

ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF VALUES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
RK NARAYAN'S *THE GUIDE* AND  
ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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Abstract

"A man is but a product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes". This quote by Mahatma Gandhi emphasizes the power of thoughts and their impact on people's actions and lives. It suggests that people can remake their lives and transform their circumstances by working on their thoughts and life attitudes. The proposed paper examines and argues that education plays a significant role in shaping individual's values and morality, and offer critical reflections on pursuit of self-discovery through the exploration of the psychological and philosophical evolution of the protagonists in the two seminal Indian novels: R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008). Written fifty years apart, both works depict characters embarking on journeys that transform their worldviews and self-perception resulting from their self-knowledge and individual philosophy of life, revealing deeper insights into India's complex socio-political realities in contemporary India. *The Guide* is a narrative about Raju's transformation from a simple tour guide to a revered spiritual figure which highlights the fluidity of identity and the role of fate in human existence. Therefore, Narayan's novel is a study of human adaptability and redemption, examining existential themes such as self-deception, morality, and the search for meaning. *The White Tiger* is about Balram Halwai's rise from impoverished servant to successful entrepreneur that embodies a psychological shift from submission to rebellion, reflecting the inner turmoil and

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moral compromises required to navigate India's stark class divisions. Adiga's novel critiques the darker side of capitalism and moral decay in the pursuit of success, offering a philosophical examination of freedom, exploitation, corruption, and individualism.

### Introduction

Interdisciplinary research offers a comprehensive approach to understanding human experience and behaviour. It draws on the strengths of each discipline, allowing for a deeper exploration of how individuals interpret their world, make sense of their existence, and wrestle with internal and external conflicts. Literature as a discipline in general and a novel in particular cannot fully be shaped without the influence of other disciplines like philosophy, psychology, sociology and history. The development of characters encompasses philosophical questions about ethics, freedom and identity, and how they reflect psychological struggles such as trauma, anxiety and the ultimate quest for self-actualization. For the holistic development of a narrative, it is pertinent to understand essential questions about life, existence and morality. When applied to literature, philosophy can unravel profundity inherent in the character's actions, themes and narrative structure, shedding light on the human quest for meaning and truth. The psychology behind human behaviour, their mental processes and emotions offers enriching interpretations and enables a thorough understanding of what influences their decisions and experiences.

Literature has been historically a quintessential tool to raise awareness, inspire movements and give voice to the marginalized, contributing to the broader cultural and intellectual landscape. In addition, it offers an escape from everyday life, allowing readers to immerse themselves in other experiences and realities while challenging personal beliefs, sparking new perceptions and inspiring change or self-awareness. Indian English fiction is replete with narratives about the transformation of protagonists, often reflecting personal, cultural and societal changes as a consequence of various circumstances and factors influencing change. And the transformation of an individual cannot be fully shaped without culture, values and morality influencing the behavioural patterns, as culture is what people value, practice, cherish, what they do, their habits and life, their art, music, history, their way of doing things, etc.

For instance, Raju in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) transforms from a simple tour guide to a spiritual guide in the process of seeking

redemption; Lata Mehra in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) evolves throughout the novel as she navigates societal pressures and personal desires, growing in her understanding of love and independence; the characters, Estha and Rahel in Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) undergo profound emotional and psychological transformations as they confront trauma, loss and societal oppression; Biju and Sai in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) experience shifts in their identity and perspectives due to migration, the colonial legacy, and the challenges of modernization; Gogol Ganguli's transformation in *The Namesake* (2003) by Lahiri struggles with his Bengali heritage and American identity, ultimately finding reconciliation between the two; Subhash in another novel, *The Lowland* (2013) by Jhumpa Lahiri, transforms as he moves from India to the US taking on responsibilities and facing the aftermath of his brother's tragic involvement in a political movement; Balam Halwai in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) transforms from a poor servant to a successful businessman representing a psychological transition from obedience to disobedience, mirroring the internal conflict and ethical concessions necessary to navigate India's glaring class distinctions. These novels explore complex character development and transformation in the face of societal, political and personal challenges and also analyses the role of education in the development of individual values.

