

# The Guide



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF R. K. NARAYAN

Born in the south Indian metropolis of Madras (now Chennai), R. K. Narayan spent most of his childhood in the city under the guardianship of his grandmother, who looked after him because his father's occupation as headmaster necessitated constant moves between locations. From a young age, Narayan developed a taste for literature, and after a short stint as a teacher following his university studies, he decided to devote himself to writing full-time. His early career, however, was a struggle: in spite of the patronage of one of the most important writers of the time—the British author Graham Greene, who had read his work and recommended it to his publishers—Narayan's early novels did not sell well, and he faced financial difficulties. However, he continued writing, and by the late 1940s began garnering a wide readership as well as more financial stability. As his reputation grew, he also traveled more, visiting Australia, the United States, and England, where he finally got to meet his patron Graham Greene in person. Settling in the city of Mysore in southern India, Narayan continued publishing into old age. His fictional work—almost entirely set in the fictional town of Malgudi in southern India—often reflects a comic-ironic mode in its treatment of themes such as the conflict between tradition and modernity, materialism, family, and Hindu mythology. By the time he died in 2001, his status as one of India's most important English-language writers was firmly established.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Born at the beginning of the 20th century and living through to the end of it, N. K. Narayan experienced many of the major upheavals that shook Indian society during that time. Most notable among these events was the Indian movement for independence, which sought the end of the British Raj (or rule) in India. The Raj had been established in 1858 as a continuation and further entrenchment of British commercial and colonial interests in the subcontinent. Although commencing as early as the mid-19th century, the Indian movement for independence reached its peak in the first four decades of the 20th century. The rise of Mahatma Gandhi, the activist and proponent of nonviolent civil disobedience who became a leader of the movement beginning in the 1920s, portended the end of the British Empire in India. In 1947, shortly after the end of the Second World War (1939-1945), India gained its independence. The first half of the 20th century was consequential not only because of the widespread political upheaval, but also because of the cultural and social upheaval

that followed in its wake. Modernization and industrialization, in addition to colonialism, led to tensions over deeply-ingrained traditional social and cultural hierarchies such as caste, a severe system of social stratification rooted in the Hindu religion. In the aftermath of independence, trends such as modernization and industrialization continued to accelerate. Narayan's novels—and the *The Guide* in particular—touch on many of these upheavals and transformations, although obliquely. Nods to the great changes wrought by industrialization and modernization, for instance, can be perceived in the novel's depiction of the railway line that comes to the town of Malgudi. Conflicts between tradition and modernity can also be glimpsed in the tensions that exist between the characters over caste, as well gender. Finally, in the figure of Raju, the charismatic and (ultimately) self-sacrificing holy man, one can see a playful and somewhat ironic evocation of Gandhi, the great “guide” of the Indian independence movement who led his people to deliverance.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Narayan's *The Guide*—as well as his larger body of work—represents part of the emergence of Anglo-Indian literature in the first half of the twentieth century, under what was then British rule in India. During this period, a number of Indian writers, most notably Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, in addition to Narayan, began writing and publishing works in the English language which would go on to find a wide readership both within India and outside of it. The themes with which *The Guide* grapples—including the conflict between tradition and modernity, as well as the theme of transformation and redemption—find echoes in the work of Narayan's two contemporaries. While Rao's 1939 novel [Kanthapura](#) is more explicitly political in its content, it nonetheless grapples with the issue of social and cultural upheaval brought upon a small village in southern India as a result of the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), the nonviolent freedom fighter who led India to independence from British rule. Like *The Guide*, [Kanthapura](#) touches on conflicts over caste relations, feminism, and the liberation of women in its examination of the larger transformations brought about by modernity. Likewise, Mulk Raj Anand—the third of the trio considered to be the founding fathers of the Anglo-Indian novel—also documented the conflict between tradition and modernity, particularly in relation to caste, in novels such as *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936). All three writers often focused on small Indian towns and villages (sometimes fictionalized, as is the case with the town of Malgudi in *The Guide*), through which they could dramatize, in miniature, broader changes taking place in Indian society at large. Through their collective body of work, these

three authors established the Anglo-Indian novel as a force to be reckoned with, and laid the groundwork for the future of Anglo-Indian literature.

## KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Guide
- **When Written:** 1956
- **Where Written:** United States
- **When Published:** 1958
- **Literary Period:** Modern
- **Genre:** Literary Fiction
- **Setting:** Malgudi (a fictional town in India)
- **Climax:** Raju sees rain coming over the hills
- **Antagonist:** Marco Polo
- **Point of View:** Third person and first person narrative

## EXTRA CREDIT

**Communicating with the Dead.** Narayan was so devastated after his young wife, Rajam, died of typhoid in 1939, that he sought the help of a psychic medium to help contact her in the world of the dead.

**A Pen Name.** Graham Greene, who would become the young author's patron, advised Narayan to shorten his full name, Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami, to N. K. Narayan, so as to be more palatable to English-speaking readers.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Moving between present and past, and narrated alternately in third-person and first-person, *The Guide* tells the life story of Raju. Born to a modest shopkeeper and his wife in the (fictional) town of **Malgudi**, India, Raju grows up at a time of great changes: most notable among them the construction of the **railway** line that comes to town in his childhood. The railway changes the family's fortunes and Raju's life forever. As a result of a second shop that Raju's father opens in the railway station, the family prospers, and, after Raju's father's sudden death, Raju takes over the rail station shop to continue his father's enterprise.

However, Raju doesn't remain a shopkeeper for long. Soon, he takes to showing the many visitors who arrive at the railway station the sites of Malgudi. In re-inventing himself as a tourist guide, Raju often resorts to exaggerations and fabricated tales to impress his customers. His reputation as a guide grows to such an extent that he comes to be known as "Railway Raju," sought out by tourists from far and wide.

Raju meets his match in Marco Polo, a serious, studious

academic of ancient civilizations who arrives in Malgudi to research the cave paintings and temples scattered around the town's surroundings. He engages Raju's services as a tourist guide to navigate these many sites. Raju's impulsive dislike of Marco Polo—who is haughty and domineering—is further reinforced when he meets his young, beautiful wife Rosie, who arrives in the town shortly after her husband. Raju is immediately taken by Rosie, who, in spite of the foreign name she goes by, is an Indian woman trained in the art of Indian classical dance. When Raju takes Rosie to visit a **snake** charmer and watches her as she imitates the snake's movements in a fleeting dance, he is thunderstruck: she is, he realizes, the greatest dancer he has ever seen.

Seeking to get closer to Rosie, Raju devotes himself to her and her husband's care. Soon, it becomes clear that all is not well in the marriage. The couple is liable to bouts of quarrelling, which come to a head at Mempi Hills, an area outside of Malgudi in which cave paintings are located that Marco, accompanied by his wife and guided by Raju, goes to examine. At Peak House, where the party lodges during the expedition to Mempi Hills, Raju learns that Rosie is dissatisfied with her husband—primarily because he has banned her from pursuing her passion, the art of classical dance that has been practiced by members of her family for generations. Taking advantage of Rosie's dissatisfaction, Raju flatters and compliments her, praising her dancing abilities, and soon, they strike up an affair behind Marco's back.

With Raju's encouragement, Rosie again tries to talk to her husband about commencing a career in classical dance, but she is rebuffed, and inadvertently reveals that she is having an affair with Raju; a man, she tells her husband, who appreciates her talents. This leads to a crisis between husband and wife. When Raju goes up to visit Marco and Rosie at Peak House, however, neither Rosie nor Marco reveal exactly what is going on, and instead, Rosie commands Raju to leave them alone.

Raju returns to Malgudi, where, depressed by Rosie's absence, he has a difficult time picking up his old life—the shop at the railway station, and his work as a tourist guide. One day, a few weeks after his trip to Peak House, Rosie appears with her luggage at the house that he shares with his mother. Raju's mother, a traditional woman, is surprised by the appearance of the single young woman, but accepts her presence in the house for the time being. Raju learns from Rosie that Marco has left her.

Raju is thrilled by Rosie's reappearance, and is encouraging and supportive of her reawakened devotion to dance: she takes to practicing everyday in his house. However, trouble soon begins to brew with his mother, who has heard rumors that Rosie is a married woman, and has realized, moreover, that Rosie is a dancer who belongs to a lower caste. Financial troubles also escalate: Raju's creditor, the *sait*, a merchant from whom he buys wholesale supplies for the railway shop, begins pursuing

Raju in the courts to pay back his debts. Raju's negligence of the railway shop also leads to the loss of the business. Problems further escalate when Raju's uncle, his mother's brother, appears in the house, insults Raju and Rosie, and, along with his sister, demands that Rosie leave. Raju defiantly takes Rosie's side, and in response his mother packs up her things and departs with her brother.

Throughout, Rosie, unaware of the extent of Raju's financial straits, continues practicing her art. One day, she declares that she is ready to perform publicly, and, after settling with Raju on the more traditional and captivating name of "Nalini" as an appropriate moniker for her public debut, Raju sets to work arranging her first public performance.

From the moment of her debut, Rosie is a huge success. Raju, who takes credit for orchestrating her astronomical rise to fame, re-invents himself once again as the "manager" of the alluring and captivating Nalini. Nalini is asked for everywhere, and Raju's role in managing Rosie's career transforms him into a man of wealth and influence. Still pursued by the suit for the debts he owes for the railway shop, and finding that his father's home is now under mortgage to the suit, Raju and Rosie move to a larger, more luxurious house, where Raju takes to hosting important visitors and hobnobbing with politicians, bankers and rich merchants—all men who seek access to Nalini through Raju.

Keeping Rosie to a relentless schedule of engagements and performances, Raju nonetheless starts growing jealous of the artist friends that she likes to spend time with, and seeks to limit her contact with them. He does this, in spite of sensing that a dangerous dissatisfaction is developing in Rosie. One day, he receives an unexpected parcel in the mail. It is the book that Marco, Rosie's husband, has published on his research on the cave paintings in Malgudi. Raju hides the book from Rosie. Nonetheless, news of the publication reaches her: she becomes excited when she reads about Marco's book in a magazine. Not only that, but Rosie quarrels with Raju when she discovers that Marco's book has been sent to them, but that Raju has hidden it from her.

Increasingly jealous of Rosie's preoccupation with her husband, Raju also hides a letter which arrives for Rosie from Marco's lawyers shortly after the arrival of the book. The letter concerns a box of valuable jewelry that Marco wants to release to Rosie. Instead of sharing the letter with Rosie, Raju forges her signature on the form sent by the lawyers, hoping to acquire the box of jewelry without Rosie's knowledge.

Before long, Raju's deceit is exposed: a police superintendent shows up at one of Rosie's performances with a warrant for Raju's arrest for forgery. Raju is forced to disclose all to Rosie. She is devastated, particularly upon discovering that, in spite of her tireless dancing, Raju has been reckless with the immense wealth they've accumulated through her engagements. They are now so poor that even meeting the cost of Raju's legal

expenses is a burden. She takes to dancing again to pay for Raju's expenses, which include fees for an expensive lawyer that she hires to defend Raju in the court case against him. The lawyer, however, fails to get Raju off. Raju is convicted of forgery and sentenced to two years in prison. Although he comes across reports of her continuing rise to stardom in the newspapers he reads in jail, Raju never meets Rosie again.

Uncertain of where to take himself after his release from prison, Raju sits on the banks of a **river** near a small village. A stranger approaches him, and stares up at him reverently. Soon the stranger, a villager by the name of Velan, confesses that he is having trouble with a younger half-sister who refuses to accept the marriage match he has arranged for her. Although Raju is disconcerted by Velan's unwarranted respect for him, he tries to help. After Velan brings his sister to visit Raju, the sister accepts the match arranged for her by her brother. Velan and his family credit this success to Raju.

Raju's success in pacifying Velan's rebellious half-sister leads the villagers to believe in his powers as a holy man, or spiritual guide. Raju, considering that he has nowhere to go and that the offerings of food brought to him by the villagers on a daily basis provide him with free nourishment, decides to play the role that the villagers have given him. He grows his beard and takes up residence in the temple by the river, all in a bid to play the role of "holy man" more convincingly. Each day, a congregation of villagers arrive to listen to him discourse on various topics. Although he often feels like an imposter, Raju continues with the charade.

When a severe drought afflicts the village, Raju is unwittingly drawn into undertaking a two-week fast on behalf of the villagers to bring about rains. Realizing the enormity of the sacrifice that the villagers expect him to undertake, and afraid for himself, Raju finally discloses his full life story to Velan, including his history of deceit and imprisonment. Raju hopes that Velan will see that he is just an ordinary man after all, devoid of the powers which the villagers have invested him with. However, after hearing Raju's story, Velan's view of him remains unchanged. He speaks and looks at Raju with the same reverence and respect he had on that first day they met by the river bank.

Astonished, but also moved, that Velan should still continue to respect him as the "swami" in spite of his shameful past, Raju decides to undertake the fast in earnest, as a way of repaying Velan's—and the villager's—faith in him. News of the swami's fast spreads far and wide—people come to the village by the thousands to meet the heroic holy man, and journalists and news people arrive to report on the developments. On the final day of the fast, Raju is so weak that that he is unable to descend to the river on his own to hold vigil, as he has done every day throughout the fast. With Velan's help, however, he musters the energy to reach the depleted river. On the brink of unconsciousness, he looks to the horizon, and tells Velan that

he feels rain coming over the hills.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Raju** – The protagonist and part-narrator of *The Guide*, Raju is a trickster-charlatan whose greatest talent lies in re-inventing himself. With roots in a modest household in the town of

**Malgudi** in southern India, Raju knows how to make the best of opportunities—as evidenced, for instance, in the way that he takes advantage of the **railway** that is newly constructed in Malgudi to create a career for himself as a tourist guide. Articulate and persuasive, Raju has no qualms about twisting facts—and even reality—to suit his interests, a skill which he deploys relentlessly in his role as host to tourists in Malgudi. Raju’s penchant for duplicity is also evidenced in the affair that he commences with Rosie behind the back of her husband, Marco, who also happens to be one of Raju’s customers. Driven by a desire for wealth, Raju’s greed is apparent in the way that he exploits Rosie’s immense talents as a dancer to enrich himself once he again reinvents himself as her manager. Jealousy and a desire for control are the other hallmarks of his character, qualities which, along with his deceitful tendencies, ultimately land him in prison. And yet, as low as Raju may go, he seems always able to rise again. In his final reinvention as a holy man or spiritual guide on the **riverbank** near a small village after his release from prison, Raju comes to fulfill the destiny of “a guide” in the highest sense. Although initially playing the role of “swami” so as to exploit the villagers’ generosity, Raju ultimately lives up to the villagers’ faith in him by risking everything to save them.

**Rosie / Nalini** – The young and beautiful wife of Marco, and love object of Raju, Rosie’s most striking quality is her immense genius for dance—most clearly manifested in the “**serpent dance**” she performs only on rare occasions. Descended from a poor, lower-caste family who have traditionally devoted themselves to the art of temple dancing, Rosie, in spite of her own passion for dance, attempts to escape the constraints of her caste and poverty by marrying a wealthy, educated, upper-caste man. And yet, rather than providing Rosie with deliverance, the men with whom she becomes entangled inevitably attempt to repress her creativity and independence. Not only does Marco condemn and ban Rosie’s pursuit of dance, but Raju, with whom she commences an affair soon after she arrives in **Malgudi** with her husband, also lets her down. While Raju genuinely supports and encourages Rosie’s pursuit of her art at first, once she achieves fame as the dancer “Nalini,” he begins to exploit her success in his role as her manager to enrich himself. Not only that, but Raju repeatedly lies to and deceives Rosie, and attempts to control her contact with others because of his jealousy. And yet, try as they might, the men in Rosie’s lives ultimately fail to contain and control her. Forceful,

free-spirited, and a brilliant artist, her artistic and feminine powers are such that, by the end of the novel, she has discarded the chains that both men have sought to confine her in, and is outshining both as a free and independent woman, successful beyond measure.

**Marco Polo** –The husband of Rosie, Marco is a serious, studious, reticent scholar of ancient civilizations whose only passion is for his work. His research into the sites of ancient civilization has turned him into an eternal tourist, as evidenced by the traveler’s clothes that he always wears. Arriving in the town of **Malgudi** on the **railway** one day to examine cave paintings, Marco hires Raju to show him the sights. His insensitivity and callousness towards everything other than his work is reflected in his neglect of Rosie during their visit to Malgudi. Marco’s controlling and dominant nature is also reflected in the ban that he imposes on Rosie, forbidding her to pursue the passion for classical dance which she nurtures. Marco’s rigidity and cruelty become apparent when, upon discovering that his unhappy and dissatisfied younger wife has commenced an affair with his tourist guide, he completely ignores her for three weeks, and then abandons her at the railway station of Malgudi as punishment. And yet, although he leaves his wife, Marco is clearly unable to let her go entirely, as suggested in the communication that he attempts to commence with her, via his lawyers, once she establishes herself as a famous dancer managed by Raju.

**Gaffur** – A rather grumpy taxi driver, who is often hired by Raju to act as driver on the tours on which Raju takes the many tourists arriving in **Malgudi** on the **railway**. In his role as driver, Gaffur is the first to notice Raju’s designs on Marco’s wife, Rosie. Gaffur is an honest, upright man with principles, as evidenced in his repeated warnings to Raju to leave Rosie alone.

**Raju’s Father** – A modest shopkeeper in the town of **Malgudi**, Raju’s father is by turns soft and severe with his son, whom he takes shopping with him at times, and whom he threatens with violence at others—particularly when Raju misbehaves or fails to learn the lessons that his father attempts to teach him. He is a social man who likes chatting with the customers who stop at his shop. When he opens a second shop in the **railway** station that is built across from his house, he prospers. However, Raju’s father doesn’t survive long—taken ill during the rainy season one year, he dies before his son reaches full adulthood.

**Raju’s Mother** – An uneducated, traditional woman, Raju’s mother is a devoted wife and mother, who barely leaves the immediate vicinity of the house that her husband has built in **Malgudi**. Although she seems to be a meek, pliant woman, she is in fact strong-willed. She frequently butts heads with her son, particularly after he ruins the **railway** shop business that her husband had built before his death. She also rebels against the presence of Rosie in her house when Raju invites her to live with him and his mother. Clinging fast to her principles relating

to caste and family honor to the last, Raju's mother goes so far as to leave her own house with her brother in order to protest her son's disgrace.

