**Transformation and Redemption of Raju:**

In tracing the metamorphosis of [Raju](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-guide/characters/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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-guide/symbols/malgudi) sees him “guiding” visitors through, and to, the town’s sites and geography. This is the role Raju plays in relation to [Marco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-guide/characters/marco-polo), 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-guide/characters/rosie-nalini), 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-guide/symbols/water). 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](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-guide/characters/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.