

## A Comparative Study of Arthur Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter* Nathaniel Hawthorne and Raju in *The Guide* by R.K. Narayan

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### Abstract:

Enlightenment is something which is very internal. Here, the novels, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Guide* introduces a new approach in justifying religiosity among the widely accepted (!) preachers. Two saintly characters are having a moderate demonstration through this writing in order to unfold their insights under the observation of their so called dedicated activities. So the readers might be convinced by the crucial fact that, how far they are enlightened; or, whether they are being merely privileged to be addressed by the illusioned common mass or by the co-incidences at large.]

Arthur, the distinguished character comes out of Nathaniel Hawthorne in his famous novel the *Scarlet Letter* while Raju the figurative personnel of *The Guide* by R.K. Narayan-though the characters amazingly convey striking phenomena belonging to two centuries apart. Both the writers happened to be extremely popular with the vast reading public of the similar and different backgrounds.

Both the writers use psychoanalysis, soliloquies, asides, to convey true insight of the characters thereby supplying the readers the resemblances and incompatibilities of their individualities. Here we would intend to justify and diagnose their extent of moral disillusionment, enlightened realization.

Raju, in *the Handitouch* of R.K. Narayan is found to be shifted ultimately into a guide and prodigy (a guru) according to some critic he is an anti hero rather than a hero. Certainly, the very portrayal of Raju almost provided a modern essence to the novel, *the Guide*. Since it breaks with the traditional structure of a novel- the hero lacks in heroic characteristics; Rosie is always devoid of being called a heroine; even the plot development is not pursuing a single theme or any particular climax. Unlike the traditional ones it starts with an abrupt opening of a modern drama containing the features of flash back and flash forward as well.

In the *Scarlet Letter* admittedly this kind of feature is hardly noticed. Primarily he seems to be gifted with scholarly attainments, whereas he wore a half-frightened look all about him. Arthur's failing health was considered to be on account of excessive study and scrupulous fulfillment of his priestly duties; and on top of that, his frequent fasting and vigils.

However, we are face to face with Raju when he was chatting with a barber. In the course of the conversation between the two, readers were convinced through the affirmation of the barber that Raju did not commit murder nor did he cheat, abduct or rape, while ironically he was accused of all these crimes.

The proverb goes that, a saint has a past and the sinner future. As we go through the novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, Arthur Dimmesdale, the priest having an ascetic puritan approach, could appear before the people as someone apostle-like personality. Hester Prynne, the deserted wife of doctor Roger Chillingworth, fell victim to his enchantment and out of religious devotion she had had a physical union with Arthur and Pearl came out to be the living evidence. Expectedly, the puritan society charged Hester, but she never acknowledged, not for fear but to save her Godlike lover. Hester was to bear the letter 'A', which stands for 'Adultery' as a punishment; she was socially boycotted as well. At the end, Arthur being repentant, was able to confess before the public and died at that very moment, escaped public humiliation thereby.

Readers, however, come across Arthur as a young scholar accomplished in all the learning flow of the learnings. At the first scaffold scene Arthur appeared as an honorable (!) member of the church, while, Hester was a sinner (!) standing in the marketplace with the blazing scarlet letter on her bosom. Paradoxically, though being the sinner, Arthur is surrounded by an admiring congregation and Hester by curious onlookers.

Undoubtedly, these two characters have got some similarities- 1) the two lovers happened to be fortunate enough to have such beloveds as Hester and Rosie respectively who had ardently been true to their lovers, though up to the end they suffered. 2. Raju and Mr. Arthur, too are capable of casting spells on others.

3.. Both the couples have got unconsummated relationship and both the lovers had deprived their wives of their social status.

4. Arthur and Raju are found on a common line as and when he was heart pressed to confess Hester's husband, Roger and He decided to confess and at the time he want to escape from Roger's constant torment. So also, Raju once earnestly attempted to have the village Mongal to evade from Velam's agonizing flattery.

Arthur Dimmesdale having committed a grave sin shelved him into a religious aura. Raju, too, committing the same sin was taken to sainthood.

Raju was at first privileged enough by Rosie, later by Velan, being a confidant, so also Arthur was by Hester. Velan had facilitated Raju with the role of the fake Swami. Similarly, Hester invested Arthur with the role of being indifferent towards public confession in public. Accordingly we would like to add here that Arthur, like Raju, was fortunate enough in having such beloveds as Hester and both Hester and Rosie were true to their lovers with utmost sincerity and respect towards their relationship. Rosie had done all she could for the exemption of accusation in which Raju truly was involved. Hester too had suffered very much for a long period from social, disgrace, but never disclosed anything about her abuser. Both the heroes had been privileged by the universal feminine hood of their beloveds. In *the Guide*, Raju could make Rosie divorce, raped her and control financial social or even psychological affairs. Later he became her guardian or protector, though having a psychological distance. Surprisingly enough, when Raju had been arrested for forging her signature she did not leave him rather fought alone to rescue him. Hester too never showed any kind of negative impulsion.