**Raju's Uncle** – Elder brother to Raju's mother, Raju's uncle arrives in **Malgudi** to set his nephew straight, once the latter ruins his father's **railway** shop business and takes up with Rosie, whom he also invites to live with him and his mother. Strong-willed, confrontational, and embodying strong principles of caste and family honor, Raju's uncle acts as a support to his sister, providing her with shelter once her son refuses to follow her counsel.

**Velan** – Velan, a local from the small village of Mangal in southern India, comes across Raju sitting on the banks of the **river** one day. Velan is trusting and respectful. Upon setting eyes on Raju, he seems to identify something spiritual, and immediately puts his faith in him as a holy man. It is Velan's faith in Raju that precipitates the latter's transformation into a holy man of renown, as other villagers also begin to put their trust in his powers. Velan's trust is such that, even after Raju confesses to him his life of deceit and trickery, his faith remains unshaken: and it is this act of trust that motivates Raju to genuinely try to help the villagers by undertaking a fast to bring about rains to end the drought under which they suffer. Velan acts as Raju's support to the very last, helping him down to the river to hold vigil on the final day of the fast.

**The Villagers** – Residents of the village of Mangal in southern India, located not far from a **river** bank. The villagers, following Velan's example, put their faith in Raju as a spiritual guide. They suffer especially under a severe drought that afflicts them one year and puts their livelihoods in jeopardy. Turning to Raju for guidance, they draw him into a long fast to alleviate the drought.

**Velan's Brother** – A rather dull-witted 21-year-old who goes to inform Raju that his brother Velan has been injured in a fight, which has broken out as a result of a drought that afflicts the villagers. In relaying Raju's words back to village elders, Velan's brother muddles up the message, inadvertently communicating to the villagers that Raju has undertaken to fast until **rains** arrive.

**The Sait** – A merchant who acts as Raju's creditor in **Malgudi**, and from whom Raju supplies the **railway** shop. When Raju, busy with Rosie and Marco, fails to repay his debts, the Sait is relentless in his pursuit of Raju through the courts, eventually managing to have the house that Raju's father had built mortgaged to him.

**Mani** – Raju's secretary, who works for him once Raju reinvents himself as the manager of Rosie/Nalini's dance career. Raju's trust in Mani begins to waver once Rosie discovers that Raju has hidden Marco's book from her. He suspects Mani as the revealer of the secret. However, Mani's loyalty to Raju is reflected in the fact that he is the only visitor who comes to see

Raju in prison.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**The Master** – An old man who oversees a *pyol* school in **Malgudi**, a school in which lessons are held on the old man's stoop. Raju's father sends Raju to this school to remove him from the influence of the construction workers who are building the **railway**.

**Joseph** – A reticent man who looks after Peak House, the house at the top of Mempi Hills. Raju takes Marco and Rosie to stay there while Marco studies nearby cave paintings.

## TERMS

**Dharma** – Dharma is a concept based in various South Asian religions, including Hinduism and Buddhism, which alludes to an order or a law that controls the universe. For an individual, following one's dharma—in a sense, one's destiny or fate—leads to spiritual transformation and fulfillment. In *The Guide*, the notion of dharma is closely associated with **Raju**, who in spite of his various transformations, always occupies a position of guide in some form or another—as a tourist guide in **Malgudi**, a dance manager (and hence an artistic “guide” of sorts), and finally as a spiritual guide on the **riverbank** of a small village. Thus, a law or a destiny seems to govern Raju's life, which ultimately leads him to fulfill his destiny, or dharma, in the highest sense—as a holy man who sacrifices himself to “guide” others out of their suffering.

**Caste** – A system of hereditary classes in Hindu society, which distinguishes between people on the basis of social status in relation to notions of hereditary purity and pollution. One's caste often also determines one's occupation. For instance, **Rosie**, who belongs to a lower caste in the novel, is a dancer by virtue of her place in the social hierarchy: members of her caste (and of her family) traditionally devote themselves to the temples as dancers. Transgressing caste divides, for instance by marrying outside of one's caste, is frowned upon in Hindu society. This is one reason why **Raju's mother** is outraged by the relationship between Rosie and her son **Raju**—as Rosie belongs to a lower caste than that of her own family.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## HYPOCRISY AND DISGUISE

Raju, the protagonist and occasional narrator of N.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, is a character whose entire life is built upon the sins of hypocrisy and dissimulation. His multiple careers—including his work as a tourist guide in his hometown of **Malgudi**, southern India, his career as a “dance manager” for Rosie/Nalini (the seductive dancer he begins an affair with when she visits Malgudi with her husband, Marco), and his final reincarnation as a holy man in a small village in southern India—are all premised on deceptions and lies. The novel dramatizes the ways in which Raju's propensity for deceit leads him into trouble. Ultimately, Narayan suggests that Raju's deceptions not only lead to his complete corruption, but also to the destruction of everything he holds dear.

The various roles that Raju invents for himself—a tourist guide, dance manager, and holy man, respectively—all rely upon the spinning of fabricated stories and illusions. In recounting to Velan, the villager to whom Raju tells his life story, his past life as tourist guide in Malgudi, Raju emphasizes that he felt no qualms about spinning tales on a regular basis. Raju tells Velan that his lectures to the visitors about the sights depended largely on the mood he was in on the day he escorted clients. He ascribes different ages to the same site, for instance, according to his humour. He exaggerates the singularity of some of the sights, contending that a particular spot in town is “the greatest, the highest, the only one in the world,” when this is not necessarily true. He also adjusts his stories and “facts” according to his customers, depending on what he thinks they want to hear. Raju's dissimulation and consistent misinformation is so successful that his reputation only grows as a result, leading tourists, innocent of his deceptions, to seek him out in droves, asking for him by his nickname, “**Railway Raju**.”

Raju's tendency toward deceit and disguise continues when he takes on the role of promoting Rosie's classical dance career, in his capacity as her manager. He changes his appearance—dressing “soberly” for the part of classical dance manager and sporting rimless glasses—all to play more convincingly the new part that he has assumed. Much of his work managing Rosie's career consists of creating an illusion of importance. Raju takes to sitting in a particular spot at each of Rosie's performances, and he inquires in great detail about the preparations for each show, so as to create a tension that further supports Rosie's career. He speaks, acts, and moves as though he is an immensely important man, and even begins to believe in this illusion himself—taking full credit for Rosie's immense success. It is only later, in retrospect, that he realizes that Rosie was responsible for her own success.

After being released from prison for forging Rosie's signature, Raju reinvents himself once more, this time as a spiritual guide on a **riverbank** by a small village. When he finds that the

villagers' misguided faith in his spiritual powers means that he is well-nourished by the offerings they bring him, without him having to do much, he embraces the role enthusiastically, again dissimulating his true identity. He changes his appearance accordingly—growing his beard and hair long to more convincingly resemble a holy man, all the while keeping his past a secret from the villagers. He takes to uttering “mystifying statements” to the villagers who gather around him every day, and in this way manages to project an aura of wisdom and sainthood that has no basis in reality.

Raju's dissimulation and hypocrisy is not only limited to his work, however. This tendency extends to his personal relationships as well. Raju's hypocrisy in particular becomes apparent when he escorts Marco, the scholar of ancient civilizations who comes to Malgudi to study cave paintings, bringing along his beautiful wife Rosie. On the one hand, Raju plays the part of the consummate tourist guide to Marco, arranging his travels, showing him the sites, and organizing his comfortable stay at Peak House, the house at the top of the Mempi hills near Malgudi where Marco spends some time examining nearby cave paintings. On the other hand, Raju deceives and betrays Marco ruthlessly by courting and successfully seducing his beautiful young wife, Rosie. Under the pretence of entertaining her by showing her the sites while Marco is at work, Raju flatters and courts Rosie, taking advantage of her dissatisfaction with her husband. Raju ends up winning Rosie after Marco abandons her upon discovering her affair with his tourist guide. However, Raju's inability to reign in his deceitful tendencies ultimately ends up destroying his own relationship to Rosie. Jealous of Marco's reappearance in their lives after the publication of Marco's book on ancient civilizations, Raju hides news of Marco from Rosie and lies to her about the correspondence he receives from Marco's lawyers addressed to her.

Raju's hypocrisy and lies ultimately lead to his complete corruption and the destruction of his relationships. This is reflected in the criminal act that Raju commits—when he forges Rosie's signature on a document that Marco's lawyers send to Rosie, in order to procure a jewelry box belonging to her without her knowledge. Ultimately, it is discovery of this deceit by the police—and Raju's subsequent trial and imprisonment—that leads him to lose everything, including his reputation and the love of his life, Rosie.

*The Guide* takes a critical view towards the failings of its protagonist. While Raju's deceptions and exaggerations seem harmless at first, merely a means through which he cleverly reinvents himself time and again, his propensity for deceit ends up infecting all aspects of his existence. In this way, Raju not only corrupts himself, but also destroys his most cherished relationships, and ends up losing everything that he holds dear as a result.



## TRANSFORMATION AND REDEMPTION

In tracing the metamorphosis of Raju—the protagonist of *The Guide*—from shopkeeper to tourist guide to stage manager to holy man,

Narayan's novel delves both into the pitfalls and the redemptive potential of transformation. While Raju's many guises are framed by deceit and illusion, Narayan suggests that throughout these transformations, Raju moves towards fulfilling his destiny, redeeming himself in his final role as a spiritual guide. In this way, the novel also affirms the Hindu principle of *dharma*—understood as a law or principle along which an individual acts out their fate.

Transformation is at the heart of Raju's journey from shopkeeper to holy man. Over the course of the novel, he adopts different identities, slipping in and out of various careers, often dishonestly, in his pursuit of money and prestige. Although Raju adopts many different guises, a common thread underpins his transformations—in one form or another, he always plays the role of “guide,” suggesting that being a guide is his calling. His work showing tourists around **Malgudi** sees him “guiding” visitors through, and to, the town's sites and geography. This is the role Raju plays in relation to Marco, the scholar who visits Malgudi to undertake research, and whom Raju leads to the cave paintings. After Raju betrays Marco by starting an affair with his young and beautiful wife, Rosie, he again takes up the role of a kind of “guide” by managing Rosie's career as a dancer. In orchestrating Rosie's performances and engagements, Raju also contributes to guiding Rosie towards stardom.

Finally, Raju willingly adopts the role of spiritual “guide” foisted upon him by the locals of the small village in which he ends up after his release from prison. Although Raju is far removed from spirituality or mysticism, the villagers do not know this, and blindly put their faith in his spiritual powers. Towards the end of the novel, an American television producer arrives in the small village to make a film about the fast that Raju undertakes to bring about drought-ending rains. The producer asks Raju, “Have you always been a yogi?” and Raju answers, “Yes, more or less.” That the role of “guide”—in one form or another—always frames and underpins Raju's transformations suggests that being a guide is Raju's destined vocation.

Indeed, through his final transformation into a yogi, Raju seems to fulfill the destiny or *dharma* of “guide” in its highest, most noble sense. While Raju is at first reluctant to take on the fast for the rains that the villagers expect him to, he finds that he has no choice but to succumb to their expectations—he simply has no access to food. Finding himself cornered, Raju finally commits to undertaking the fast genuinely, subjecting himself to a great sacrifice and risking his life in the process, all for the purpose of fulfilling the villagers' hopes for rains. Notably, Velan's continued faith in him—even after Raju discloses his full life-story and shares with Velan his history of deceit—leads him

to attempt to live up to Velan's and the villagers' trust in him. By finally submitting to the two-week fast, then, Raju acts for the first time in his life as a “guide” not out of pure self-interest, but for the good of others.

Raju's authentic attempt to “guide” the villagers out of the drought through the act of fasting not only represents him fulfilling his fate in the noblest sense, but it also leads to his redemption. While Raju has spent much of his life deceiving and swindling others under various guises of a guide, this life of deceit is mitigated through the sacrifice he undertakes by fasting. Raju's redemption through this act of sacrifice is suggested in the final image of the novel. A young villager named Velan helps Raju, who is weakened by the fast to the point of being unable to stand in the dry river bed where he holds vigil every day on his own. The last scene shows Raju thinking that he sees rain coming over the hills. While the ending of the novel is ambiguous (the reader does not know whether Raju is hallucinating or whether rain is in fact coming; and the reader is also left in the dark about whether Raju lives or dies), this image of rain suggests a spiritual nourishment or reawakening—indeed, Raju tells Velan that he feels the rain rising in his body. Thus, irrespective of whether or not the rain *does* actually come, Raju's vision of rain in this final scene alludes to the great change that has come over him. In authentically taking on the role of a spiritual guide by undergoing the fast, he fulfills the role of “guide” in its highest sense, and redeems himself in the process.

*The Guide* portrays the journey of a man who, even as he transforms himself often dishonestly, moves towards the fulfillment of his destiny. By finally and authentically taking on the responsibilities of a holy man to help the villagers who have sustained him, Raju acts according to the *dharma* that governs his life: playing the role of “guide” in its most benevolent and selfless sense. In this regard, Raju not only fulfills his destiny, but he also redeems himself through his self-sacrifice.



## GENDER AND FEMINISM

*The Guide* tells the story of Raju, the trickster-charlatan who, in his final reincarnation as a holy man, ends up redeeming himself by undergoing a heroic fast to save Indian villagers from a drought. But while this male character (and occasional narrator) is at the heart of the story, it is the brilliant dancer Rosie/Nalini—Raju's love interest—who steals the show. While various men—including Rosie's first husband Marco, and later her lover Raju—attempt to control Rosie and direct her fate, she proves mightier and more resilient than both, ultimately taking her destiny into her own hands. While mostly told by a male narrator, Narayan's novel can in fact be read as a feminist tract that traces a woman's journey from dependence on men and imprisonment within patriarchal constraints to her transformation into an independent woman who assumes her full powers and thereby

achieves her liberation.

Rosie enters the story as the wife of Marco, the scholar of ancient civilizations who arrives in **Malgudi**, Raju's hometown in southern India, and seeks Raju's help as a tour guide to explore the caves around the town. The extent to which Rosie is constrained by her marriage is revealed in the fact that she is forced to give up her passion—the classical Indian dance practiced by generations of women in her family—under her husband's orders. Rosie makes this sacrifice in exchange for marrying an upper-caste man who can provide her with a comfortable life. As such, Rosie is condemned to spend her time watching her husband pursue his passion—the study of ancient civilizations—while denying her own. Marco's complete preoccupation with his research, as well as his ban on her dancing, leaves Rosie feeling lonely, unloved, and unfulfilled. And yet, as his dependent, she is completely reliant on his material support. Consequently, not only is she unfulfilled and lonely, she is also powerless.

Although Rosie begins to fulfill her dream of becoming a dancer once she begins a relationship with Raju (who recognizes her immense talent when he sees her imitating the movements of a **snake** one day), her new relationship also ultimately leads to her subjugation. At first, Raju's support of Rosie's career provides her with opportunity: she begins to perform publicly as Raju takes on the role of her "dance manager," organizing and arranging shows and performances for her. But as Rosie becomes more successful, Raju increasingly exploits her, taking advantage of her incredible talent and the public's insatiable demand for her performances to enrich himself hugely. He subjects Rosie to a cruel schedule of performances that leave her depleted and unhappy. In this way, Raju treats Rosie as though she were his property—using her to serve the impulses of his greed. Furthermore, as Rosie becomes more popular, Raju grows more jealous, seeking to control her contact with others. He is particularly jealous of the artist friends she likes to spend time with, and comes up with excuses to keep her from them, thus isolating her even further from the few nourishing relationships that sustain her. Moreover, he takes to hiding letters and correspondence addressed to her from Marco and his lawyers, jealous of the reappearance of Rosie's husband in their lives. Raju's desire to control Rosie grows to such a degree that he commits a serious act of deceit as a result: he forges her signature in order to acquire valuable jewelry from her husband, Marco, without informing Rosie. As such, Rosie's relationship with Raju eventually proves to be as limiting and oppressive as her relationship with Marco. With Raju, as with Marco, Rosie finds herself an imprisoned woman.

While both Marco and Raju attempt to control Rosie and to shape her destiny in different ways, she ultimately challenges both men, escaping their clutches to take charge of her own fate. Firstly, she challenges her husband on his ban on her dancing by asserting her right to follow her passion, though

ultimately it leads her nowhere with Marco. She rebels further against him, however, by beginning an affair with Raju—a man who, initially at least, conveys an appreciation for her talent and her art. Rosie further defies social conventions by continuing a relationship with Raju in spite of not being married to him. This is scandalous by the standards of the society in which Rosie lives, as reflected in the reproach that Rosie experiences from Raju's mother, who condemns the relationship, going so far as to move out of her own house in protest. Furthermore, Rosie's huge success as a dancer is largely due to her own powers and talents. While Raju, in his role as her manager, takes credit for the success of Rosie's dance career, he himself later comes to realize and to acknowledge that it is in fact Rosie's own genius as a dancer and devotion to her art that led to her success.

By the end of the novel, Rosie has proven herself to be an independent, resilient, and powerful woman. She is dependent on neither Marco nor Raju, instead maintaining and growing her reputation as a brilliant and successful dancer without the aid or support of any man. As such, the novel can be understood as one that traces a woman's journey of empowerment by following the ways in which Rosie breaks the patriarchal chains that bind her through hard work, resilience, and independence of spirit.



## TRADITION VS. MODERNITY

Narayan's *The Guide* depicts modernization overtaking protagonist-narrator Raju's hometown of **Malgudi** in southern India during the early twentieth century. Not only are new technologies associated with industrialization—such as the **railroad**—introduced during this period, but social relations are also upended as hierarchies of caste and gender are re-negotiated. The novel's attitude towards the relationship between tradition and modernity is complex and ambiguous. These forces are sometimes depicted as in conflict, and sometimes in harmony. As all of the characters grapple with tradition and modernity, *The Guide* suggests that both have their merits, though ultimately the novel implies that there is a particularly special power embedded in tradition.