Across history, literature has been a vital instrument for drawing attention to issues, igniting social movements, and giving voice to the underrepresented, all of which contribute to a wider cultural and intellectual environment. Emerson observes, 'The foundation of culture, as of character, is at last the moral sentiment' and which adds to the depth of a well-rounded plot and makes it authentic. It also provides a diversion from daily life by letting readers surrender themselves in different realities and experiences, which might challenge preconceived notions, offer fresh perspectives and motivate self-awareness or transformation. Indian English Writing is full of stories about characters who undergo transformations depicting societal, cultural, and personal changes brought about by a variety of events and forces at play. The paper therefore, aims at delving into post-modern Indian texts to shed light on various aspects that played in the backdrop of the transformational journeys of protagonists in two seminal post-colonial texts: R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008).

A deeper understanding of India's complex socio-political realities and the crisis of values in the national fabric are unravelled in both

the novels that bring out characters embarking on journeys that completely change their worldview and their perception of 'self'. Traditional concepts of morality, identity, and achievement are all diluted by the disjointed and non-linear plots. JC Aggarwal defines value crisis in a society and asserts that 'it implies the erosion of traditional values of society or situation of dilemma when there is little balance between traditional values and modern values. There is lack of synthesis. Material values override the ethical, moral, social and spiritual values. At present, India is passing through a period of value crisis in several fields of national life. It is generally being said that the life of individuals as well as our social life is plagued with the evil values of corruption, cynicism, disparity, disruption, hypocrisy and violence.' (53) Since the two characters were written by different authors fifty years apart, it draws attention to a stark contrast between their moral frameworks, which represents a serious decline in moral principles and values in contemporary India, well depicted in both the novels in question. The apparent divergence in the discernment of principles that shape society also underscores the changing worldview and distinct philosophical shifts over a period of time.

In his essay titled "Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism", Max Weber has clearly concluded that Hindu religious ideas, especially those of Karma and Dharma provide the value basis of economic-traditionalism and hence are to be negatively associated with the prospect of economic development. The same is represented by the attitudinal change in both the characters, Raju and Balram, as soon as they find the opportunity and prospect of economic gains with a blatant disregard for moral conduct or sense of righteousness. Balram's realization that he must seize the opportunity to kill Mr. Ashok to escape his circumstances is evident in his dramatic monologue, "I was looking for the key for years. But the door was always open." NL Gupta, conversely, while considering some modern philosophers opines that 'moral and aesthetic values are products of creative evolution, which is a process of realisation. Truth, beauty, good, justice, righteousness, determine the means of their realisation. The various steps in the evolutionary process are indispensable to the ends.' Raju exemplifies this process of realisation which is why he consciously seeks redemption after bearing the consequences of chasing material wealth. Gupta further adds that 'This conception of values appeals to the modern mind with a bent of naturalism. Values or ideals without relation to a mind are inconceivable and meaningless. Values are values for consciousness. Values are ends

in themselves, unrelated to and thought of, by a mind, and yet directing and guiding the process of their gradual realisation as alluring rather than efficient causes, are not conceivable. Direction is always conscious.' (13)

In addition to highlighting the characters' divergent perceptions, this contrast offers an insight into the progression and changes that have unfolded in society over the years. It is clear from analysing their different moral compass that a decline of traditional values has brought a significant shift in the collective conscience of modern-day society thus creating a crisis of character. JC Aggarwal has precisely outlined the characteristics of persons with material values and spiritual values and he asserts, 'The materialistic persons hanker after money, power and prestige and for achieving of their objective, they are ready to go to any lengths. Plagued with suspicion of one another, they tend to become incapable of meaningful communication and deep personal relationships. They are prone to destructive and violent acts. They are very selfish. On the other hand, the spiritualists act on the premise that an individual is made for mutually helpful and satisfying relationships. They are preoccupied with enlightenment and truth. Humility is the hallmark of their behaviour. Arrogance and pride are anathema to them. Their relationships are marked by honesty, integrity and openness.' (19)

### R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*

RK Narayan's realistic portrayal of characters has often driven the interest of scholars and critics to delve deeper into his perception of social realism. The skill of fusing relatable and ordinary characters with extraordinary ambition and circumstances rooted in local traditions and Indian culture enhances its richness, making it profound, engaging and immortal. It is quite fascinating to find his characters indulging in self-discovery amidst all the chaos and conflict around them. He discerningly uses the suffering of the middle class with profound insight to illustrate survival strategies to deal with the complexities of life and society. *The Guide* chronicles the vicissitudes of life through the character of Raju, a tour guide in the made-up town of Malgudi, who goes through a series of transformations, from being a tour guide to a convicted prisoner to the most revered spiritual guide in the village. He is recognized for his inventive storytelling and compelling eloquence, which has earned him great appreciation. Incidentally, Raju meets Marco and his wife Rosie as their tour guide and soon after, Raju finds an

opportunity to sneak through a crack in their marriage and not only becomes close to Rosie but also encourages her to accomplish her dream of becoming a professional dancer.