As far as Arthur's character portrayal is concerned, his animal nature has been determined to be the hereditary and Genetic one. "This man", said R. Chillingworth, "pure as they deem him, - all spiritual as he seems, - hath inherited a strong animal nature from his father or his mother." [P-137-138, L:24] It is to be noted here that his attempt for confession in the course of his sermon as the worst of sinners, did not humiliate him rather won the public confidence. At the same time, he is prevented from making a confession in fear of otherwise consequences. He is ashamed and afraid of what he really is. "I, you pastor, whom you so reverence trust, am utterly a pollution and a lie!" [P: 154, L:2-3]. Even when he urges others, especially his congregation, to treat him like a sinner, then his congregation refuses to believe that he has done anything wrong and to them, he is simply acting as a perfect puritan. He says, "Ye that have loved me! - Ye that have deemed me holy! ... Behold me here the one sinner of the world". [Page-337] Also Raju though successfully exploited people as a guide; as a saint but he once attempted to escape. He himself uttered, "I will look for a new place". [Page-84, L-10-11; ]

The minister's standing on the scaffold in darkness of the night is described by the author a mere "mockery of penitence - a mockery at which angels blushed and wept while friends rejoiced with jeering laughter." [P -158] and at midnight, he is held back from the last logical step by his cowardice. Hawthorne said, "He had been driven hither by impulse ... which dogged him everywhere, and whose own sister closely linked companion was that Cowardice which invariably drew him back,..." [Page-158, 1st para, *The Scarlet Letter*]. Tadd Ruetenik commented, "... Arthur's seeming acceptance of fatherhood is not a matter of confessing individual responsibility, but rather an acceptance of a more general, yet more profound responsibility for Hester and Pearl, the lowest members of the community" [Page-14, Another View of Arthur Dimmesdale: A Profound Lesson in Scapegoating from *The Scarlett Letter*]. In the same way, Raju also did not confess verbally before Rosie that he was guilty. Like Arthur he was also earnestly sensitive towards his male-ego. Raju had always kept Rosie and her affairs under his exclusive control and after the accusation, he could not bear Rosie's upright role. Until Roger Chillingworth had detected Arthur's deception, he also did not dare to confess. As Pearl commented about his secret confession, "only the trees could hear". So also Raju could not but confess Velan. However, irony lies in the fact that, when they confessed they were not put to public humiliation, rather, people had had the reverse opinions. In *The Scarlet Letter*, after Arthur's death, the exposure of the letter 'A' on his bosom or his dying words simply turned out to be 'man's righteousness'. Velan, also hearing the whole story of Raju called him 'Swami'

Arthur, despite his care and vigil is exposed to detection by Roger Chillingworth, the very crafty person, as the minister finds himself being unable either to undo his sin or to confess before him. "poor, miserable man! What right had infirmity like his to burden itself with crime"? (P-158, para-1 )

Hypocrite as the two characters were, had been virtually distinctive in respect of the matters of disillusionment. We may add here that "to Joseph Conrad, innocent or good purposes tend almost inevitably to become tragic illusions, either in their too great absorption of the individual, ... or because they are unrealizable, or because, in the very process of realization, they are bound as ideals to deteriorate". [Page- 120, Joseph Conrad: His Outlook On Life]. At each stage, as we find, Raju had never been inwardly repentant for his mischief. Rather, he marshaled as we find an allusion in Bacon's essay, "A place showeth the man". [Page-73, Of Great Place] But the respect showed to Arthur by the community proved reverse, as it reminded him of his own sin, that is, he had polluted Hester's heart and this made him impoverished. "Happy are you Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon the bosom! Mine burns in secret! Thou little knowest what a relief it is, after the torment of seven years cheat, to look into an eye that recognizes me for what I am". (P-206, 2<sup>nd</sup> para)

Raju here proved himself to be an arch knave never much less than what Arthur had been. Raju was assumed as a guide both at the beginning and at the latter part of the story, though undeserving as a professional, whereas Arthur was acknowledged to be an ardent preacher and a priest with sincerity of all necessary leaning.

Here it is to be noted that the public respect or reverence earned by Arthur rather tormented himself while Raju's success in the public deception seemed to have encouraged him. Here we may add Narayan's own words, "Raju soon realized that, his spiritual status would be enhanced if he grew a beard and long hair to fall on his nape." [page -47, L:(1-2); last paragraph] The driving force behind all his austerity, ascetism or priest like simplicity may be determined to be his commitment for penance and atonement. On the other hand, whatever Raju did appear to be simply professional, which was, in fact, unalloyed with his characteristic ambition. R.K.Narayan has fortified Raju by providing some oral splendor and, almost in all the cases, co-incidences rescued him like an arbitrary god. In the novel he appeared before the people of the village Mangal as an omniscient and an omnipresent personality. In the novel we find, when he was simply a tourist guide, he had no idea about the significant spots of his own area. He said, "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 a different turn..." [The Guide: P-49; L:(14-16)]

One of the notable features of his character which strikes the reader's mind – whatever his plans might be yet they reveal him otherwise later. Accordingly, It may be thought of his ill motive lying behind everything he wants to do, that means, behind his plan to desert the town, there might be some evil intention which he had controlled with effort. Truly, for him, it was an escape from inhibitions of all kinds and restraints imposed on him by ecclesiastical orders.