The coming of modernization is indicated in the novel by the sweeping changes that overtake the town of Malgudi during Raju's childhood. Primary among these changes is the construction of the railroad. As an emblem of modernization, the railroad brings about numerous changes to Malgudi. For one, the railroad opens Malgudi up to a wider world, as people from all parts of India and even further afield begin visiting the town. The railroad also leads to greater economic prosperity. Raju's father, who previously made a living from a modest shop, grows richer when he opens another shop in the newly built railway station. The family, therefore, benefits from the developments that overtake the town. Raju's own move from a shopkeeper (like his father) to a tourist guide after the opening



of the railroad reflects the way in which the railroad leads to greater and more varied opportunities for the townspeople. Raju's work as a tourist guide would not have been possible without the railroad, which brings the visitors who become his clients.

In opening up the town to a wider world, the railroad also reveals the ways in which modernity leads to the re-negotiation of traditional gender and caste hierarchies. One of the people who appears in the town thanks to the railroad is Rosie, wife of Marco—the scholar who arrives in Malgudi to undertake research. In many senses, Rosie represents the ways in which gender and caste hierarchies are being upended in modern times. She is an educated woman, having gone so far in her studies as to gain a master's degree. Furthermore, she is a woman who has married outside of her caste—allying herself to Marco, and later to Raju. Although she does not marry Raju, her relationship to him is unusual not only because they are an unmarried couple—which, by the standards of the time and the society, is scandalous—but because Raju, like Marco, is also of a higher caste.

The tension between Rosie's modern identity and the traditional constraints of the society in which she lives is embodied in the conflict between Rosie and Raju's mother. While Raju's mother has not left the immediate vicinity of her home in decades, she is surprised to see Rosie appear alone one day on her doorstep. "Girls these days!" she tells her. "In our day we wouldn't go to the street corner without an escort." Indeed, when Raju's mother realizes the nature of the relationship between Raju and Rosie, she condemns her son and his lover, not only because of their unmarried state, but also because Rosie belongs to a lower caste than her son.

Rosie's embrace of a modern identity and life is ultimately reflected in the fact that she ends up as an independent woman making a career for herself as a dancer. Unlike a traditional woman, she escapes dependence on men, leaving behind both Marco and Raju. And yet, the art that Rosie practices is the classical art of temple dancing—an ancient art form practiced by generations of women in her family. It is through this art that she achieves her liberation. Indeed, her power as an independent woman and an artist is associated with the traditional "snake dance" that she performs only on rare occasions. As such, Rosie represents a melding of the traditional with the modern: she uses an ancestral art—classical dance—in order to achieve her liberation as a woman. Through the figure of Rosie, the novel suggests that tradition and modernity are not always in conflict, but can also complement one another and work in tandem.

While Rosie represents the melding of the modern and the traditional, Raju's own journey reflects his return to, and embrace of, the traditional. Raju initially rejects the traditions of his family and upbringing. Not only does he neglect his father's occupation by giving up shop-keeping to become a tourist

guide, but he also turns his back on his mother's wishes for him to marry his cousin, instead allying himself with Rosie. The great wealth that Raju accumulates as a result of Rosie's dance career is then used to collect luxuries associated with modernity. Raju and Rosie move into a larger and more modern house than the modest one built by his father, and they travel everywhere by car or by train. As they grow wealthier, therefore, their lifestyle changes to reflect the luxuries of modern life.

And yet, Raju's final transformation into a holy man on the **riverbank** near a small village suggests that he is ultimately drawn back into the traditional. While at first Raju is reluctant to take on this role, he ends up adopting it authentically, as reflected in the fast that he undertakes on behalf of the villagers in order to bring an end to the drought that has been plaguing them. The spiritual transformation that he undergoes as a result—one very closely connected with his adoption of the traditional role of holy man—suggests that the power of tradition is, ultimately, greater than that of modernity.

Narayan's attitude towards the relationship between tradition and modernity in *The Guide* is complex and ambiguous. On the one hand, the novel depicts the forces of tradition and modernity as deeply in conflict. On the other hand, both forces seem to achieve balance in a figure like Rosie, who deploys the traditional art of classical dance—practiced by generations of her family—to achieve her liberation as a modern woman. Raju, however, is drawn back into the traditional in spite of himself—ending his life as a holy man providing spiritual guidance to destitute villagers. The spiritual transformation that Raju undergoes in this traditional role suggests that the novel does ultimately privilege tradition (even if only slightly) over modernity.



## GREED AND MATERIALISM

Raju, the protagonist of Narayan's *The Guide*, is deeply motivated by his desire for material wealth. Living in the town of **Malgudi** in southern India, he constantly reinvents himself—taking on the role of a tourist guide and dance manager—in his pursuit of money. However, the novel ultimately suggests that it is only when Raju gives up his greed and materialism entirely in his final role as a holy man that he achieves something of the spiritual fulfillment that eluded him in his previous life.

Raju's obsession with material wealth becomes manifest when he leaves behind his father's **railway** shop and transforms himself into a tourist guide, taking advantage of the many tourists that the railway brings to Malgudi. In recounting his career as a tourist guide to the young villager Velan, Raju explains that his primary motivation when seeking out new customers was money. Raju immediately sizes up arriving tourists according to their means, and exploits them

accordingly to ensure for himself the greatest monetary gain possible.

Likewise, in taking on the role of Rosie's dance manager, Raju becomes obsessed with making more and more money. Realizing the immense draw that Rosie has on the public, he exploits her talents, arranging endless performances and shows that enrich him further, completely neglecting Rosie's own needs in the process. Raju's greed corrupts him. He comes to treat Rosie as a means to end; she is primarily an instrument through which he can enrich himself. This is reflected in the most serious act of betrayal he commits, when he forges Rosie's signature in order to procure a box of valuable jewelry from her estranged husband Marco. Furthermore, while Raju grows rich from Rosie's performances, he squanders the money on a large house, servants, and a lavish lifestyle that nonetheless do not bring him satisfaction, given that he continues to be consumed with enriching himself further.

In his final act of reincarnation, Raju reinvents himself as a holy man in the small village where he finds himself after his release from prison, taking on the role imposed on him by a young villager named Velan. Raju's motivations in adopting this persona are initially also motivated by greed. At a key moment in the novel, in which he considers running away from the village, Raju decides that he will play the part of spiritual guide primarily because it is lucrative: he does not have to work, and can rely on the offerings that the villagers bring to him to sustain himself. In this way, Raju's greed motivates him to exploit the villagers' trust in him in order to further his own self-interest.

Ultimately, however, Raju's play-acting as a spiritual guide actually compels him to give up his greed and materialism. When Raju finds himself accidentally drawn into a two-week fast by the villagers, which is intended to bring about **rains** and relieve them of the drought under which they have been suffering, Raju has no choice but to give up even the most basic necessities, including food. By agreeing to undertake the fast, Raju thus sacrifices his own comfort and health for the sake of the villagers. While the novel is ambiguous about whether Raju actually survives the fast or not, the image of him on the brink of death as he goes to the river to hold vigil at the end of the novel represents the moment in which he achieves his most noble and purest identity. By acting out of benevolence towards others, rather than out of self-interest and greed, he seems to achieve something of a spiritual redemption—as reflected in the vision of rain that he sees at the end of the novel.

Throughout *The Guide*, Raju's actions are largely motivated by greed and materialism. These impulses prove to be self-perpetuating, as they lead Raju only into greater greed and self-interest. It is only when he is forced to give up all material comforts and necessities—including food—that Raju seems to find spiritual satisfaction and redemption. In this way, the novel

seems to privilege selflessness, generosity, and benevolence as the only meaningful values through which one can achieve fulfillment and peace.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### THE RAILWAY

The railway, which comes to Raju's hometown of **Malgudi** when he is still a child, represents modernization and industrialization. Raju and his family watch in awe as construction workers appear to build the tracks and the railway station which is located right across from Raju's family home. On the day the railway is completed and the station is officially opened, the town is given a holiday in celebration. Indeed, the construction of the railway line to Malgudi changes the villagers' lives in many ways. Raju's family, for instance, grows wealthier as a result of the second shop that Raju's father opens in the station. Raju's own career prospects are transformed by the railway, when visitors who arrive by train become the customers that he leads as a tourist guide. The railway not only improves the financial prospects of Raju's family; it also opens the family and the town's inhabitants to a broader world beyond Malgudi—exposing them to people from all over India, and from different walks of life. As such, in symbolizing modernization and industrialization, the depiction of the railway in the novel alludes to the ways in which these forces have the capacity to transform people's material, social, and cultural prospects.



### THE SERPENT

The serpent, closely associated with Rosie, symbolizes feminine power and energy in the novel. The animal first makes an appearance when Rosie asks to see a dancing cobra, and Raju, playing the tourist guide, duly locates one for her on the outskirts of **Malgudi**. Rosie is fascinated by the cobra as it rises from the ground to the tune of a flute, and imitates its movement. It is at this moment that Raju realizes that Rosie is amongst the greatest dancers he has ever seen—Rosie's imitation of the snake seems to reveal her full feminine as well as artistic power, and Raju is completely captivated. Towards the end of novel, Rosie—now the famous dancer Nalini—performs her “snake dance” before an auditorium packed with a thousand spectators. She rarely performs the dance, which is special because of the incredible dexterity that it requires. Again, as Raju watches her, he is completely captivated by the beauty and power of her snake-mimicry, as are the other spectators in the auditorium. The

close link established between the serpent and Rosie, therefore, indicates that the serpent represents Rosie's energy and power not only as a dancer, but as a woman. By the end of the novel, after all, Rosie looms larger than both the men—Marco Polo and Raju—who have tried to contain and control her. As such, the sliding, dexterous movements of the snake seem to point to the suppleness and dexterity of Rosie's own feminine and artistic powers.



## WATER

Water is an integral part of Raju's final incarnation as a holy man, or "swami," in the small village of Malgam. He ends up here after his release from prison, and as such the water associated with his new life represents his purification and redemption. It is by the river that Raju meets Velan, the villager who innocently puts his faith in his healing powers. The significance of water as a symbol of purification and redemption becomes apparent towards the end of the novel, when a drought afflicts the villagers, who then draw Raju into a long fast in the hope that his sacrifice will bring about rains. Raju, who at first reluctantly, and then willingly, accepts the responsibility, stands in the river each day during the fast to hold vigil, chanting incantations. For the first time in his life, Raju acts out of self-sacrifice, on behalf of others, not out of self-interest. As such, his immersion in the river signals the transformation and purification that he undergoes in his final role as a holy man. The significance of water as a symbol for redemption is further reinforced in the final image of the novel, which depicts a famished and weakened Raju, possibly on the brink of death, standing in the river with the help of Velan, perceiving rain coming over the hills. Although Narayan doesn't confirm or deny whether rain does actually arrive, Raju's perception of water coming from the sky is significant: whether real or imagined, he feels as though he is about to be drenched in rain, and indeed feels the water in his body, coming up his feet and legs. This imagery of rain suggests that, at the climax of his act of self-sacrifice, Raju is purified and transformed.



## MALGUDI

The fictional town of Malgudi represents India in miniature. Like the country of which it is a part, Malgudi undergoes tremendous changes, including the arrival of industrialization and modernization, as symbolized by the **railway** line that is newly built there. Furthermore, it is a microcosm of the society at large, as it is home to people who occupy various social and economic positions. The Sait, for instance, is clearly wealthier than Raju and his family, while the poor people who occupy the huts outside of town, where Raju takes Rosie to meet the snake charmer, are much poorer, and most likely of low caste. Malgudi's geography also reflects the wider country: the town itself, with its condensed population,

recalls the large urban centers of India, while the beautiful wild landscape that surrounds it, such as that found at Mempi Hills, where Raju takes Marco and Rosie to look at cave paintings, suggests the country's extravagant natural scenery.





## QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *The Guide* published in 1958.

### Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ [..] the villager resumed the study of his face with intense respect. And Raju stroked his chin thoughtfully to make sure that an apostolic beard had not suddenly grown there. It was still smooth.

**Related Characters:** Velan, Raju

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 2

#### Explanation and Analysis


At the beginning of the novel, Raju sits by a riverbank after his release from prison. Velan, a man from the nearby village of Mangal, comes up to Raju and sits near him, looking at him reverentially. Velan's respectful gaze suggests that he attributes special spiritual powers to Raju—which is what prompts the latter to check whether the "apostolic beard" of a holy man has grown on his chin. Indeed, Velan's view of Raju as a holy man is significant, for it portends Raju's spiritual transformation from a deceitful tourist guide to a spiritual "guide" in the highest sense—one who guides others out of suffering.

### Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ Where could he go? He had not trained himself to make a living out of hard work. Food was coming to him unasked now. If he went away somewhere else certainly nobody was going to take the trouble to bring him food in return for just waiting for it.

**Related Characters:** The Villagers, Raju

**Related Themes:**   



**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 24**Explanation and Analysis**

After his release from prison, Raju sits by a riverbank, reflecting on his future. He must decide on where he will go and what he will do now. The villagers from a nearby village have mistaken him for a holy man, and generously bring him offerings of food to show their reverence and gratitude for him. Raju ultimately decides to stay and play the role of holy man that the villagers have cast him in not out of benevolence, but out of greed. He considers that simply by staying where he is and doing very little, the villagers will continue to feed him for free. Raju's motivations here reveal the essential greed that defines his personality: he is a protagonist who, throughout most of his life, acts out of self-interest.

**Chapter 3 Quotes**


☝☝ One fine day, beyond the tamarind tree the station building was ready. The steel tracks gleamed in the sun; the signal posts stood with their red and green stripes and their colorful lamps; and our world was neatly divided into this side of the railway line and that side.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Velan, Raju's Mother, Raju's Father**Related Themes:** **Related Symbols:**  **Page Number:** 27**Explanation and Analysis**

Telling his life story to the villager Velan, Raju recounts the most sensational event of his childhood: the construction of the railway line in the town of his birth, Malgudi. The railway heralds modernization and progress not only for Raju's family, but for the whole town—leading to economic prosperity and an opening up of the town to the wider world beyond. The railway's transformative effects are reflected in the color imagery used to describe it in the above passage: the tracks that “gleam” in the sun and the signal posts with “their red and green stripes and their colorful lamps” suggest that something vibrant, new and dynamic has arrived.


**Chapter 4 Quotes**

☝☝ Raju himself was not certain why he had advised that, and so he added, “If you do it you will know why.” The essence of sainthood seemed to lie in one's ability to utter mystifying statements.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), The Villagers**Related Themes:**    **Related Symbols:** **Page Number:** 38**Explanation and Analysis**

At the temple by the riverbank, where Raju has taken up residence as a holy man after his release from prison, villagers from a nearby village gather around him to listen to his discourse. Raju, who is only playing the part of a holy man but actually has no idea what he is doing, instructs the villagers to recollect everything they've said since daybreak. This is a nonsensical command. In the above quotation, Raju himself wonders why he had advised the villagers to undertake this task. This moment reveals Raju in the midst of his deception and dishonesty. He manages to deceive the villagers by uttering “mystifying statements” that sound profound and seem to confirm his status as a wise or holy man, but these statements are actually empty.

☝☝ Raju soon realized that his spiritual status would be enhanced if he grew a beard and long hair to fall on his nape. A clean-shaven, close-haired saint was an anomaly.

**Related Characters:** The Villagers, Raju**Related Themes:**    **Related Symbols:** **Page Number:** 39**Explanation and Analysis**



After arriving on the riverbank of a small village shortly after his release from prison, and being mistaken for a holy man by local villagers, Raju resolves to change his appearance so as to look more like an “authentic” holy man. His decision to do so reflects his penchant for disguise as well as his hypocrisy—two things that abound throughout the course of the book, regardless of where he's living and what he's doing. At this point, Raju is a newly released


convict, and yet he keeps this a secret from the villagers, exploiting their benevolence (they bring him offerings of food) by aiding and abetting their misconceptions about him.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ I pointed out to him something as the greatest, the highest, the only one in the world. I gave statistics out of my head. I mentioned a relic as belonging to the thirteenth century before Christ or the thirteenth century after Christ, according to the mood of the hour.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Velan

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 



**Page Number:** 43


### Explanation and Analysis

Telling the villager Velan about his career as a tourist guide in his hometown of Malgudi, Raju confesses that he often made up facts and stories about the sites he showed tourists. Raju's tendency to resort to lies suggests that he has neither principles nor integrity—he simply acts according to his whims, and is often motivated to take advantage of clients' gullibility so as to also exploit their pockets. Raju's treatment of the tourists alludes to his penchant for deceit and hypocrisy, as well as to his greed and materialism.

☝ The man pulled out his gourd flute and played on it shrilly, and the cobra raised itself and darted hither and thither and swayed...[Rosie] stretched out her arm slightly and swayed it in imitation of the movement; she swayed her whole body to the rhythm—for just a second, but that was sufficient to tell me what she was, the greatest dancer of the century.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Marco Polo, Rosie / Nalini

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 51

## Explanation and Analysis

Rosie, the young and beautiful woman who has arrived in Malgudi with her husband Marco Polo, asks to see a dancing cobra. Raju, who has been hired by Marco to guide him around the ancient sites of the town, duly obliges. He finds a snake charmer in a remote part of town whom he takes Rosie to visit while her husband is busy studying an ancient site.


This is a significant moment in the novel, for it is the first time that Rosie's full artistic powers are revealed. Rosie's imitation of the snake shows her to be a brilliant dancer—she is so skilled that Raju is convinced she is the “greatest dancer of the century.” Furthermore, Rosie's power both as an artist and as a woman is closely associated with the snake here. Not only does Raju recognize Rosie's artistic talents through her imitation of the snake's movements, he is also beguiled and seduced by her feminine power and magnetism.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ [...] he suddenly noticed at the end of the year that the skies never dimmed with cloud. The summer seemed to continue. Raju inquired, “Where are the rains?”

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), The Villagers

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 70


### Explanation and Analysis

Many months, or perhaps years, have passed since Raju's release from prison. He has established himself as a holy man on the banks of a river, where he is visited and looked after by villagers eager for his spiritual aid. Raju's realization that the seasonal rains have not arrived that year marks the beginning of the drought that afflicts the villagers—the drought threatens their crops and cattle. But the lack of rains can also be read to indicate the spiritual “drought” or emptiness under which Raju himself lives: he has led a life of deceit and greed, and even in his role as a holy man, he continues to deceive the villagers by not disclosing his true history, and exploiting their generosity so as to sustain himself.