The character of Raju is complex and a deceptive one which unravels through his actions as the narrative unfolds itself. Raju's opportunistic and adventurous mindset is reflected in his inclination towards exploiting Rosie's talent to capitalize it for material gains, "A dancer's art is ephemeral; one has to make the best of it while the artist lasts." Raju is a charming and fascinating person at first, but when he gets caught up in a complicated web of deceit and love, his life takes a different turn. He keeps his vested interests over everything else and manipulates Rosie by controlling her matters, profession, engagements and her wealth by superficially reassuring her, "You don't worry about these things. Just leave it to me." Furthermore, most of his decisions are driven by moral compromises and rationalization of his material lust, be it forging the signature, ("These things happen in business. It's all about taking risks") or be it defending his greed, ("I've worked hard to build what I have. A little indulgence is my right.") There are numerous passages in the novel where his actions reflect his self-serving disposition.

In his book, *Vedic Education*, Mukhopadhyaya talks about spiritual and ethical growth and affirms that 'spiritual growth depends on one fundamental factor described as *Chitta-vritti-nirodha* and, therefore, all avenues of influences from external world which might disturb the mind should be closed, so that spiritual life may grow freely in the atmosphere of inner peace and quiet.' (280) Following a brief period of incarceration, Raju ends up in a distant town where he serves as a spiritual advisor earning immense faith and respect from the villagers and eventually, grows spiritually in a tranquil atmosphere through inner peace. Even though Raju grapples with his sense of purpose and personal identity, he becomes a celebrated figure as he wins the trust of the locals. The narrative examines themes of change, atonement, and the fuzziness of the distinction between truth and deceit. His interactions with Rosie and her husband Marco, who represents the tension between art and business, define Raju's path. When Raju is requested to observe a ceremonial fast in order to protect the village from drought, he ultimately finds himself in a moral bind. As Raju embraces a selfless path at the narrative's conclusion, readers are left to consider the intricacies of interpersonal relationships and the essence of faith.

The author has skilfully woven Indianness with the cultural elements and the spirit of its diversity through the narrative of *The*

*Guide* as Raju accepts the role of a spiritual guide and becomes a Swami. He says, "If people find solace in my words, who am I to deny them?" and later takes the on responsibility of the well-being of the villagers while displaying a deep sense of connection and growing ownership, "They have faith in me. I cannot let them down now." Raju's gradual awareness of accountability validates his selfless transformation while trying to redeem his past mistakes, "If my sacrifice can bring rain and save these people, let it be so." It is believed that there is no bigger redemption than recognising one's flaws and expressing desire to change for the better and Raju is no exception as he expresses with a pure conscience that "I am no saint, but perhaps it's time to make amends." The profound realization coupled with a conscious understanding of morality makes his redemption meaningful as he finds meaning in sacrifice, "In trying to save them, I have saved myself."

However, his character exhibits a giant scope of growth while grappling with social responsibilities and juggling with individual desires under the pressure of family, duty and community, underlining the importance of cultural and social values. It offers a potential landscape for the analysis of complex philosophy based on the character's fundamental human values serving as a tool to reflect on the intricacies of human experiences, ethics, existence and the search for meaning through the themes of existentialism, moral ambiguity, transformation and redemption. In his book, *I am Brahman*, Maurice Anslow, a journalist who studied human evolution and faith, discovers the essentials in religion and evolutionary energy which highlights the truth that consciousness is the basis of all existence and writes, 'From the cleverest philosopher to the humblest temple worshipper everyone agrees that the path is to abandon our senses of ourselves and seek unity with God... Our individual dharmas are prescribed for us because it is the manner in which we will work out or address the karma of our past which is the collective consequences of acts we have undertaken in this and previous lives.' (27-28) The character of Raju serves as a symbol of authenticity and self-discovery underscoring the importance of individual will, decision or choice in defining one's life. Raju's actions illustrate the complexity of values while he confronts various moral and ethical dilemmas in different situations and finally decides to seek redemption through a personal quest into the truth of consciousness and by delving deeper into the alchemy of faith.

