst of my caresses she would suddenly free herself and passionately tells Gaffur to bring the car. She shows the urge to go and see/ meet Marco. As Marco was goal oriented person, he is not shown in the process of shifting desires. Even when Raju and Rosie's covert relationship is exposed, Marco shows extreme displeasure but he remains indifferent to his desire. This indifference of Marco revitalizes Raju to support Rosie physically and morally against the codified laws of society. Both Raju and Rosie from now on will start to shift from one goal (symbol) to another and create a fantasy world where they felt everything is under control. The decision of performing publicly brings Rosie name, fame and money and her popularity brings Raju the material success. Raju's attention shifts from Rosie to money. Money creates a new machine like individual self of Raju.

The fantastic world of Rosie's fame and Raju's luxury masked their real self. It is money which brings an enormous transformation in Raju's flourishing life. In the words of Prof. Krishna Sen: "The modern Malgudi society that Raju embraces during his days of prosperity is hardly any better, either from the point of view of morality or humanity" (Narayan, 1971, p. 195). Raju fully utilizes the power of money to get the permission for liquor from the government which was prohibited at that time. The author says: 'Permit Holder' became a social title in our land and attracted men of importance around me, because the permit was a different thing to acquire. I showed respect for law by keeping the street window shut when serving drink to non-permit folk. All kinds of men called me 'Raj' and slapped my back…Through my intimacy with all sorts of people, I knew what was going on behind the scenes in the government, at the market, at Delhi, on the racecourse, and who was going to be who in the coming week. (Narayan, 1971, p. 184) Raju's unattainable desires drive him even to forge Rosie's signature with the intention of misappropriating her jewels and converting them into easy wealth. Raju successfully shifts from his imaginary order to symbolic stage of life. The chain of signifiers in front of

Raju seems to offer the 'Real' but Lacan says that Real is always in some level a fantasy and ultimately unattainable. As we see the false support of the fantasy was shaken with the entry of Marco's book and the legal notice about the ornaments. Here, Marco is the key signifier or symptom that was being excluded from till now in Raju and Rosie's world. The presence of Marco always gets them back to their shattered self and to the symbolic order. Raju's forgery breaks away Rosie's fantasy.

Raju and Rosie both characters can be well framed in Lacan's concept of subjectivity. As Lacanian subject both Raju and Rosie as adult experience the chain of signifiers in order to have their new self. Entering into the symbolic order they are guarded by their desires and sets themselves in the signifying chain where a subject shifts from signifier to signifier in search of something that they felt lost from their life or they are unfamiliar to it. This is how the symbolic order is structured to experience the social reality.

Instead of attaining the real to convey the self, the self ultimately is framed by the 'social reality'.

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Book Review

Impact of Migration on Poverty and Local Development of Bangladesh by Tasneem Siddiqui & Raisul Awal Mahmood, pp. 200, Refugee and Migration Movements Research Unit, 179, Shahid Syed Nazrul Islam Sarani, Bijoynogor, Dhaka-1000, Published in February 2015, Price Tk.500

The title of the book attracts the attention of three categories of readers and researchers interested in the fields of migration, poverty and local development. These three issues along with others could be discussed in much detail, but the authors gave short accounts, because it is a project-focused publication. Again, all the three components are dynamic in nature, their contents are changing rapidly and now drawing more attention, so to say. With the start of war in Middle Asia and consequent turmoil situation, the whole world is shivering with migration problem. The question of its impact has drawn global thinking. Secondly, poverty reduction is the focal issue of sustainable economic development efforts now being pursued by 193 developing countries of the world. Third, latest development thinking in the line of inclusive development is only possible to achieve with the pursuance of local development efforts.

With this short introduction, let us try to explore how far the book under review can satisfy us. The book is an outcome of a research project and its objectives are to accommodate a large number of issues designed in the project objectives and also there are time-constraints. Thus, so many issues were dealt but with less focus. For example, the issue of poverty, migration and remittance deserve exhaustive discussion. Those are discussed briefly. Whole things were looked from the angle of opinions and findings derived from surveys. This is project objectives and findings focus book-not following text-book styles (no detailed discussion). But, the laudable aspect of the book is that it contains field-level data on a number of issues, equipped with detailed tables and displayed in attractive ways in Bangladesh map. Another feature is that a very few works have been done on the topic earlier, as far as my knowledge goes. In order to guide the research, a good number of eminent researchers and scholars worked in advisory body. Obviously, their contributions are in the book. Embassy of Switzerland, who financed the project, expressed their satisfaction on the work done. They deserve thanks.

The book starts with chapter one, i.e. the introduction stating the rationale and objectives of the research, purpose of the study, then review of the existing literature, splinted into migration and poverty, migration and local poverty and the community, then at the end research questions. In this chapter, authors gave a brief idea about the whole book- a praise-presentation. One can here get a brief about the book in a nutshell. Chapter two clarifies the conceptual need of poverty, and local development, and methodological framework including geographical distribution of the survey HHs. Chapter three presents trends of short-term international migration from Bangladesh. Chapter four focuses on the migrant and non–migrant HHs. Chapter six provides differentials impact on migration on HH poverty. Chapter seven mainly presents migrant's investment and local development. Chapter three to seven are the core areas and contain much information. Chapter eight discusses impact of local government through the consumption of goods and services. Chapter nine describes impact on local development through community participation. One feature of each and every chapter is that they present clearly the outcome of the research finding without any ambiguity- of course in a brief manner. The last chapter (chapter ten) puts summary, conclusions and recommendations in a befitting manner. The information, both tables and colored maps are very vital part of the research work and illuminate us with the author's findings. As a whole myself and may be many others will find the book very useful and deserve our admiration.

I took the book with much eagerness, because I have had the opportunity to work at one time with local development, I worked as a consultant of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in the project "Combating Child and Women Trafficking in Bangladesh" for three years– a closed area of migration and working life-long in the area of poverty reduction. Both the writers have earned reputation as researchers home and abroad and well-known to me. Prof. Raisul Awal is working now as my departmental colleague; worked life-long in UK and USA and in the end of career now in Bangladesh. They, let us hope, will contribute in development efforts of Bangladesh in future too. I wish the book's wide circulation and extensive use.

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