☝ Did they expect him to starve for fifteen days and stand in knee-deep water for eight hours? He sat up.

**Related Characters:** Velan's Brother, The Villagers, Raju

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 85

### Explanation and Analysis


Velan's brother has jumbled a message from Raju to the villagers, and this has led to the profound misunderstanding among the villagers that Raju has accepted to undergo a two-week fast so as bring about rains to alleviate the drought under which they suffer. Later that day, Raju suddenly realizes the enormity of the task that has been placed—accidentally—on his shoulders. Raju clearly does not want to “starve for fifteen days and stand in knee-deep” water for hours a day—after all, he's maintained his image as a holy man primarily so that he can enjoy the surplus of food the reverent villagers gift him on the daily. His shock and reluctance in facing the hardship to which he would be subjected suggest that Raju always thinks about his comfort and convenience first. Here, he thinks about his own suffering, rather than the villagers', who are, in fact, already suffering and starving because of the drought.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

☝ I was accepted by Marco as a member of the family. From guiding tourists I seemed to have come to a sort of concentrated guiding of a single family.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Rosie / Nalini, Marco Polo

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 88

### Explanation and Analysis


Marco Polo, a scholar of ancient civilizations, has arrived in Malgudi to study ancient sites, and has employed Raju as his guide. While Marco accepts Raju “as a member of the family,” Raju is in fact busy carrying on an affair with Marco's young and beautiful wife, Rosie, who has also arrived in the

town. Raju's hypocrisy and deceit, therefore, are revealed in his double-dealing with Marco. Raju has no problem playing the consummate host and helper to Marco's face—to the point where Marco seems to accept him as “a member of the family”—while betraying him behind his back.

☝ Rosie was lying on her bed with eyes shut. (Was she in a faint? I wondered for a second.) I had never seen her in such a miserable condition before. He was sitting in his chair, elbow on the table, his chin on his fist. I had never seen him so vacant before.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Rosie / Nalini, Marco Polo

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 105


### Explanation and Analysis

Raju has been carrying on an affair with Rosie, the wife of the scholar of ancient civilizations who has arrived in Malgudi and hired Raju's services as a tourist guide. In this passage, Raju arrives at Peak House—the house at the top of Mempi Hills where the couple has been staying—and realizes that something is terribly amiss. The scene that Raju stumbles upon when he opens the door to Rosie and Marco's room suggests the betrayal that both Raju and Rosie have participated in has finally brought about destruction. Raju's deceitful actions—as well as Rosie's—have consequences, something which Raju in particular seems to be in denial about.

☝ “[...] I followed him, day after day, like a dog—waiting on his grace. He ignored me totally. I could never have imagined that one human being could ignore the presence of another human being so completely.”

**Related Characters:** Rosie / Nalini (speaker), Raju, Marco Polo

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 118



**Explanation and Analysis**

Rosie, who shows up alone at Raju's house one day, tells Raju about the events that preceded her husband Marco's abandonment of her. At Peak House, Rosie revealed to Marco that she has been having an affair with Raju, the tourist guide he has hired to show them the sites of Malgudi. Full of a sense of guilt over the affair, Rosie is repentant. However, her husband refuses to accept her repentance, and punishes her by completely ignoring her. Marco's silent treatment of Rosie reflects his rigidity and cruelty. This treatment also reflects a pattern in Rosie's life: in some form or another, she always finds herself oppressed and treated badly by the men in her life.

**Chapter 8 Quotes**

☝☝ "You are not of our family? Are you of our clan?" He again waited for her to answer and answered himself. "No. Are you of our caste? No. Our class? No. Do we know you? No. Do you belong to this house? No. In that case, why are you here? After all, you are a dancing girl. We do not admit them in our families. Understand?"

**Related Characters:** Raju, Raju's Uncle (speaker), Raju's Mother, Rosie / Nalini

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 133


**Explanation and Analysis**

Raju's uncle shows up at the house Raju shares with his mother, in order to clear out Rosie, who has taken up residence there after being abandoned by her husband Marco. The rhetorical questions with which Raju's uncle bombards Rosie point to the conflict between tradition and modernity in the novel. In pointedly calling attention to Rosie's low caste and poor economic and social status, Raju's uncle affirms traditional hierarchies of caste and social division. Rosie's presence in the house violates these traditional hierarchies, and neither the uncle nor Raju's mother are happy about these transgressions.

☝☝ I dressed myself soberly for the part in a sort of rough-spun silk shirt and an upper cloth and a handspun and handwoven dhoti, and I wore rimless glasses—a present from Marco at one of our first meetings. I wore a wristwatch—all this in my view lent such weight to what I said that they had to listen to me respectfully. I too felt changed; I had ceased to be the old Railway Raju.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Rosie / Nalini

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 139

**Explanation and Analysis**

Rosie has been practicing her dancing for months in Raju's house, where she has taken up residence, in preparation for her public debut as a dancer. To help her, Raju adopts the role of her promoter and manager—yet another type of "guide." In taking on this new persona, Raju changes his appearance in order to play the part more convincingly. This transformation points to Raju's talent for disguise and dishonesty: just as Raju had bluffed his way into a career as the tourist guide "Railway Raju," here he bluffs his way into a new career as Rosie's manager.

**Chapter 9 Quotes**

☝☝ I silently fretted. I liked her to be happy—but only in my company. This group of miscellaneous art folk I didn't quite approve.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Rosie / Nalini

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 149

**Explanation and Analysis**

After her public debut as a dancer, Rosie/Nalini achieves enormous success. In his role as her manager (as well as her lover), Raju has a strong hand in directing Rosie/Nalini's career. But Raju is jealous, especially of the art friends that Rosie likes to spend time with. Raju's jealousy—as well as his attempts to curtail Rosie's freedom—point to the increasingly oppressive attitude that he takes towards her. Like her husband Marco, Raju also ends up attempting to limit and to constrain Rosie's freedom.

☝☝ It seemed absurd that we should earn less than the maximum we could manage. My philosophy was that while it lasted the maximum money had to be squeezed out. We needed all the money in the world.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Rosie / Nalini

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 153

### Explanation and Analysis

Raju, who has been managing Rosie/Nalini's immensely successful dance career, has a discussion with her one day in which she expresses dissatisfaction over her relentless schedule. Raju's greed and materialism is evident in his conclusion that he and Rosie needed to earn "the maximum they could manage." Of course, it is Rosie doing the actual hard work, not Raju, given that it is Rosie who must spend hours on stage each day and countless more hours practicing her dancing. Raju's focus on money thus reveals the extent to which he has come to view Rosie as a means to his own financial success. He values her primarily as a money-making instrument—not someone he loves and cares deeply about—and therefore reveals his greed and materialism in the process.

☝ [..] I carried [the book] to my most secret, guarded place in the house—the liquor chest, adjoining the card room, the key of which I carried next to my heart—stuffed the volume out of sight, and locked it up. Nalini never went near it. I did not mention the book to her.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Marco Polo , Rosie / Nalini

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 156

### Explanation and Analysis

Rosie's long-estranged husband Marco sends a book to Raju, who is now acting as Rosie/Nalini's manager. The book is a product of Marco's research trip to Malgudi, a trip during which Raju had acted as tourist guide to Marco, and also began his affair with Rosie. Raju, who is afraid that Rosie might still have feelings for her husband, decides to hide the book from her. Raju's deceit here reveals that his lies and his hypocrisy have begun to infect his most intimate relationships, as well. Raju wants to keep Rosie close to him by maintaining control over her, and his decision to hide the book from her reflects this desire for control—it is a means through which Raju hopes to keep Rosie estranged from her husband and thus kept squarely in his own control.

☝ I found a scrap of paper and made a careful trial of Rosie's signature. I had her sign so many checks and receipts each day that I was very familiar with it.

Then I carefully spread out the application form and wrote on the indicated line: "Rosie, Nalini."

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Marco Polo , Rosie / Nalini

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 164

### Explanation and Analysis

Raju, seeking to procure a box of valuable jewelry belonging to Rosie from Marco's lawyers, decides to forge her signature on the form sent to him by the lawyers, rather than disclose the letter to Rosie. This act represents the climax of Raju's deviousness. His penchant for deceit has reached a point where he betrays the love of his life, Rosie, and therefore risks destroying his most cherished relationship. Raju's obsession with the jewelry also reflects his longstanding greed and materialism—he does not want to share news of the letter from the lawyers with Rosie, but he does not want to give up the chance to procure Rosie's valuable jewelry.

## Chapter 10 Quotes

☝ I was now a sort of hanger-on in the house; ever since she had released me from police custody, the mastery had passed to her. I fretted inwardly at the thought of it. When the first shock of the affair had subsided, she became hardened. She never spoke to me except as to a tramp she had salvaged.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Marco Polo , Rosie / Nalini

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 173

### Explanation and Analysis

After Raju is arrested by the police for forging Rosie's signature on forms sent by Marco's lawyers, Rosie raises the bail necessary to have Raju released from prison. This signifies a turning point in the relationship between Raju and Rosie: when he returns home, he realizes that he has lost all of his power—Rosie is now the one in charge. He is suddenly her dependent. This transformation in their relationship also marks the beginning of Rosie's assumption




of her own power as an independent woman; for the first time, she takes complete control of her own affairs, as well as Raju's.

☝ I felt like telling Mani, "Be careful. She'll lead you on before you know where you are, and then you will find yourself in my shoes all of a sudden! Beware the snake woman!" I knew my mind was not working either normally or fairly. I knew I was growing jealous of her self-reliance. But I forgot for the moment that she was doing it all for my sake.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Mani, Rosie / Nalini

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 176

### Explanation and Analysis

After Rosie raises bail to have Raju temporarily released from prison, she takes up her dance career again in order to raise enough funds to help Raju contest the charges brought against him by Marco for his forgery of her signature. Mani, Raju's secretary, now acts as Rosie's right-hand man in helping her organize her dance engagements. Raju's thoughts on Rosie's self-reliance here reveal the depth of his selfishness, as well as his lack of accountability. Raju seems to blame his troubles on Rosie, as suggested in the warning he wants to give Mani, when in fact he is in trouble because of his own deceitful and dishonest actions. In referring to Rosie as a "snake woman," Raju seems to attribute a dark, evil power to her. Rosie is indeed powerful, as suggested in her self-reliance, but her power is benevolent: she works hard so as to help Raju defend himself against Marco. Raju seems to overlook this, at least in the moment, forgetting that she is working for his "sake."

☝ But on Friday and Saturday I turned the last page of the Hindu with trembling fingers—and the last column in its top portion always displayed the same block, Nalini's photograph, the name of the institution where she was performing, and the price of tickets. Now at this corner of South India, now there, next week in Ceylon, and another week in Bombay or Delhi. Her empire was expanding rather than shrinking.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Rosie / Nalini

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 181-182

### Explanation and Analysis

In prison, where he is serving a two-year sentence for forging Rosie's signature in an effort to obtain her jewelry, Raju comes across news of Rosie/Nalini in the newspapers. Rosie's increasing success and reputation—which she is achieving without Raju's help—confirms the fact that she has attained her full powers as an independent woman, one who is in complete control of her destiny. Moreover, while Rosie goes from accomplishment to accomplishment, Raju sits in prison, his reputation and his life in tatters. The contrasting fates of Raju and Rosie point to the massive gulf that has opened up between the two characters, as it is Raju who is now confirmed as weak and impotent.

## Chapter 11 Quotes

☝ Raju asked, "Now you have heard me fully?" [...] "Yes, Swami."

Raju was taken aback at still being addressed as "Swami." "What do you think of it?"

Velan looked quite pained at having to answer such a question. "I don't know why you tell me all this, Swami. It's very kind of you to address at such length your humble servant."

**Related Characters:** Velan, Raju (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 184

### Explanation and Analysis

Raju has just finished telling the villager Velan the story of his life, disclosing fully his history of deceit and deception. He expects that Velan will be horrified by his disclosure. However, Velan's attitude towards Raju doesn't change—he addresses him with the same respect he has always shown him, and refers to him with the respectful term "Swami," or religious teacher.

That the villager's faith and trust in Raju remains unshaken, in spite of his discovery about Raju's past, is significant, as this suggests that Velan believes that Raju's spiritual powers are so innate that his past misdeeds are irrelevant. Furthermore, Velan's continued faith puts Raju under pressure to go through with the fast that the villagers expect him to undertake. Raju is thus forced to make a moral

choice: either to live up to the faith and trust that Velan (and the villagers) put in him, or to break their trust.

“Will you tell us something about your early life?”

“What do you want me to say?”

“Er—for instance, have you always been a yogi?”

“Yes; more or less.”

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    



**Page Number:** 193


### Explanation and Analysis

As reports of the fast that Raju is undertaking on behalf of the drought-stricken villagers spread in the news, an American TV producer shows up at the riverbank where Raju lives to interview him. The answer that Raju gives to the producer’s question is significant, because it suggests that he has always been a “yogi,” or a guide, in some sense or another. Raju goes from being a tourist guide to a dance manager to a spiritual guide—all careers that involve “guiding” others in some sense. His answer to the producer’s question, therefore, suggests that a kind of destiny or dharma has governed his life: he was destined to play the role of guide, and has therefore done so, in some form or another, from the beginning.

“The morning sun was out by now; a great shaft of light illuminated the surroundings. It was difficult to hold Raju on his feet, as he had a tendency to flop down. They held him as if he were a baby. Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said, “Velan, it’s raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs—” He sagged down.

**Related Characters:** Raju (speaker), Velan

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 196

### Explanation and Analysis

On the last day of the fast Raju undertakes to bring relief to drought-stricken villagers, he is so weak he can barely stand on his feet—Velan and another villager have to help Raju reach the river to hold vigil. Raju’s assertion that it is raining in the hills, as well as his feeling that rain is coming up his body, is deeply significant. While it is not clear whether Raju is hallucinating or not, his prediction of rain alludes to his spiritual redemption and purification. Raju’s journey as a holy man has led him, finally, to act out of benevolence for others, rather than out of self-interest. As such, his feeling that it is raining alludes to the spiritual transformation he has undergone, as a result of the sacrifice he makes on behalf of the villagers. Although this ambiguous ending of the novel doesn’t make clear whether Raju survives the fast or not, it implies that his sacrifice has been huge, and that therefore he is redeemed as a result.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1

Sitting on a granite slab by a **river**, Raju is approached by a stranger, who looks up at him reverentially. Slightly disconcerted by the stranger's gaze, Raju nonetheless invites him to sit. Raju asks where the stranger comes from, and the stranger tells him that he is from a nearby village, Mangal, located across the river bank. Raju enjoys the stranger's talk, considering that he has been all alone in this place for a day. Again noting the stranger's respectful gaze, he strokes his chin, wondering whether "an apostolic beard" has sprouted there.

Raju's musings on his facial hair lead him back to his last visit to a barber for a shave, which took place two days earlier. To Raju's chagrin, the barber, whose shop is located close to the prison gates, had correctly guessed that Raju had just been released from prison. He also guessed that Raju had not committed a serious offence like murder or rape, but rather a petty one of cheating, and that he had not been in prison for a long time. When the barber asked Raju what he intended to do next, Raju said he didn't know—though he must go somewhere.

On the **river** bank, Raju finds the stranger still seated on the steps below him, looking at him with devotion. Raju asks him irritably why he looks at Raju in this way. Raju is tempted to confess to the villager that he is here on the river bank because he has nowhere else to go, but he is worried that he will offend the villager if he mentions the word "jail." Before he has a chance to speak, however, the villager tells Raju that he has a problem. Raju encourages him to share it.

Before the stranger, whose name is Velan, shares his problem, the narrative jumps forward to Raju telling Velan his life story. His troubles began, he says, when he met Rosie, a woman who, in spite of the exotic name she went by, was an Indian dancer. At the first opportunity he found, Raju told Rosie that she was a great dancer who fostered India's cultural traditions.

*That the novel opens on a riverbank is significant, given that the river (and water more generally) is used symbolically to allude to Raju's spiritual state. Indeed, there are already indications that Raju is undergoing some kind of transformation. The stranger who looks up reverently at Raju clearly mistakes him for some kind of a holy man, and this foreshadows Raju's forthcoming spiritual transformation into a genuine holy man.*



*This flashback to the haircut at the barber reveals that Raju, in fact, has a dark secret—he has committed a crime, although the reader is not told exactly what it is. Furthermore, the conversation at the barber's reveals that Raju is at a point in his life where he is unmoored and unsettled; after his release from prison, he must find a new path forward.*



*The villager's attitude of devotion and respect towards Raju is ironic—given that Raju is in fact not a holy man or a saint, but a newly released convict. This disconnect between what Raju appears to be, and who he actually is, calls attention to the gap between illusion and reality—a recurrent theme in the novel.*



*The abrupt jump to Raju's own life story emphasizes that Raju—like Velan, who is seeking his help—has had troubles of his own. In Raju's narration, Rosie clearly plays a very important part, given that Raju associates his troubles with her. Rosie's "exotic" and non-traditional name—which is not Indian—alludes to the way that she straddles the divide between tradition and modernity.*



Raju flatters and praises Rosie's talents whenever he finds the opportunity and whenever they are out of range of her husband's hearing. Her husband, in contrast to Rosie, is grotesque, always dressed like a man about to undertake an expedition—which prompts Raju, upon meeting him for the first time in the **railway** station, to refer to him as Marco Polo.

Raju says that he was fated to become a guide. As a child, he had grown up in a small house opposite the **railway** station of **Malgudi**, in a house built by his father long before trains arrived in the town.

Raju's father made a living from a small shop he built on the premises of the house, around which peasants and drivers of bullock wagons were always gathered. When his father went inside the house to eat lunch every day, Raju would take his place in the shop. Each morning, after drinking the buffalo milk warmed for him by his mother, Raju would find his father waiting for him on the *pyol*, or stoop, of the house, ready to commence giving Raju lessons on the Tamil alphabet and arithmetic. To Raju's relief, the lessons inevitably ended with the arrival of the first customer at the shop, and he would immediately go off to play under the shade of a tamarind tree across the road.