The narrative addresses issues that involve moral judgements and ethical relativism which clearly states that the morals of

individuals are not the same even if they belong to the same family or community. Raju experiences a feeling of existential vacuum that made his life purposeless, therefore his journey determines that while superficiality and peripheral forces define life, an individual still holds the agency to make meaningful choices, highlighting the balance between determinism and personal responsibility. Following the theory of consequentialism, a utilitarian approach advocated by Jeremy Bentham and JS Mill, Raju's evolution as a spiritual guide for the welfare of the villagers respecting their deep faith is right because it produces right results, and also produces maximum happiness for a maximum number of people at a given point of time. In such a situation, the 'consequence' matters as the action becomes moral if the pleasure derived from the action is more than the pain for an individual. Therefore, the novel is quite relevant in examining various dimensions of ethics.

#### Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

*The White Tiger* on the contrary, incorporates the themes of class struggle, corruption, misuse of power and the stark inequalities in modern India. The urban setting contrasts sharply with Narayan's rural India, presenting a more globalized, capitalist landscape where individual ambition and survival take precedence over traditional values. It critiques the "India shining" narrative by showing the darker underbelly of the economic boom. Balram often justifies corruption by using 'Rooster Coop' as a metaphor for the oppressive social structure in India which sets the stage towards disregarding morality, "The trustworthiness of servants is the foundation of the entire Indian economy. A billion servants are told to wait patiently in line, without rebelling or rioting, even though they are aware that they won't get paid what they deserve."

The novel deals with the concept of individualism and survival strategies in an immoral social construct dominated by power politics and class distinctions. Balram travels a long way through a crooked corrupt system to break the oppressive chains through crime. Later in the story, he justifies his crime by calling it a rebellion against systematic oppression and exhibits his trait as a manipulator by serving his self-interest, "I had to kill him. It was a liberation for me and sacrifice for them." Adiga raises questions about freedom, determinism, and the moral cost of ambition. The narrative explores existential themes while emphasising the vehement urge to break free from the "Rooster Coop" – the suffocating limitations of society

and family to claim much-needed freedom, even at the cost of ethics and morality. Balram's belief that corruption is necessary to succeed nurtures his transformation and supports his means to turning into an unscrupulous businessman, "In this country a man is either strong, or he is weak. Either he's a man, or he's a servant." The novel also satirizes the election methods and corrupt nature of politics through the character of a politician called the Great Socialist who controls the 'darkness' with power. Due to the dubious activities in the coal sector, the Stork family frequently bribes the Great Socialist to secure their prosperity.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle gives an explanation of *acrasia* which is lack of self-control; and distinguishes between weak and impetuous *acrasia* as a part of the discourse of his theory of actions and moral character in ethics. He believes it is fundamentally determined by the difference in their thoughts, beliefs and intellectual perceptions. He asserts two versions of the same: extreme and moderate. Balram can be categorized as the 'Extremist' version, for his 'beliefs play no role in the production of any action except in means/ends reasoning as to how to achieve a desired goal; the desired goals themselves are determined by the agent's emotional response to particular situations or the state of his general desires; the value of each goal (or course of action) is – provided subjective probabilities are equal – a function of the strength of his desire for it at the time of action,' (162) says David Charles. The character of Balram is shaped by the emotional responses to his unprecedented and unpredictable circumstances that significantly contribute to his transformation from a servile virtuous man to a defiantly immoral extremist. However, it doesn't justify the end, but the sweeping change in his beliefs, thoughts and actions is triggered by external factors like betrayal, oppression, injustice, and his inability to control his emotions & pain which he considers to be relevant, leads to his intellectual failure affecting his morality.