As the story continues, we come to know that Raju abused Rosie with first chance and he keenly perused her until she divorced thereby shattering her mother's dream for a dignified family life. Then immediately Rosie came to Raju and now on, he became her patronizing protector. Here, also, marshalled his lot by maximizing Rosie's neglected passion for art, treated her as his property at large. Gradually, his genuine self interest grew prominent and once he could not but bridle his temptation; accordingly, he forged Rosie's signature in a document sent by Marco offering a box of jewelery. Even Rosie also reacted but tried her best to save him but could not. After the imprisonment, he stepped down to the village Mangal. Here, again he happened to appear as a perfect exploiter, namely, a religious guide. Obviously, Raju was all along found to be sincere and solicitous as regards his multiple professions and personal interest which never failed him.

As far as he had been a voluntary guide for the visitors in Malgudi; as an accountant, a shopkeeper, an intruding lover – he excelled everywhere. On top of that, he won an unlimited name and fame a prodigy, saint, 'Swami'. Raju had never been true to any ideology except his own self interest. Once he was betaken to an honest effort of fasting through by a compelling situation which made him a spiritual celebrity. This is very provident in the last phase of the story where a small boy's wrong information has incurred upon him as an overloaded reward which deserves not only subtlety, but also restraint. Here, it happened that, Raju had a news that two groups of the villagers were going to fight, and then, to prevent them, he told the boy (the news bearer) that "Tell your brother, ... unless they are good, I will never eat". But it resulted in fatally i.e, the boy told the people that, "Sawmi does not want food... Because... it does not rain". [Page-89, The Guide]

The villagers started calling him Mahatma. The very next day, when the villagers led by Velan, went to show their awe he himself was mesmerized to comprehend the very reality, as he said to himself, Did they expect me to starve for fifteen days and stand in knee-deep water eight hours?" He himself had confessed "to escape the ordeal", "But it is to be done only by the saint. I am no saint". Later he told all about him, taking the total risk of downfall. Even though he could not manage to retreat. He happened to find himself a man of public interest. On the fifth day of his fasting we are informed, "Fortunately, he (Raju) had concealed a little staled food, left over ... .. late at night" [c-11; Page-210: L-2, Para-4] At the very irritation, about Velan his own word, "this single man was responsible for his present plight." [chapter-11, Page: 212] Here we can quote from Narasimhaiah, ('An Inquiry into the Indianness of English Literature') "Here, surely, we learn to repeat saying that 'Don't ask the past of a saint'. Indian tradition is full of evidence that we love to echo it in Raju's case". (p-33)

On the eleventh day morning Raju, accordingly, went to attend the ritual of going down the basin with the help of Velan and others, "... shut his eyes and turned towards the mountain, his lips muttering the prayer... .. The morning sun was out... .. Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said Velan it is raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs- 'and with that he sagged down"

Thus we are not given a clear finishing. We may quote from Leena Sharker's essay. She says, "The novel is open ended as it is not stated whether the village was totally drenched by heavy shower with the death of Raju"

But C.D. Narsimhaiah considers, "Raju a transformed man in the end". [Page -106] This is the very thing which I would like to contradict. It seems up to the last moment he struggled to be their *Savior*. the above discussion proves that he was compelled to fast. At last he seemed to have been tempted to do that only to claim the credit,

which is very evident in his last speech. The narrator says that, “The morning sun was out”, but Raju said, “... it is raining”. So we may assume that it is nothing much less than Raju’s hallucination through which he could see rain, the very desired thing. Of course Raju’s own words proved so -“I can feel”, that means it was not happening really. Again if something happened like that, then of course there would have been an overwhelming outburst among the awaiting folk. We, therefore, would simply deny the fact that Raju had been enlightened at last. Arthur, on the contrary, has confessed in public in chapter-23. He said, “The law we broke!- the sin here so awfully revealed- let these alone be in thy thoughts! I fear! I fear! That, when we forgot our god-when we violated our reverence each for other’s soul,.. ... He hath proved his mercy, in my afflictions. By giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast!.. ...” [Page 275-276, Last para; Line 2-10] From the beginning we find that, he was inwardly repentant though dared not to confess. He was also suffering from his cowardice. The way the two ecclesiastical(!) personalities emerged in the novel, of course, is able to appeal to public testimony, to be sure, enlightenment is something, which is extremely internal. Therefore, our very observation based on the soliloquies conversations does not comply with the popular view that, Raju dies as a pious soul, rather we are in confusion as the film maker James J. Malore asked Raju, “...have you always been a Yogi? Here Raju gave an untrue answer, “Yes, more or less”. [Page-219, The Guide]. Truly, it is Arthur, not Raju got enlightened though were being privileged sometimes by the illusioned common mass or sometimes simply by the coincidences.

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