Back on the **riverbank**, Velan is seated on the steps that lead down to the river, telling Raju that he has a problem. Raju has felt important ever since this man gazed up at him. He tells Velan, in a sudden fit of sagacity, to show him a person without a problem, and he will in turn show him a perfect world. He then tells a story of a woman who went crying to the Buddha, clutching a dead baby in her arms. The Buddha tells her to go into every home in the city and find one where death is unknown. Raju adds that if Velan can show him a single home without a problem, he can show him the way to find a solution to all problems.

*Raju's flattery of Rosie in spite of her status as a married woman points to his dubious morals; clearly, he has no qualms about overstepping the bounds of propriety with Rosie behind Marco's back. This also points to Raju's propensity for deceit.*



*Raju's statement that he was fated to become a guide points to the role that destiny, or dharma, plays in the novel, particularly in the unfolding of Raju's own life. Raju seems to follow a preordained path. Raju's remark that he grew up in a house before the arrival of the railway in Malgudi indicates that Raju's early childhood took place before the arrival of industrialization and modernization in the town.*



*The occupation of Raju's father as a small shopkeeper suggests that the family lives modestly—although all their needs are met through the father's business. Raju's own childhood seems to reflect the way in which the family exists between tradition and modernity. On the one hand, even as a child, Raju must already work helping his father at the shop. On the other hand, the father's insistence on giving Raju morning lessons suggests that education—a marker of modernity—is also important to the family. Raju's father wants his son to be educated, but the education he provides him with is clearly rudimentary, as indicated in the fact that Raju is released to play with the arrival of the father's first customer.*



*In making profound statements to Velan about the universality of people's problems, and in referencing the Buddha, Raju seems to be taking on the part of a wise holy man that Velan is projecting onto him. But the motivation behind Raju's wise statements seems to be self-interest: he clearly enjoys the way that Raju venerates him, and makes him feel important. Raju's own posture of superior wisdom is also ironic, given that he himself is confronting a major problem for which he as yet has no solution—he has been released from prison, but doesn't know where he will go or what he will do.*



Velan, impressed by the weightiness of Raju's statements, tells him that the youngest daughter of his late father's third wife, for whom he acts as a guardian, refuses to accept his plans for her marriage—Velan wants her to marry his cousin's son. He is at a loss over what to do with the girl, and asks Raju for counsel. Raju instructs him to bring her to see him. In gratitude, Velan reaches down to touch Raju's feet, but Raju recoils, telling him that it is only God who is worthy of such prostration.

After Velan leaves, Raju sits watching the **river** for a long time and counting the stars. He has a fantasy that, by charting the stars, he will become a famous night guide for the skies. However, he soon finds himself muddled and exhausted by the task and lays down to sleep.

The next morning, Raju awakens to find Velan standing with his sister, a fourteen year old girl. Raju, still groggy from sleep, finds that he is not quite ready to take charge of the world's affairs, and he directs Velan and the girl to wait for him in the hall of the temple by the **river**. When he goes to meet them again, he finds that Velan has brought him a basket of food. Raju, who can use the food, welcomes this.

Nonetheless, Raju takes the basket and places it at the foot of a stone image of a god in the temple, saying that they will eat the remnant only after the god has taken his fill. He begins telling a story of a man named Devaka who, in ancient times, begged for alms at the temple gate, but would always put offerings given to him at the feet of a god first. Halfway through the story, Raju realizes he can't remember the point or the ending of the story, and he lapses into silence, while Velan waits patiently. Raju turns and strides to the river step, and Velan and his sister follow.

*Velan's difficulty with a recalcitrant younger half-sister, who refuses to accept the match he has made for her, points to the theme of gender and conflicts over gender relations as a central theme of the novel. The rebellious young sister foreshadows Rosie, the novel's heroine, who also often acts outside of the bounds of her prescribed gender role. Raju's rejection of Velan's gesture of respect and gratitude suggests that Raju—who is only play-acting the part of a wise man, after all—is aware that he does not deserve the respect that Velan shows him.*



*Raju's act of looking at the river is significant, given that water in the novel is a symbol of Raju's purification and redemption. As such, his preoccupation with the river here suggests the beginnings of this process of purification. Furthermore, his fantasy about becoming a famous night guide for the skies foreshadows his role, at the end of the novel, as a spiritual guide who sacrifices himself for the sake of bringing rains from the skies to relieve the drought-stricken villagers. As such, by the end of the novel, Raju does become a "a famous [...] guide for the skies" in a sense.*



*Raju clearly has set events in motion without being quite ready to deal with their consequences. Velan's presence with his sister even before Raju wakes alludes to the way in which Raju's life slowly begins to be invaded by others. The food that Velan brings Raju as a gift of gratitude, however, indicates that Raju can also benefit from Velan's presence in his life and space.*



*Raju play-acts when he tells Velan that they must wait for the god to eat his fill. Knowing that Velan believes him to be a holy man, Raju dissimulates in such a way so as to confirm, rather than correct, Velan's mistaken impression. And yet, Raju's performance is not foolproof, as suggested by the fact that he loses the most important thread of the story that he begins to tell Velan and his sister about Devaka.*



Raju remembers being back in **Malgudi**, his mother telling him stories as they waited for his father to close his shop. Raju's mother would send her son out to see if his father—who enjoyed the company of his late-night customers—could be convinced to turn in. Inevitably, the father would tell Raju to tell his mother not to wait for him, but to leave some food out. Raju and his mother would then eat dinner, and Raju would lie down, cozy with his mother beside him, and listen to her stories about a man called Devaka, falling asleep before his mother was even through the beginning of the story.

*Raju's memories of listening to his mother tell stories about Devaka evoke the warm, close relationship that Raju shared with her as a child. This vision of closeness both foreshadows, and stands in contrast with the conflicted relationship that Raju will in fact develop with her in adulthood. Furthermore, Raju's memory of his mother here suggests the way in which Raju continues to be haunted by his past. Although he is pretending to be, and acting as though, he were a new person (a holy man), he cannot reinvent himself completely, as fragments from his previous life continue to bubble up in his mind. This moment also explains why Raju can't remember the point of the Devaka story—he always fell asleep immediately.*



On the **riverbank**, Raju is still sitting on the steps with Velan and his sister patiently waiting for him on a lower step. Raju is irritated by them; he has his own problems to think about and wishes he were alone. He tells Velan he will not think of his problems now, but only when the time is right for it. When Velan rises to go, Raju tells him he needs to give the matter some thought. He suddenly finds himself asking, "Have I been in prison or in some sort of transmigration?" Velan seems relieved and happy that Raju has spoken so much, and states that the course of things is pre-determined just as the course of a river is pre-determined. They gaze on the river. Raju watches Velan and his sister cross it and disappear.

*Raju's memory of his mother seems to unsettle him, as indicated by his sudden irritation with Velan and his sister. The question that Raju asks—to himself or to Velan, it is not entirely clear—is both profound and ambiguous. Raju has indeed been in prison, of course, but his thought that perhaps he has been in some sort of "transmigration" alludes to the fact that he feels some profound change coming over him. Velan's statement that the course of things is pre-determined in the same way that the course of a river is, brings attention to the role of water in the novel. As a symbol for Raju's purification and redemption, the emphasis on the river, as well as the characters' act of gazing on the river in this scene, suggests that Raju's process of purification has begun.*



## CHAPTER 2

Raju tells Velan of the construction of the **railway** in **Malgudi**, across the street from his father's house. Construction workers have begun work on the line, parking their trucks beneath the tamarind tree under which Raju plays. Raju is busy among the workmen, and he has taken to playing on the red mountain of earth beneath the tree.

*The beginning of the construction of the railway line in Malgudi alludes to the coming of modernization and industrialization to the town. As a child, Raju seems to have no grasp of the significance of these changes—approaching the railway construction simply as an opportunity to play—and yet, the railway will have profound consequences for his own life and destiny.*



One day, Raju gets into a fight with a boy who encroaches on the red mountain of earth by the **railway** construction site that has become Raju's territory. Raju pounces and curses the boy, who runs to Raju's father, repeating the curses that Raju hurled at him. Raju's father is infuriated and, upon learning from his son that he has picked up the words from the railway construction workers, announces that he will send Raju to school to remove him from the workmen's influence.

*Raju's sense of propriety over the red mountain of earth points to the fact that, even as a child, Raju had exhibited tendencies towards greed and accumulation, traits that will motivate much of his actions in adulthood. Furthermore, even before its completion, the railway is already changing the environment in which Raju and his family live—exposing Raju in particular to foreign (and negative) influences, and thus motivating his father to remove him to school.*



Each morning, Raju's mother makes a fuss over Raju as she dresses and prepares him for school. He has an endless walk to school, and is often distracted, dawdling on the way. Raju's father, proud of his son's education, takes to boasting about the old master who oversees the school.

*Raju's school attendance marks a new phase of his childhood. Although Raju himself has little interest in school, his attendance there seems to mark a change in the family's social status. By sending their son to school, the parents seem to attain (or at least aspire to) a higher social status—as indicated by the fact that Raju's father likes boasting about his son's education, as well as the fuss that Raju's mother makes over her son every morning.*



The school, in fact, is not terribly sophisticated—it's a *pyol* school, one in which lessons are held on the front stoop of an old man's house, who also acts as master. All levels of classes are held there at the same time. The master is abusive, often irritated by his young, clumsy pupils, who like to sneak into his house and make fun of him while cooking.

*The school that Raju attends is very rudimentary, and as such reflects the tension between the traditional and the modern in the novel. On the one hand, it is an institution of education, but at the same time it is no more than an informal, chaotic gathering held on the front stoop of an old man's house.*



Despite the chaos of the *pyol* school, Raju makes enough progress to qualify for first standard at the Board High School. On the day Raju attends the new school, he is accompanied by the master, who is proud, strutting about like a king.

*That Raju qualifies for first standard indicates that his rudimentary education at the master's school was successful, in spite of the chaos that characterized the lessons there. The pride that the master takes in his students' success suggests that, in spite of his irritable and chaotic teaching style, he did in fact fulfill his duties as a teacher.*



By the **riverbank** near the small village of Mangal, Velan appears, bursting to tell Raju that his sister has admitted her follies before the family and has accepted Velan's decision to betroth her to their cousin. Velan is clearly incredibly impressed with Raju's prescience. Raju, on the other hand, is once again tempted to debunk himself, but once again holds back.

*Velan is increasingly convinced of Raju's spiritual powers—and the success that Raju achieves with Velan's sister (without trying very hard), further confirms to Velan that Raju is spiritually gifted. And yet, there is a wide gap between Velan's perception of Raju and Raju's own perception of himself, as indicated in the fact that Raju feels tempted to reveal himself for the charlatan that in fact he is.*



Grateful to Raju for helping him conclude the affair with his sister, Velan comes to invite Raju to the wedding, which has been arranged. He offers Raju a large tray of fruit in thanks. Although Raju manages to avoid the wedding, the wedding comes to him—Velan and the family, including the girl and her suitor, come to pay thanks to Raju by the **river**.

*In spite of himself, Raju seems to be achieving good deeds—as indicated not only in Velan's gratitude for his help in dealing with his difficult sister, but also the whole family's thankfulness. The tray of fruit that Velan offers Raju points to the generosity of Velan, who does not take Raju's help for granted, but attempts to repay him in some way by providing him with nourishment.*



After the wedding incident, Raju's circle begins to widen as news of his success with Velan's sister spreads. Other villagers begin to come sit by the **river** steps, stopping there after work to visit him.

One day, Raju hides himself in the temple. Villagers arrive as usual, wondering where he has gone to. They speak in praise of him, saying that his presence has changed things for the better. Eventually they leave, leaving behind offerings of food, and Raju emerges from his hiding place, grateful for the food, and hopeful that Velan will always offer some to him.

The next day, Raju wakes up, and contemplates his future. He must decide whether he will go back to his hometown of **Malgudi**, where he will have to bear the giggles and looks of the townspeople, or whether he will go elsewhere—but he is not sure where. Raju thinks that he's not trained to work hard, and that it is unlikely that he will find another place where he will have such easy access to the nourishment that Velan and the villagers provide him. He decides, therefore, to play the role that Velan has given him. He will give guidance to the villagers, and he will play his role brilliantly, as the villagers want him to do.

Having decided on his course, Raju sets up a place in the temple beside the **river** for himself with a better backdrop. However, Velan and the other villagers don't appear. Raju begins to worry that they may never come. Raju sees a boy bathing in the river, and the boy tells him that his uncle has sent him to see if the man—that is, Raju—is present. Raju sends the boy back, telling him to inform his uncle that he is indeed back.

## CHAPTER 3

Raju tells of the day that the **railway** line is finally completed in **Malgudi**. Everyone in the town is given a holiday to celebrate. The railway station is decorated, and important officials of the town give speeches, hailing the achievement of the railway.

*Things seem to move in a way that is outside of Raju's control. He has not asked for this attention from the villagers, and yet he receives it. This alludes to the role that destiny, or dharma, plays in shaping Raju's life and path—here, his reputation grows in spite of the fact that he has not actively sought for it to do so.*



*Raju's act of hiding himself indicates that he feels harassed and overrun by the villagers' unsolicited attention. And yet, he also seems to recognize the value of this attention, given that the offerings that the villagers leave him provide him with nourishment. As such, Raju's actions and thoughts here express ambivalence towards the villagers.*



*Raju's decision to play the part of the holy man that Velan and the villagers have given him indicates his selfishness and self-interest. Raju chooses to remain by the river merely because he does not know where to go, and does not want to work hard to earn his keep and his food. As such, he essentially decides to exploit the villagers' gullibility and their goodwill, as well as their generosity towards him, in order to provide for himself. Here, Raju's decision to play a role for his own benefit represents one of many examples in the book of him acting in such a way.*



*Raju's mastery of disguise and dissimulation is suggested here in his adoption of a "backdrop" within the temple that would better serve his new identity as a holy man. In sending the boy to inform the villagers that he has reappeared, he serves his own self-interest, as he is interested primarily in what the villagers can give him (offerings of food), rather than what he can provide for them.*



*The completion of the railway line marks an important moment in the history of Malgudi, for the railway indicates the arrival of modernization and industrialization—the railway will change the inhabitants' lives, and it is for this reason that it is celebrated by the town's officials and inhabitants.*





The **railway** is good for Raju's father's shop, which prospers as a result of the growing population around the railway station. Raju's father can now afford to buy a juka (a carriage) and horse, in order to do his shopping for the shop. However, Raju's mother is not impressed by the horse and carriage.

Raju's father makes a deal with a groom, who hires the carriage to sell goods in the market when the carriage is not in use by Raju's father, and with the agreement that he will then pay the father a portion of the profit. However, this turns out to be a bad deal for the father—the groom gives no money to the family, swearing that he is unable to make a profit. He convinces the father to sell the horse and carriage to him. Only then does it become apparent that the father has been cheated: suddenly, the groom is seen selling his goods up and down the streets.

Raju's father is given the privilege to run a fancier, bigger shop at the **railway** station. The shop is so large that he doesn't even have enough supplies to fill the shelves, though he follows the stationmaster's orders to fill them.

Raju takes his father's place at the hut shop—the original shop built on the premises of their home. However, he doesn't do well there—his father's old customers miss chatting with their patron, and so Raju and his father switch places. Raju is charged with overseeing the **railway** shop, and his father returns to the hut shop. At the railway shop, Raju flourishes, and drops school to spend all of his time looking after customers.

## CHAPTER 4

Back at the **riverbank**, the boy whom Raju had sent to his uncle announces the return of the "saint," and soon the villagers come en masse to visit Raju. Raju tells the villagers that their boys must learn, and the next day a teacher appears, to whom Raju offers the space of the temple to give his lessons. The following day, the teacher arrives with students, and it is Raju, rather than the teacher, who ends up lecturing them, speaking to the boys wisely on such topics as godliness and cleanliness. Raju is impressed by his own eloquence.

*Indeed, the opening of the railway seems to immediately improve the economic prospects of Raju's father. As such, as a symbol, the railway suggests the ways in which modernization and industrialization can improve people's lives and prospects—as they do for Raju's family.*



*While Raju's father prospers from the opening of the railway, he is clearly somewhat naïve and gullible. His inability to recognize that the groom is cheating him suggests that he has trouble adjusting to his new, more prosperous circumstances. His gullibility also indicates the humble, simple life that he has led thus far—one that has been largely sheltered from swindlers such as the groom, who clearly exploits the father's innocence and naiveté to win the horse and carriage off him for a low price.*



*Although Raju's father loses money to the groom, who tricks him into selling his horse and carriage, he nonetheless finds another opportunity for financial gain in the railway shop. The railway, in other words, creates many economic opportunities for the family.*



*Raju's success in overseeing the railway shop suggests his penchant for flourishing under the new circumstances created by the railway. Furthermore, that his father returns to the hut shop while Raju goes to the railway shop indicates that, unlike his father, Raju is perhaps more adaptable to the new circumstances of industrialization and modernization.*



*Raju's insistence that the village boys must learn perhaps suggests his own regret over dropping his schooling once he had taken over running his father's railway shop. And yet, even though Raju offers the teacher space within the temple to teach, it is Raju himself who ends up lecturing the boys. On one level, this suggests Raju's narcissism and conceit—he does not let the teacher do his job, and instead does it for him. Raju's self-regard is also indicated in the fact that he seems to impress himself by his own eloquence. Raju clearly is quite an egoistic "holy man."*



Raju recalls that, in spite of dropping school, he had continued to read in between serving customers at the **railway** shop. Raju's father died suddenly during the rainy season of that year. With his mother's consent, Raju decided to close the hut shop and focus on the **railway** shop instead, where he took to selling magazines and school books.

*The death of Raju's father marks the moment when Raju steps forward as the "head" of the household. From now on, it is he who will be making decisions for the family (even if he does so with his mother's consent). His decision to close the hut shop indicates that he immediately takes a step away from his father's legacy and influence, as it was the hut shop that his father had established first.*



At the **riverbank**, the school children, who have arrived at the temple for instruction with their teacher, are rapt by the stories that Raju tells them. Soon, their parents also arrive to hear Raju's stories.

*Raju's talent for discourse and talk is reflected in the fact that there is a huge appetite for his stories—even the village pupils' parents come to listen to him.*



As the gatherings around Raju grow, he can't help feeling like an actor. Indeed, on one occasion, he is asked to give a discourse by a villager, and finds himself suddenly lost. Casting about for something to say, Raju tells the gathered crowd that all things must wait their hour. He also tells the puzzled villagers to reflect on their actions. It occurs to him that "The essence of sainthood" rests in "uttering mystifying statements."