While talking about 'intuitionism', Jennifer Trusted observes, '... Hume had been right to say that reason was the slave of the passions. But there was also the autonomous aspect of the will, the will of the moral and rational part of human nature – reason issued the commands and so moved the autonomous will to freely choose to follow the moral law. Actions were right if they conformed to moral law; they were not meant to be judged by consequences: ...when moral value is in question, we are concerned, not with the actions which we see, but with their inner principles, which we cannot see.' (57) According to Jennifer's concept of intuitionism, Balram has

an innate moral capacity similar to his intellectual capacity, which enables him to make moral value judgements and to evaluate them as being true or false. His moral truth is quite self-evident and his psychology is marked by a anger, frustration, and rebellion against a system that has dehumanized him. His journey is one of awakening from servitude to self-empowerment, but it also involves a psychological descent into moral decay. Balram has an innate ability to make moral evaluations, therefore he exercised his free will because he strongly believed that doing good was not worthy of approval under the circumstances in which he conducted himself. Balram is acutely aware of the systemic inequalities that oppress him, and his psychological journeys involve shedding his old identity and adopting a new one, free from moral constraints. Balram's need to escape 'the slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune' and to find relief and release from oppression and injustice, cannot be overlooked. The novel explores the psychology of ambition and what it truly means to be free and more extreme, as he justifies murder and betrayal in his quest for freedom. The novel presents a sharp critique of how systemic injustice can shape individual psychology, leading to moral degradation. Jennifer opines that 'Changing circumstances, such as those brought by technical advances, increased psychological knowledge of human nature, changing religious beliefs and changing opinions of what is fair shares and what is proper reward, will alter moral judgements on social values and codes of behaviour.' (89)

### Role of Education in Shaping Values

Balram's character challenges the reader to question whether the ends (freedom from oppression) can justify the means (murder and deception). To quote Brightman, 'Values mean whatever is actually liked, prized, esteemed, desired, approved, and enjoyed by anyone at any time.' Morality and conscience are shaped by one's individual values, brick by brick that become a strong guiding light in times of ethical dilemmas. Education is therefore significant in cultivating and moulding values as an important skill necessary to perform as a functioning member of the society. It is the most desirable and influential part of the lifelong learning process. The two characters in question, Narayan's Raju, who emerges as a fraud masquerading as a spiritual guide and Adiga's Balram, who becomes a businessman demonstrating the darker aspect of ambition in a corrupt system, represent an uneducated and 'half-baked' section of society whose

journeys reveal a complex relationship with human values, set against the backdrop of the Indian socio-political landscape. Considering the recommendations of various Committees on Religious and Moral Education (1959), JC Aggarwal opines that 'There is great corruption and dishonesty in our official and business life. It is the students of today who are to be in charge of the various departments of life tomorrow; and if they learn what real integrity is in their early years, they are not likely to go very far wrong later on. Every effort must, therefore, be made to teach students true moral values from the earliest stage of their educational life.' (109)

Initially, Raju is driven by vested interests, displaying moral ambiguity. Due to lack of formal education, he resorts to guile, manipulation and deception to navigate through life which is a testimony to his moral degradation and propensity evident in his exploitation of innocent villagers' sentiments and faith for personal gains. His eventual, if dishonest transition into a religious figure emphasises the idea of moral complexity by showing how individual morals can be compromised out of desperation. Similarly, Balram refuses to submit to the oppressive and corrupt forces as he chooses to murder his employer, Mr. Ashok and establishes loss of innocence, honesty and integrity. He was first exposed to corruption within government institutions when his father succumbed in a decrepit village hospital. The concept that systematic corruption compels individuals to champion unethical means of survival is clearly validated in *The White Tiger*. Both the stories embody a critique of 'darkness' or the social construct that trap the lower classes in the vicious cycles of poverty and moral compromise because of lack of access to formal education and unfavourable circumstances.

While both the characters are shaped by lack of exposure and education, their trajectories with different sets of experiences highlight how education can directly or indirectly influence one's ethical and moral compass. Raju's minimal knowledge and limitations in Malgudi enable him to grow as a street-smart man which helps him to survive and fend for his basic needs but not to conform to moral principles or develop ethical values needed for a dignified life. In spite of that, his life lessons and introspection overpower his lack of education. This way, education acts as a double-edged sword for Raju. On the other hand, Balram showed signs of a promising student but the quirk of fate took a different turn. A textual analysis and comparative study of both the characters offer a nuanced relevance of education in forming values and shaping the overall character of an individual. It is essential to lay emphasis on

ethical education in schools to ensure a strong principled future for everyone. Through the lens of social realism, a shift in the worldview and philosophy of life can be closely observed to identify the source of changing human values.

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