*While Raju becomes increasingly successful in playing the part of a holy man—as indicated in the gatherings that continue to grow around him—the gap between others' perception of him and his perception of himself begins to widen. Raju knows—and feels—that he is a charlatan. And yet, in spite of this feeling, he manages to continue deluding the villagers, partly by uttering nonsensical statements that are taken for mysticism.*



At the next gathering, Raju chants holy refrains, which the audience repeats. The villagers also decorate the halls of the temple by the **river**.

*The villagers' immense respect for Raju is suggested by the fact that they follow his example—as indicated in the repetition of the refrains that he chants, for instance. They also express their veneration by decorating the temple, the space that he inhabits.*



Raju decides to grow his beard in order to look more like an authentic holy man. His prestige is growing. The gatherings have grown so huge that the crowds that come to listen to his wisdom spill out of the temple halls and reach all the way to the **river**. However, in this vast crowd, Velan is the only person that Raju knows personally.

*Raju's decision to change his appearance so as to look more like an "authentic" holy man points to his penchant for disguise and deception. Furthermore, his growing reputation, as indicated in the vast crowds that now come to see him, suggests that he is in fact extremely skillful at constructing and projecting identities that trick others into putting their faith in him.*



Raju not only chants holy verses in his role as spiritual guide, he also discourses on philosophy and prescribes remedies and medicines to ailing villagers. People also bring him their disputes, which he helps resolve. He is so busy amidst his various obligations, and is under so much demand that he has no privacy.

*Raju comes to play an increasingly central role in the lives of the villagers, who look to him for guidance and counsel. His position is framed by irony, however, given that Raju's healing and teaching activities have no basis in anything—he is simply making things up as he goes along.*



## CHAPTER 5

After his father dies, Raju comes to be known as “Railway Raju.” Visitors arriving in **Malgudi** by **train** ask him for his guidance in exploring the sites of the town. With the help of Gaffur, a taxi driver in the town, Raju shows them around. In acting as guide, Raju often changes facts and stories about the places that he shows, or makes up things all together, depending on his mood that day, or on what he thinks his customers want to hear. He gauges customers according to their means and adjusts his tours accordingly to reap maximum profit.

One day, a girl from Madras, by the name of Rosie, who visits **Malgudi** with her husband, asks to see a dancing **cobra**. While enchanted by the girl, Raju develops a deep dislike of her husband. Her husband had arrived first in Malgudi, seeming already to know everything about the town. Because he was dressed like an explorer, Raju gave him the nickname Marco. Shortly after arriving, Marco had asked Raju to take him to the **railway** station to meet a train coming from Madras. From this train, Rosie had stepped down, beautiful and enchanting.

Raju, eager to please Rosie, searches for a **cobra**. While Marco is busy examining an ancient temple one day, Gaffur drives Raju and Rosie to a remote part of **Malgudi**. There, they meet a snake charmer who, under a tree, reveals a dancing cobra. Rosie is completely fascinated by the snake and suddenly imitates its movements in a dance. Watching her, Raju is thunderstruck: her movements are so captivating that he thinks that she must be the best dancer in the world. After the meeting with the snake charmer, Raju and Gaffur drop Rosie off at her hotel, where they find her husband waiting. Marco, to Raju’s annoyance, demands that the car be ready the next morning at 10 am.

The next morning, Raju and Gaffur duly arrive at the hotel at the allotted time. Marco emerges without Rosie and wants to set off in spite of her absence to examine cave friezes at Mempo Hills, a wild area on the outskirts of **Malgudi**. At Raju’s prodding, Marco reveals that he is having trouble with his wife, which is why she is not accompanying them on the trip. Raju, looking for any opportunity to approach Rosie, convinces Marco to let him go and speak to her.

*Raju’s transformation into a tourist guide is the first of many such transformations that he undergoes throughout his life. Here, his penchant for disguise and dishonesty becomes apparent, given that Raju makes up many of the facts and stories that he tells his tourist clients—giving no heed to whether these facts and stories have any basis in reality. Furthermore, Raju’s fixation on reaping the maximum profit from his clients points to his greed and materialism, qualities which often drive him to exploit others.*



*Rosie and Marco are the only two clients that Raju mentions by name in narrating his history as a tourist guide. This indicates that they have a special impact on Raju—they are unlike many of the other clients that he has shown around Malgudi. Indeed, Raju’s feelings towards Rosie and her husband seem to be extreme. While he is clearly enamored with the wife, he expresses a deep revulsion for her know-it-all husband. These extreme feelings do not bode well; they suggest that Raju, from the very beginning of his encounter with Rosie and Marco, becomes too emotionally involved too quickly.*



*Rosie’s imitation of the snake’s movement under the shade of a tree is an important moment in the novel. It is at this moment that Raju not only recognizes Rosie’s immense talent as a dancer, but is also completely captivated by her as a woman. The power of Rosie’s imitation of the snake is also significant because it alludes to the depth of her own artistic and feminine potency. Rosie is a force to be reckoned with both as an artist and as a woman, and this is perhaps why Raju finds himself so deeply attracted to her. And yet, Rosie has a husband—Marco’s appearance at the end of this scene, demanding the prompt arrival of the car the next morning, is a reminder that Rosie is not a free woman.*



*The events of the next morning reveal that all is not well in the marriage between Marco and Rosie. This is to Raju’s benefit, who immediately seeks to take advantage of the situation by asking permission from Marco to approach Rosie. Raju’s hypocrisy is on full display here: while he pretends that he is doing the husband a favor by seeking to conciliate his wife, in fact he is only looking for a way to get closer to Rosie, at a cost to Marco.*



Raju goes to the hotel room and knocks, telling Rosie through the doorway that he is not her husband. He flatters and compliments her, saying that he couldn't sleep all night, thinking of her dancing before the **cobra**. Finally she opens the door, and he continues with his flatteries, entreating her to join them on the trip, telling her that life without her is meaningless. Rosie is won over by Raju's compliments and closes the door to change for the trip. Raju informs Marco that Rosie is coming, and Marco is amazed at Raju's success. Rosie, having packed a bag for herself and her husband for what is likely to be an overnight trip, joins them in the car.

The party—driven by Gaffur—arrives at Peak House, a lodging at the top of Mempi Hills outside of **Malgudi**, later that afternoon. Gaffur drops them off and returns to the town. Rosie is in ecstasy over the wild and beautiful surroundings. Joseph, the man who looks after Peak House, lights lanterns as night approaches. At dinner, Rosie insists on serving the meal and accidentally touches Raju, who is electrified and haunted by her touch.

After dinner, Marco announces that he intends to spend the evening reading, and so Raju and Rosie go to sit in the house's glass veranda, through which they can watch wild animals coming and going in the night. Sitting beside Rosie in the darkness, Raju is dazzled and excited by her nearness. Suddenly, they see the eyes of a wild animal flashing in the dark. Rosie is excited. Raju, unable to contain his own excitement at Rosie's proximity, breathes hard, and she asks him what is the matter, but then Marco appears and interrupts them.

The next morning, the mood is tense. Marco appears without Rosie, and when Raju presses him on her whereabouts, Marco says to leave her alone. Raju wonders what has happened between them. He is reluctant to leave without Rosie, but Marco is impatient to embark on his visit to the caves, and so Raju has no choice but to follow him. At the caves, Marco comes alive. He talks to Raju about the site's history, and he is soon busy measuring and photographing the friezes that decorate the walls. Watching him, Raju thinks that Marco is only passionate about dead and decaying things.

*Raju deploys all of his powers of seduction to come closer to Rosie. Here, as with the villagers whom he hoodwinks largely through his mystifying statements, Raju reveals his great gifts for eloquence. In the compliments and the flatteries that he conveys to Rosie, he seems to deduce exactly what she wants to hear. His hypocrisy, however, is further confirmed in his interaction with Marco. The latter has no idea that Raju has convinced Rosie to join them essentially by attempting to seduce her. In this way, Raju, while pretending to "serve" Marco to his face, in fact undermines him behind his back.*



*Mempi Hills, where Peak House is located, is a wild and beautiful area outside of Malgudi. The varied landscape of the town and its surroundings suggests the broader landscape of India as a whole, which is composed of urban centers as well as a vast natural landscape. At Peak House, Raju's infatuation with Rosie grows. His strong response to her accidental touch suggests the depth and the passion of his feelings for her.*



*The wild setting of Peak House, including the wild animals that surround it, allude to the wild, animalistic passion that Raju himself feels for Rosie. Indeed, in this scene, Raju is so stimulated and excited by Rosie's proximity that he seems unable even to control his physical reactions—he breathes so loudly that Rosie asks him what is the matter. Raju's wild passion and his limitless desire for closeness with Rosie is contrasted with Marco's coolness and distance; while Raju and Rosie are busy watching the animals, Marco retreats to his scholarly study.*



*The troubles that plague Marco and Rosie's marriage bubble to the surface again, as, for the second time, Rosie refuses to leave her room and to accompany her husband on an outing. Raju rightly notes that Marco seems to be much more interested in the caves and the friezes that decorate them than he is in anything else—including the troubles with his wife, on which he is silent to Raju. Marco's lack of interest in anything but the caves indicates the insensitivity of his character; he is, indeed, more preoccupied with dead and decaying things than with the living.*



Looking for an excuse to check on Rosie, Raju pretends he hears Gaffur's taxi and excuses himself from Marco for a brief visit to Peak House. There, he finds Rosie sitting on a boulder beneath the shade, clearly unhappy. She asks if her husband is still wall-gazing. Raju boldly asks her about her quarrels with Marco, and she informs him that they disagree about most things. Raju takes this opportunity to again praise her dancing and to flatter her, going so far as to reveal his feelings for her.

Rosie, perhaps prompted by Raju's flattery, opens up about her conflicts with Marco. She tells Raju that she had married Marco because of his wealth and class. She further shares that she comes from a family dedicated to the temples as dancers—the women of their caste are viewed as public women. As a girl Rosie had attended school, and had gone so far as to earn a degree in economics. One day, she saw an ad in the paper, placed there by an academic in search of a wife. After Rosie met Marco, the author of the ad, she was encouraged by her family to marry him, given that Marco was a man of wealth and class. If necessary, they told her, she must give up the family's traditional art of dance, particularly as it turned out that Marco had no interest in her art.

When Raju touches Rosie after she finishes speaking, she does not refuse his touch. Emboldened, Raju again flatters her, telling her she is a queen. Later that day, news arrives that Gaffur's taxi has broken down, which means that he cannot come to pick them up as planned. Everyone is happy—particularly Raju, who sits again with Rosie in the glass veranda that night to watch the animals. This time, he holds her hand in the darkness.

Gaffur, having fixed his taxi, arrives at Peak House, but Marco, still deep in his cave study, wants to remain at the House to continue with his research. After they decide to remain at Peak House, Raju accompanies Rosie back to **Malgudi** with Gaffur to pick up more things for the extended stay. As he drives them back, Gaffur looks at Rosie and Raju suspiciously—gleaning that there has been some sort of change between the tourist guide and Marco's wife.

*Rosie's statement that she and Marco disagree about most things reveals that the troubles that plague the marriage run deep. Raju again takes advantage of the conflict between Marco and Rosie to ingratiate himself to Rosie. His intention to seduce her is reflected in the fact that, at every opportunity, Raju resorts to flattering and complimenting her in way that appeases her ego—by reassuring her of the brilliance of her dance, and by declaring his feelings. Raju behaves boldly, but in a very calculated way.*



*Rosie's background reflects her position as a woman at the crossroads of modernity and tradition. On the one hand, she exemplifies a traditional identity as a member of a lower caste of temple dancers. On the other hand, she is a woman who pursues and completes her education—this is presumably unusual for a woman, particularly one of her caste. That Rosie, at the prompting of her family, marries Marco because of his wealth and class, also suggests her desire to escape the constraints that are imposed on her as a result of her poverty and low social status. As such, Rosie had clearly hoped that a husband such as Marco would bring her freedom. But this deliverance comes at a price, given that she must give up her family's ancestral art of dance.*



*By letting Raju touch her, Rosie begins to collude in the betrayal of her husband. Raju further encourages this impulse on her part by taking to flattering and complimenting her again. The development of the relationship is indicated in the fact that the physical contact between Raju and Rosie grows, as he holds her hand that night in the veranda. By this point, the relationship between Rosie and Raju has progressed well beyond the bounds of propriety, given that she is a married woman.*



*The taxi driver, Gaffur is, the first to catch on to the fact that something is not quite right in the relationship between Raju and Rosie. The implicit disapproval that he expresses through his suspicious gaze suggests that what Raju and Rosie are embarking on is not only inappropriate, but also immoral, given Rosie's status as a married woman.*



In **Malgudi**, Raju briefly stops at his house, where his mother confronts him, full of questions about his disappearance. Raju avoids his mother's questions and instead takes the opportunity to show Rosie the sights. Gaffur, who drives them around, explicitly warns Raju that Rosie is a married woman. Rosie, meanwhile, is excited like a child at the sights that Raju shows her. One evening, after a long day of sightseeing, he takes her to her room and follows her inside.

*In becoming so preoccupied with Marco and especially Rosie, Raju seems to have neglected the rest of his life back in Malgudi—including his mother. Raju's infatuation with Rosie does not seem to be having a good influence on him. Gaffur's explicit warning to Raju about Rosie is wise, and yet, Raju's own ill judgment is reflected in the fact that he does not heed Gaffur's words, and continues his pursuit of Rosie. Ultimately, he gets what he wants: once he enters Rosie's hotel room, the affair commences in earnest.*



## CHAPTER 6

At the **riverbank** near the village of Mangal, months or years have passed. Raju's hair and beard have grown long; his reputation has grown so much that he has come to be called "Swami," or religious teacher, and visitors come to the temple from afar to visit him. He is so inundated by offerings from the supplicants that he has lost interest in accumulation and gives everything back to his visitors. The temple hall is especially packed during the rainy season, when people shelter within to hear the swami speak.

*Raju's transformation is so thorough that he has managed to keep up the façade of a "holy man" for months, or perhaps years. He now not only looks the part of a holy man, he has the name of one—as indicated in the title of "Swami" that the villagers and other visitors give him. Some deeper changes seem to have taken place in Raju, as well. Raju's life has hitherto been marked by greed and a desire for accumulation; the fact that Raju gives back the gifts that he is given by visitors indicates that his desire for accumulation is perhaps being tempered.*



One year, Raju notices that there has been no **rain**. The river has shrunk, and the food offerings of the villagers have grown meager. Everyone in the village is thinking about the rains, and they ask Raju for explanations for their plight. The drought worsens; the cattle that the villagers herd are weak, producing little milk, and soon they begin dying.

*The lack of rains and subsequent drought have serious implications for the villagers—who rely on the rains for their livelihood of farming and cattle herding. The fact that the villagers turn to Raju for explanations suggests the esteem that they hold him in; Raju has become a kind of father figure to whom the villagers turn in times of trouble.*



One day, Velan asks Raju to go with him to a forest path to examine a dead buffalo in the hope that Raju will be able to determine the cause of the animal's death. Raju goes with Velan and tells him that the buffalo has died of poison. This reassures the villagers for a time—but cattle continue dying.

*Raju's announcement that the buffalo has died of poison has no basis in reality—Raju simply says this so as to get Velan and the other villagers to stop pestering him for explanations. Raju's recourse to lying on this occasion suggests that he has not given up his old habits of deceit and dissimulation.*



The local shopkeepers, eager to exploit the villagers' desperation, raise their prices. Soon, a fight between the shopkeepers and customers engulfs the entire village, leading to violence.

*The gravity of the situation occasioned by the drought is reflected in the fact that tensions between the villagers and others spill into violence; the scarcity under which the villagers suddenly find themselves living leads to huge conflict.*



The day after the fight, Velan's brother comes to Raju to inform him that Velan has been injured. Raju is not sure what he is expected to do and doesn't care much. Seeking to avoid a commotion, Raju tells Velan's brother—a rather dull-witted 21-year-old who is visiting the temple for the first time—to tell the villagers not to fight. Uttering one of his cryptic statements, he tells Velan's brother that unless the villagers are good, he'll never eat.

Velan's brother finds a gathering of village elders discussing the drought and the recent fight with the shopkeepers. Afraid to tell the villagers that he has mentioned the fight to Raju, he muddles up Raju's message, suggesting that Raju has undertaken not to eat until the **rains** arrive again. Impressed by Raju's readiness to take on such a sacrifice, the villagers compare him to the great freedom fighter, Mahatma Gandhi.

The villagers decide to visit the swami by the **river**. At the gathering, Raju waits for the food offerings that they always present to him, but no offerings appear. Raju continues to read and discourse to the gatherings on various topics, but still there is no food.

Velan tells Raju that everyone is hoping for Raju to come through the ordeal safely. The villagers come to touch his feet and again compare him to Gandhi. Raju, reading into Velan's words, realizes that Velan and the others think that he is fasting today. Velan says that he will keep watch over Raju—that this is the least he can do—and he tells Raju that his brother has told the villagers that Raju is prepared to fast. Raju remembers that he has discoursed to the villagers on penance, and suddenly he realizes the seriousness of the situation that he is in. Agitated, he tells Velan to leave him alone until the next night.

Raju, finally alone, attempts to sleep, but finds it difficult. He wonders whether the villagers actually "expect him to starve for fifteen days," as well as to stand for hours each day in the **river's** knee-deep water, holding vigil. He thinks of running away, but he is moved by the villagers' gratitude for the deed they think he is undertaking. He eats the few remaining morsels of food he still has.

*Raju seems to be rather unmoved by the news that Velan has been injured. This reflects his callousness and selfishness—Velan has been a good friend to Raju, and yet, Raju doesn't want to be bothered or to act upon this news of his friend's injury. In his laziness, and seeking to avoid further trouble, Raju utters one of his mystifying statements—one that is essentially meaningless, which he speaks only so that he can be left in peace.*



*While Raju's mystifying statements have often brought him respect and prestige from the villagers, in this case they also bring him trouble. In muddling up Raju's message, Velan's brother gives a meaning to Raju's words that Raju himself had not intended. That the villagers then go on to compare Raju to Mahatma Gandhi suggests the immense respect and gratitude that they accord to him, as a result of his (presumed) intention to fast.*



*Raju's focus on food in this scene indicates that, after months or years of serving as "holy man" to the villagers, his primary objective is still selfish—he simply seeks to secure sustenance for himself. Thus, Raju is still motivated by self-interest.*



*Slowly, Raju begins to realize the enormity of the sacrifice that the villagers expect of him. His agitation at the realization that the villagers think he will fast sets his hypocrisy into relief. He had discoursed to the villagers on penance, and yet now, when it dawns on him that they expect him to undergo a penance through the fast, he is alarmed and miserable. As such, the villagers' comparison of Raju to Gandhi here is ironic; Raju, unlike the great freedom fighter, is in fact reluctant to undergo any kind of penance or discomfort.*



*Raju's apprehension of the long fast that the villagers expect him to undertake puts him in a state of crisis. On the one hand, his old, selfish instincts assert themselves—Raju does not want subject himself to the hardship and therefore thinks of running away. On the other hand, the fact that he is moved by the villagers' gratitude, and does not run away, suggests that a new, more noble impulse is perhaps taking root in him.*



When Velan returns the next night, Raju asks him what makes him think that Raju can bring about **rain**. Raju tells Velan that he's no saint, but an ordinary man, and he begins narrating to Velan.

*Raju's decision to confess to Velan that he is not a saint but only an ordinary man is ambiguous. His confession is partly motivated by the hope that Velan will help him "cheat" his way through the fast by surreptitiously bringing him food. On the other hand, this confession represents the first time that Raju has been truly honest with Velan.*



## CHAPTER 7

Returning to his past in **Malgudi**, Raju speaks to Velan about how he continued to devote himself to Marco's care. Marco decides to remain at Peak House for a month to explore the caves. In the meantime, Raju also looks after Rosie, with whom he has become totally obsessed, neglecting his old life to cater to her needs.

*The double-life that Raju leads affirms the deceit and dissimulation that characterizes his relationship to Marco. While playing Marco's helper and guide, Raju betrays him by indulging in a passionate affair with his wife. Notably, Raju seems to feel no remorse nor guilt over this situation—so long as he has Rosie, nothing else seems to matter.*



While Rosie continues her affair with Raju, she also begins to show excessive consideration for Marco, still up in Mempi Hills. One day, at the hotel in **Malgudi**, she suddenly demands that Raju call Gaffur so that he can drive her to Peak House. Raju talks to Rosie about her dance, which she has begun practicing, and as he encourages her to teach him more about her art, an intimacy grows between them. He is mesmerized when one day she performs a dance for him.

*Unlike Raju, Rosie seems to feel some guilt and remorse over the betrayal of her husband. This suggests that she has more of a conscience than Raju; on the other hand, as Marco's wife, she is more closely connected to Marco than Raju. Raju, who seems to have an instinct for manipulating Rosie, focuses on her dance—which is her passion—as a way to bring her closer to him and to distract her from her husband. Sure enough, this works, as a greater intimacy develops between the two lovers, as Raju wants.*



Raju and Rosie go up to Peak House, with the plan that Rosie will speak to Marco and once again attempt to convince him to allow her to have a dance career. At Peak House, they find Marco in a good mood; he has discovered another cave, and he tells Raju that, when his research is published, it will change present ideas about the history of civilization. He says he will thank Raju in the book.

*Although Rosie, in marrying Marco, had consented to give up her dance, clearly her passion for her art is such that she is unable to live without it. It is this, along with Raju's encouragement, that motivates her to speak to her husband. Marco is completely oblivious to both his wife's and Raju's betrayal—as indicated by the fact that he tells Raju he will thank him in his book when it is published.*



Raju leaves Peak House for **Malgudi** to allow Rosie time to speak to Marco. He returns two days later. When he arrives, he learns from Joseph (the man who looks after the house) that Rosie and Marco are at the caves. When Raju finds them, they are silent and morose, barely speaking to him. Marco enters the house and Rosie follows.

*The silent and grave state in which Raju finds Rosie and Marco upon his return to Peak House suggests that something serious has taken place, and yet Raju cannot be certain what is going on. Even though he is Rosie's lover, Raju is still an outsider to the marriage—looking in from outside.*





Gaffur, who has driven Raju to Peak House, advises Raju to leave Rosie and Marco alone. In retrospect, Raju thinks he should have followed Gaffur's advice. Marco exits the house again and enters Gaffur's waiting taxi, informing Raju curtly that he will be closing his account at the house. Raju pulls Marco out of the taxi and demands that he tell Raju what is happening.

Instead, Marco goes back into the house and locks himself in his room. Rosie is also in the room—neither she nor her husband emerge to disclose what is going on. Raju goes to the room with food and opens the door, only to find Rosie lying silently, while Marco sits and stares blankly into space. Rosie tells Raju to leave them.

Raju returns to **Malgudi** with Gaffur. In town, he attempts to return to his previous life at the **railway** shop, and he returns to showing tourists around. But his mind is troubled. He feels betrayed by Rosie, who seems to be allying herself with her husband. He is so bored and terrified by the normal life to which he has returned that he even stops taking tourists, leaving them to the station porter's son to show around.

A month passes. One day, Rosie appears at the door to Raju's house. She is carrying a trunk and a bag. Raju, shocked by Rosie's reappearance, tells his mother that Rosie will be a guest at their home. Raju is ashamed of his modest home and bad dress—as he was unprepared for Rosie's arrival. His mother, also startled by Rosie's appearance, asks her many questions and is impressed when she finds out that Rosie is an educated woman.

*Gaffur once again reveals himself to be a good friend by counseling Raju to leave the couple alone, and yet again, Raju reveals his stubbornness by ignoring his friend's counsel. Raju's bold act of pulling Marco out of the taxi and demanding answers suggests that the relationship between Raju, Marco, and Rosie has developed well beyond the realms of a tourist guide and his clients—the fates of the three characters are now deeply intertwined.*



*Raju's decision to walk into Marco and Rosie's room without being given permission again points to his boldness—Again and again, Raju acts well outside the bounds of his position as tourist guide. The sad state in which he finds husband and wife suggests that the marriage has reached a crisis point.*



*Raju's inability to pick up his old life with any satisfaction or pleasure suggests what a disruptive event Marco and especially Rosie's arrival in his life has been. Raju seems to have no appreciation for the stability and peace that he had enjoyed before the couple's arrival in Malgudi. He seems to feel completely entitled to Rosie's affections, as indicated by the fact that he feels "betrayed" by her, which disregards her status as a married woman, and the difficult position she is in as a result.*



*Rosie's arrival at Raju's house catches him off guard. His shame over his father's modest house and his own bad dress points to his obsession with appearances, and with material wealth. He seems to misjudge Rosie in thinking that she cares for appearances. Raju's mother's awe at Rosie's education sets up a contrast between the two women: Raju's mother, belonging to an older generation, has clearly led a more traditional life, whereas Rosie's access to education reflects her position as a modern woman.*



Raju hires Gaffur to take him and Rosie on an outing to the beach in **Malgudi**. There, Rosie tells Raju that Marco has left her, and she recounts the events of the past month with her husband. She tells him that when she had broached the topic of dancing, Marco had grown hostile, telling her that she had promised never to mention dancing again. Rosie was ready to compromise, even ready to give up dancing, but she had asked Marco to allow her to show him just one bit of dance. When she began to dance, he stopped her and dismissed her abilities. In response, she told him that Raju liked her dancing—which then led Marco to realize that she was having an affair with Raju. After a long night spent questioning her on the details of the affair, Marco retreated to the caves.

After her disclosure, Rosie felt terribly sinful and sad over her affair with Raju, and she followed her husband to the caves, where he proceeded to ignore her for three hours. It was then that Raju had found them at Peak House. Marco continued ignoring Rosie for the next three weeks, and when she attempted to confront him, he told her that she was no longer his wife. Finally, Marco packed up, and she followed him down to the hotel in **Malgudi**. At the **train** station, to which she also followed him, he told her that he had no ticket for her. He entered the train and shut the door in her face. Having nowhere to turn, she went to Raju's home.

After listening to Rosie's story, Raju comforts her and tells her that he will make the world recognize her as the greatest artist. But things, at first, prove to be difficult, especially with Raju's mother, who has begun to hear rumors about Rosie. She tells her son that she doesn't want a dancing girl in the house. She wants the girl to return to her husband.

Totally caught up by Rosie's arrival at his home, Raju further neglects the **railway** shop, which is not doing well under the care of the porter's son, whom he has charged with looking after the shop. The railway gives Raju notice to quit, and Raju, losing his temper over this new setback, fights with the porter's son and the porter. But to no avail—a new shopman takes over the railway shop. Raju also fights with him, leading to an end to his association with the railway.

*Marco's complete dismissal of his wife's passion for dance indicates how callous and insensitive Marco is as a husband. While feeling perfectly entitled to indulge his own passion for the study of ancient civilizations, he seems to look down on his wife's art, and forbids her from indulging it. As such, in many ways Marco is an oppressive, insensitive husband who seeks to control his wife. Although Rosie betrays Marco by cheating on him, his own behavior towards her does not cast him in a good light. Rosie's disclosure of the affair can be read as an attempt on her part to shake her husband out of his rigid rejection of her dance. And yet, the disclosure only serves to get her further in trouble, rather than to change Marco's mind.*



*Marco's behavior towards Rosie after the disclosure of the affair reveals the depths of his cruelty. Certainly, he is upset by the discovery that his wife has betrayed him, but Rosie is clearly remorseful and repentant. In spite of her repentance, and in spite of making herself abject before him, he still refuses to show any empathy or consideration for her, subjecting her almost to complete silence for weeks. His act of leaving her at the train station without a ticket is not only cruel, but vindictive. Clearly, Marco is willing to go to great lengths to humiliate and punish his wife.*



*Raju seems willing to give Rosie what she wants—recognition of and support for her dance. But the couple's unconventional relationship upsets the traditional hierarchies and boundaries of their society—as indicated in Raju's mother's objection to Rosie's presence in the house. In her view, Rosie, as a married woman, belongs with her husband Marco, and not Raju.*



*Raju's neglect and loss of the railway shop marks the beginning of his destruction of all that his father had built. Just as the opening of the railway shop had once reflected the family's prosperity, now its closure points to a downward turn in the family's fortunes. The violent confrontations that Raju gets involved in also suggest that Raju, under the influence of his infatuation with Rosie, is not entirely in control of his judgment or his emotions.*



## CHAPTER 8

Shortly after the loss of his **railway** shop, the Sait, a wholesale merchant at the market who was also Raju's creditor, arrives at the house and demands that Raju pay back the 8,000 rupees he owes him. Raju, inappropriately, is overcome with a fit of laughter. The Sait leaves, angry and offended. Raju's mother has stopped speaking to him, although she is still civil to Rosie. She thinks that her son has ruined everything that his father built.

Within a few days of the Sait's visit, Raju finds himself involved in court affairs—the Sait has brought a criminal case against him. Raju seeks Gaffur's counsel, but he isn't happy to hear Gaffur tell him that he must send Rosie away. Raju quarrels with him, and Gaffur leaves. With the help of a lawyer, Raju manages to get the case against him adjourned (postponed), and he tries to reassure his mother that all will be well.

Raju's uncle—his mother's eldest brother—appears unexpectedly one day at the house. The uncle castigates Raju. When Raju leaves him to watch Rosie practicing her dance, the uncle follows him, then insults Raju by telling him he has turned into a dancer's backstage boy. The uncle addresses Rosie disrespectfully, alluding scathingly to her low caste and class. Rosie is devastated, but the uncle doesn't relent, telling her she must clear out by the next train. Raju, flying to Rosie's defense, attacks his uncle. His mother, siding with her brother, is drawn into the commotion and arrives to tell Rosie that she is a she-devil who has ruined her son. Raju's uncle and mother are shocked when Raju puts an arm around Rosie and tells her that she is staying in the house.

The next morning, Raju's uncle renews the fight by saying that the **train** is arriving in an hour and he asks whether Rosie is ready to leave. Raju's mother, too, asks whether Rosie has packed her things. Raju responds by saying again that Rosie is not leaving. Raju's mother announces that if Rosie doesn't leave, she will. Raju's uncle encourages his sister to pack, and Raju is saddened as he watches his mother leave the house with her brother.

*The escalation of the family's troubles is marked by the arrival of the Sait, who demands his money. Raju's inappropriate laughter during the Sait's visit further confirms that Raju is losing control over his faculties—he seems unable to think or behave in a rational way. The deepening rift between him and his mother also points to the fact that Raju's troubles are not only financial. His family relationships are also beginning to fall apart as a result of his ill-advised actions.*



*The continued unraveling of Raju's affairs suggests just what a disruptive effect Marco and Rosie's appearance has had. As a consequence of their arrival in Malgudi, Raju has lost the railway shop, he is in conflict with his mother, and now he is involved in a court case to repay money he owes. Gaffur again shows himself to be the voice of wisdom when he tells Raju to send Rosie away, and again Raju reveals his stubbornness by quarreling with Gaffur instead of taking his advice.*



*The arrival of Raju's uncle in the house leads the familial tensions to reach crisis point. The emphasis that Raju's uncle puts on Rosie's low caste points to his position as a proponent of traditional hierarchies. Like Raju's mother, Raju's uncle largely objects to Rosie's presence in the house not only because she is a married woman, but also because of her low social status. Raju's act of publicly putting his arm around Rosie is shocking to the uncle and mother because it represents a complete transgression of traditional social codes. Raju lays claim to a married woman by touching her in public; and in doing so, he also transgresses the boundaries of his higher caste, which would forbid such contact across caste divides.*



*The departure of Raju's mother from the house represents the complete breakdown of Raju's familial relations. Raju's involvement with Rosie leads him to lose many of the links to his old life—including his mother. That Raju's mother leaves her own house—a house she has not left in decades—indicates the extent to which she is outraged by the relationship between her son and Rosie, a relationship that violates all of the traditional principles she holds dear.*



After his mother's departure, Raju and Rosie continue living as a married couple. Rosie diligently practices her art every day, and, after several months pass, she announces that she is ready to perform. When she asks Raju what his plans are, he tells her that first, they need to come up with a more appropriate, traditional name for her public persona, and after some brainstorming, they settle on the name Nalini.

*Rosie does not allow the upheaval that has taken place around her, and in which she is of course at the center, to distract her from her art. Indeed, her identity as an artist is reflected in her devotion to practicing her dance. The new name that she and Raju settle on as her stage name suggests that Rosie is about to enter a new phase in her life—one in which she casts aside her identity as a wife and takes up her identity as an artist.*



Raju begins looking for opportunities for Rosie and approaches the Albert Mission School. In order to more convincingly play his part as a cultural ambassador of classical dance, he changes his appearance—dressing seriously, and sporting glasses. He invites members of the School committee to view a sample of Rosie/Nalini's dance. Two committee members duly arrive at the house on the appointed day, and, when Rosie appears before them and begins dancing, they are dazzled. Completely enchanted by Rosie's dance, the committee members not only agree to include her in the school's variety show, but to cut down on the other minor entertainments so as to give her more space in the show. They also agree to provide accompanists for the dance.

*Just as Rosie begins to transform herself, so Raju creates for himself a new identity. The new clothes and glasses that he wears in order to better play the part of cultural ambassador indicate his ability to shape-shift, depending on his needs. While Raju creates the opportunity for the committee members to see Rosie dance, it is Rosie's own talent that clearly impresses them. Indeed, the complete awe that overcomes the committee members when they see Rosie dance is a further confirmation of her immense genius as a dancer—a genius that has nothing to do with Raju, but which is intrinsic to her.*



## CHAPTER 9

Continuing to narrate to Velan, Raju recalls Rosie's rise to stardom. While, in retrospect, Raju reflects that Rosie—by virtue of her genius and talent—was responsible for her own success, at the time he had taken credit for her success. Raju himself becomes important as a result of his role as Rosie's manager. He arranges and oversees all aspects of her performances, creating an aura of power and mystery around Rosie, now known publicly as Nalini. When Rosie expresses in private her gratitude to Raju for guiding her career, Raju accepts this as his due.

*Raju's self-importance and self-regard is reflected in the fact that he is quick to take credit for Rosie's success, without considering that it is primarily Rosie's own talent, rather than his efforts, that make spectators flock to her. It is only with time, and in retrospect, that Raju develops the humility to understand that in fact, he had very little to do with Rosie's success. He himself gains importance by virtue of his association with her, not the other way around. And yet, while he accepts Rosie's thanks as his due, he does not thank her in return for the status that she creates for him.*



Raju's creditor, the Sait, is still pursuing Raju in the courts of **Malgudi**. Upon learning from his lawyer that he must make mortgage payments to the Sait to continue to live in his own house, Raju decides to move. Raju's mother writes to her son telling him that she wants to return to her home but Raju, not wanting to have her back, ignores her.

*Raju's refusal to deal with his pressing financial troubles indicates his irresponsibility: he risks losing the house built by his father, but instead of dealing with the threat immediately, he simply decides to move out. Furthermore, his decision to ignore his mother also indicates his neglect of his responsibilities as a son towards his one living parent.*



Raju and Rosie move to a new, large, two-story house in a fashionable part of **Malgudi**. The house is full of servants, musicians, and dance teachers. It is also full of visitors—those who come as supplicants, such as musicians who hope to accompany Nalini, and whom Raju treats with disdain. Those more important visitors who come with offers of performances for Nalini, Raju treats with more respect and courtesy. A few select groups—the most important visitors—are given occasional access to Nalini. Through his role as Nalini’s manager, Raju comes to fraternize with men of money and power—including politicians and bankers.

*The new, fancy house into which Raju and Rosie move reflects their ascension to a new social status. Furthermore, the modern house also suggests that Raju and Rosie’s new status allows them more direct access to the comforts and conveniences of modern life—such as space, which they did not have in the small, traditional house Raju’s father built. Raju, in his role as manager, strictly enforces a hierarchy amongst the visitors who come to the house. This points to his own obsession with status and wealth, as it seems that he reserves the best treatment for those visitors who have both status and wealth.*



For her part, Rosie is happy to receive as guests the artists—actors, musicians, and dancers—who come to call on her. However, as her circle of artist friends widens, she and Raju begin to quarrel. Raju is jealous of her friends and seeks to limit the time she spends with them.

*Rosie does not seem to care about the wealth or the status of her visitors in the way that Raju does; she seems only to care that they are artists, like her. Raju’s increasing jealousy, and his attempts to restrict Rosie’s contact with her friends, reveal that he in fact seeks to control Rosie, not to liberate her.*



Raju and Rosie, followed by a posse of musicians, travel to engagements hundreds of miles away, sometimes remaining on the road for weeks at a time. On the road, as at home, Raju seeks to limit Rosie’s access to others, as he is jealous when he senses that she enjoys the company of anyone but himself.

*Raju’s impulse to control Rosie’s access to others so as to make her entirely dependent on him shows that Raju is in effect adopting an oppressive, patriarchal attitude towards Rosie. As the man in the relationship, and as her manager, he seems to feel entitled to set limits on Rosie’s life.*



As a result of Rosie’s popularity and her growing number of engagements, Raju begins earning enormous amounts of money, spending much of it on maintaining the lavish lifestyle that has become a habit for him. Rosie, however, is dissatisfied: feeling constrained by her relentless schedule, and by Raju’s over-protectiveness, she asks him what is the use of earning so much money if they can’t enjoy it. Although Raju senses that a dangerous dissatisfaction is developing in Rosie, he is obsessed with accumulating more and more wealth.

*Raju’s greed and materialism seems to be insatiable—he is, as a result of Rosie’s success, much richer than he would have ever dreamt of being, and yet, he still wants to accumulate more wealth. His desire for wealth seems to lead him to view and treat Rosie as a means to more money. Rosie’s dissatisfaction grows in turn because she begins to sense that Raju is no longer interested in her art, as he was at the beginning of their romance, but only in the money that her art generates.*



One day, while Raju and Rosie are in **Malgudi**, a book arrives from Marco, Rosie’s long-forgotten husband. One section of the book, entitled “Mempi Hills Pictures,” includes a note of gratitude to Raju. Raju, shaken by the sudden reappearance of Marco in their lives, debates showing the book to Rosie, but in the end decides to hide it from her.

*Raju’s decision to hide Marco’s book from Rosie shows that Raju’s propensity for deceit and dissimulation is beginning to infect even his most intimate relationship. Raju’s keeping secrets from Rosie is simply another means of him attempting to control her. Clearly, his desire for control over Rosie is growing.*



Three days later, Marco's photo appears in a Bombay magazine with a positive review of the book. Rosie comes running downstairs to show Raju the magazine. She wants to see Marco's book and asks if they can get a copy. Later, to his shock, Raju notices that Rosie has cut out the magazine photo of Marco and has hung it on her dressing mirror.

A few days later, while in bed, Rosie asks Raju where he is hiding the book. Raju guesses that Mani, his secretary, has revealed the secret of the book to Rosie. Rosie wants to know why Raju hid it, and Raju says that he thought she wouldn't be interested. Rosie cries in the dark, saying that Marco was her husband, and that she deserved the way he left her. Unsettled by Rosie's sudden longing for her husband, Raju suggests they take a holiday. He tells Rosie that she can always decline engagements, but she points out that he often makes engagements on her behalf without even consulting her. Raju points out that Rosie has everything—she is famous, rich, and is pursuing her passion for dance. She retorts that the thought of dancing now makes her sick; she has become a performing monkey. In spite of the quarrel, the two make up somewhat and go to sleep.

For the next three months, Raju and Rosie continue their engagements during the all-important season of music and dance in south India. When they return to **Malgudi**, Raju, going through the mail, finds a letter addressed to Rosie from lawyers in Madras. Raju opens the letter and reads it. Sent by Marco's lawyers, it concerns the release of a box of jewelry to Rosie. Raju, afraid of Rosie's reaction to the letter, hides it from her, as he had Marco's book. He fears that Rosie might leave him to return to Marco.

One night, while sleeping beside Rosie, Raju wakes up, thinking about the letter from Marco's lawyers. He goes downstairs and forges Rosie's signature on the forms that the lawyers have sent and sends the form back to them. He then obsessively awaits the arrival of the valuable jewelry. When he and Rosie are readying to leave for a four days' engagement, he instructs his secretary Mani to await the arrival of the jewelry box.

*Rosie's inadvertent discovery of the publication of the book has exactly the effect that Raju had feared—it excites Rosie, and sets her to thinking about her long-estranged husband. The picture of Marco that she hangs on her dressing mirror is a clear sign that she still has romantic feelings for her husband.*



*The quarrel between Rosie and Raju reveals that Rosie is beginning to realize that Raju not only manipulates her, but in fact seeks to control her fully. Raju's hypocrisy is apparent in his statement to Rosie that he did not share the book with her because he thought she might not be interested. This, of course, is a lie—Raju chose not to share the book precisely because he knew that Rosie would be interested. Furthermore, he pretends that Rosie has complete freedom to determine her dance schedule, when in fact Raju is the one who sets this schedule, making bookings for her without even consulting her. Raju's oppression of Rosie is such that she has begun to despise the very art form that she has always loved. As such, Rosie's unhappiness in her relationship with Raju recalls her unhappiness in her relationship with Marco. Raju, like Marco, attempts to subjugate and control Rosie both in small and large ways.*



*Raju indulges in even deeper deceit this time when he decides to hide a letter that is directly addressed to Rosie. Clearly, Raju has learned nothing from the quarrel that he has just had with Rosie. Instead of being honest and direct with her, as she wants him to be, he again deceives her in the hope that doing so will allow him to maintain his control over her.*



*Raju's act of forging Rosie's signature represents the apex of his deceit. Furthermore, his obsession with acquiring Rosie's jewelry box reveals his greed and materialism—Raju is always hungry for more wealth, and Rosie's jewelry is likely valuable. Thus, greed and materialism often lie at the root of Raju's motivations and actions.*



Raju and Rosie depart for a performance in a city 60 miles away from **Malgudi**. The show, a benefit performance for the construction of a maternity ward, is important. Influential men are present, and the auditorium is packed with a thousand spectators. Nalini, enchanting as ever on stage, finishes the show with her **snake** dance—a long, arduous and hypnotic dance which she rarely performs due to its difficulty.

As he watches Rosie on stage, Raju thinks of his mother, to whom he occasionally sends a postcard and some money. A man approaches him in the middle of the dance to tell him that the District Superintendent of Police wants to see him, and Raju tells him that he will find the superintendent after the act is finished. Finally, Rosie finishes her dance to thunderous applause.

Outside the auditorium, Raju meets the superintendent, who is an acquaintance. He is not in uniform. The superintendent takes Raju aside and tells him that he has a warrant for his arrest—initiated by Marco—for forgery. Raju, trying to cover for himself, explains to the superintendent that he had signed the form sent by Marco’s lawyers because Rosie was busy. Raju convinces the policeman to wait until the show is over, and goes back inside the auditorium. After the show, the superintendent accompanies Raju and Rosie back to **Malgudi**.

At home, Raju pleads with the superintendent to give him more time to speak to Rosie. When Raju finally confesses his deed to Rosie, she is stunned and says that the warrant for his arrest is karma.

## CHAPTER 10

Continuing to tell his tale to Velan, Raju speaks of the two days he was forced to spend in lock-up after his arrest for forgery. Rosie visits him at the jail and cries when she sees him. When Raju is released and returns home, he finds everything different. Mani, his secretary, is silent. Rosie has stopped practicing. There are no visitors. As Raju had never been careful with money, Rosie had been forced to scrape up 10,000 rupees to secure his bail. Raju suggests that Rosie take up engagements to earn more.

*Rosie is never more hypnotic and enchanting than when she dances her snake dance—which she rarely does. Rosie’s own power as a dancer and as a woman is associated with the snake, and this dance reveals her full magnetism. Rosie’s brilliant execution of the dance recalls the fact that it is her talent, rather than Raju’s management, that has led to her immense success.*



*Raju’s almost complete neglect of his mother indicates his deep failure in fulfilling his obligations as a son. Raju has not allowed his mother to return to his father’s home, as she wants to do. His deception of Rosie, as well as his neglect of his mother, paint a picture of a man who has lost all integrity. The arrival of the police indeed indicates that Raju is perhaps about to pay for his sins.*



*Raju’s actions finally catch up with him: his deceit has been uncovered by Marco. And yet, even when he is faced with an arrest warrant, Raju continues to lie and dissimulate, telling the police superintendent that he had signed for Rosie because she had been too busy, when in fact he had signed for her precisely to keep her in the dark about the letters from Marco’s lawyers. Raju’s own position as an important man, however, is reflected in the fact that he manages to convince the policeman to wait for him until the show is over.*



*Rosie’s shock at Raju’s action suggests that she had never expected Raju to be capable of such betrayal. Her further judgment that his arrest warrant is karma confirms the implication that Raju’s deceitful actions are finally catching up with him.*



*Just as Raju had ruined his father’s business, so now it seems that he has also ruined the empire of dance that he had built up with Rosie. This is indicated in the empty, silent house that he finds upon his return from lock-up. That Rosie goes out of her way to find the funds to release Raju from lock-up, even though he is there because he has betrayed and deceived her, points to her generosity. She still feels attached to and empathetic towards Raju, in spite of his betrayal.*



Back in the house after his two days in jail, Raju realizes that he is now a “hanger-on,” and “that mastery ha[s] passed” on to Rosie. She treats him with disdain, and Raju, absorbed in self-pity, fails to see the predicament he has put her in: they are poor, in spite of all her tireless dancing.

*The trouble that Raju has gotten them into reveals the truth about his relationship to Rosie. While he had always assumed that he was the powerful one, it is in fact now Rosie—the woman—who emerges as the one with power. Raju’s own deceit has rendered him powerless, and has moreover severed him from the woman he loves.*



Rosie wants to repay their debts. She considers going back to Marco. She says that she never wants to perform publicly again, after Raju’s disgrace. She also considers a suicide pact with Raju, but doesn’t trust that he will carry out his side of the bargain. Raju tries to convince Rosie to dance again, but she says she is tired of her circus existence. Finally, Rosie says that she will help Raju, but that when everything is over she wants him to leave her alone.

*Rosie’s desperation at the predicament in which she finds herself is reflected in the wild solutions that she proposes—either returning to Marco, or committing suicide with Raju. The trouble that Raju has created for her has completely dimmed her passion for and devotion to her dance.*



With Mani’s help, Rosie busies herself with booking engagements. Watching her, Raju becomes jealous of her self-sufficiency, realizing that she did not need him, and had never needed him nor Marco all along.

*Rosie’s independence and self-sufficiency in managing her own career once she decides to help Raju leads to a complete reversal of roles. Raju had believed himself instrumental to Rosie’s career, but now it is he who is completely dependent on her for help.*



With the money that Rosie raises from her performances, she hires a reputable, but expensive, lawyer to defend Raju against Marco in the upcoming trial.

*In securing such an expensive and reputable lawyer for Raju, Rosie shows herself to be a woman of her word—she has committed to help Raju, and she goes out of her way to procure for him the best defense lawyer possible.*



At the trial, Raju’s lawyer presents the chief villain as Marco, who, he argues, wanted to drive Rosie mad. It was Raju, the lawyer contends, who saved her from her cruel husband. He even goes so far as to argue that it was Marco himself who orchestrated the forging of the signature, but Mani’s testimony about Raju’s obsession with the arrival of the insured parcel, as well as the testimony of a handwriting expert, who deduces that the signature is in fact in Raju’s handwriting, seal Raju’s fate. Raju is sentenced to two years in prison. In the meantime, Rosie continues her dancing engagements to pay for the expensive trial.

*Raju’s public humiliation in the trial, as well as the sentence that he receives, point to the complete destruction of his reputation. Raju’s deceit has led him to the worst place possible: not only has he lost his power, as well as his hold, over Rosie, he has also lost his face before the public. As a man who is obsessed with status and wealth, such a public humiliation is devastating. It is even more devastating given that it is Rosie who, through her performances, bears the costs of the trial—Raju is so helpless he must completely rely on Rosie’s generosity.*



In jail, Raju is a model prisoner, getting on well with both warders and prisoners. Raju adjusts himself to life in prison, content to take care of the prison superintendent’s garden and to stroll the 50 acres of the prison grounds.

*The prison sentence seems to humble Raju. In jail, he is forced to make do with very little—taking joy in small things such as the superintendent’s garden and prison grounds. His limited, modest existence in prison marks a departure from his once lavish existence as Rosie’s manager.*





The prison superintendent transfers Raju to his office to act as his personal assistant. While organizing the super's newspapers, Raju comes across news of Nalini. He sees photos of her in the papers and reads reports of her engagements. She is growing more and more in fame and stature as a dancer, and he is affronted that she should have managed so well without him.

Raju wonders whether Mani, his old secretary, has taken his place in Rosie's life. Mani had been his only visitor during his first months in jail. He had given Raju the news that Rosie had moved to Madras, and that a huge crowd had gathered in **Malgudi** to see her off. She had discharged all of the debts that Raju had accumulated. Mani further informs Raju that, after the trial, Marco and Rosie never met, going their separate ways.

On the last day of the trial, Raju's mother had appeared. She had refused to let Rosie speak to her, and, directing her fury at Raju, told him that he has brought great shame on the family, and that it would have been better if he had died.

## CHAPTER 11

Back in the present by the **riverbank**, Raju has told his story throughout the night and a rooster crows as he finishes. Raju expects Velan to rise in disgust and leave him. Instead, Velan remains seated in silence. Perturbed, Raju asks Velan whether he has heard him fully. Velan answers, "Yes, Swami." Raju is further shocked by Velan's use of the respectful term "swami," and by Velan's further statement that he doesn't know why the swami has told his life story to Velan, who is merely the swami's "humble servant." He tells Raju that he will not speak a word of what Raju has told him.

*The distance between Raju and Rosie is now so vast that Raju can only hope to get news of her in the papers—there is no hope of ever seeing her in the flesh again. Rosie, clearly, has moved on with her life. Her growing success as a dancer confirms to Raju that she never needed him in the first place; she is more than equipped to manage her life and her career without his aid.*



*Raju's old predisposition towards jealousy seems to reassert itself here, as he wonders whether Mani has taken his place in Rosie's life. The news that Mani brings of Rosie confirms that she has overcome all obstacles and limitations. Once looked down upon by Raju's mother as a low caste dancing girl, she leaves the town of Malgudi as a celebrated artist and a star. That Rosie has also broken her dependence on men is indicated by the fact that she does not meet her husband Marco after the trial, and instead goes her own way. She seems finally free of the control of men.*



*The terrible words that Raju's mother speaks to her son points to the extent of the destruction that Raju has wrought as a result of his deceit. Not only has he destroyed his own life, but he has also destroyed his mother's through his shameful and irresponsible actions.*



*Velan's unexpected response to Raju's disclosure takes Raju by complete surprise. Although now Velan's knows Raju's history of deceit and dissimulation, this does not seem to change his opinion of Raju: he continues to refer to him by the respectful title of "swami." Velan's faith in Raju seems to run so deep, and is so profound, that nothing can shake it.*



As news of Raju's fasting penance to end the drought continues to spread far and wide, newspaper correspondents arrive in the village to report on Raju's progress. Bigger and bigger crowds congregate in the village to visit the swami. Raju has no privacy, even to consume the few morsels of food he has left. He blames Velan for his predicament.

*Ironically, Raju, like Rosie, is now a celebrity of sorts—as reports of his fast spread in the papers and more and more people arrive to see him. Raju's feelings towards Velan at this point are very ambivalent. On the one hand, Raju blames Velan for the situation he finds himself in—after all, his life as a holy man had begun with Velan. On the other hand, Velan's complete trust and faith in Raju, even after Raju discloses his history of deceit to him, seems to provoke a shift in Raju.*



Finally, having run out of any kind of nourishment and completely lacking any privacy, Raju gives up on food. For the first time in his life, he decides to make an earnest effort on behalf of others. He acts not out of lust for money or love, but out of benevolence.

*Raju's decision to undertake the fast in earnest marks a deeply significant moment in his development. Raju, as a result of the situation he finds himself in (and also likely because of Velan's as well as the villagers' faith in him), seems to mature and to grow genuinely into his role as a holy man, as he chooses to act in the interests of others for once, rather than out of self-interest.*



An American TV producer arrives in the village, wanting to make a film about the Swami's heroic fast. In an interview, the American asks Raju, "Have you always been a yogi?" and Raju answers, "Yes; more or less."

*The American TV producer's question is more significant than it seems—for it alludes to Raju's destiny, or dharma, as a guide or "yogi." Raju has, in fact, always been a guide of some sort, but it is only in his final reincarnation as a holy man that he fulfills the role of a guide in its highest sense.*



By the last day of the fast, Raju's condition has worsened considerably. The government doctors who have been sent to the temple to monitor his health send a telegram to the authorities that the swami's condition is grave.

*Raju's fame is such that his condition has become a concern of the national health authorities. The interest and concern that Raju's fast generates is a testament to just how heroic a feat he is undertaking.*



Raju, although weak to the point of being unable to stand upright alone, nonetheless wants to go to his spot in the **river** where he has gone every day during the fast to hold vigil. Helped by Velan, and followed by a huge crowd of spectators, he makes it to the river.

*Raju's determination to get to the spot in the river where he has stood every day reveals his commitment to fulfilling his duty towards the villagers. Raju does not want to let the villagers down, and so he makes it to the river in spite of his terribly weak condition.*



Supported by Velan in the **river**, Raju suddenly stirs, opens his eyes. He tells Velan that it's rain coming in the hills beyond the river; he can feel it welling up below his feet and legs. Before he finishes, he "sag[s] down."

*Raju's immersion in the river in this final scene, as well as his sense of rain coming, allude to his spiritual transformation. This final scene is also ambiguous because, just as it is unclear whether rain actually arrives or not, so it is unclear whether Raju survives the fast or not. His act of "sagging down" can be seen to indicate death. Nonetheless, by this point, Raju has been completely transformed by the fast, and by his commitment to helping the villagers. This is further reinforced in the sense that Raju has of rain rising in his feet and legs; it is as if he is being changed from within, and, of course, Raju has changed drastically—by the end of the novel (and, perhaps, by the end of his life) he has been transformed into a true holy man, one who sacrifices himself to aid others in their hardship.*





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