



CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING VOICES' IN SAUL BELLOW'S HENDERSON THE RAIN KING AND R.K. NARAYAN'S THE GUIDE: A COMPARATIVE NOTE

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Abstract

“Consciousness raising voices in Saul Bellow’s Henderson, The Rain King and R.K. Narayan The Guide” - examines how the voices become a device in changing the characteristics of the protagonist from a charlatan to a true saint. Saul Bellow chooses to treat the growth of the spirit comically to confirm the truth that spiritual growth is the end of existence even in the modern world. He makes Henderson, the quester with his goal of expanded consciousness. The novelist also traces the development of this romantic quest for selfhood in considerable detail. Saul Bellow in the novel provides an allegory of the bipolar culture of the fifties, whose characters symbolize the values of The “Cleans” and “Dirties” of the era. Henderson by learning to adopt a more wide-ranging and solid views of life from the Wariri and King Dahfu, finally discards his personal excesses and becomes a balanced person. Thus, by the end of the novel, he is no longer a prisoner to the consciousness raising voices instead he is a free man to live a whole life.

The Guide reveals how a corrupt tourist guide Raju playing the central role is metamorphosed into a saint. When he is exposed as a criminal in the context of forging Rosie’s signature, he is sent to Jail. His imprisonment puts an end to his career as a tourist guide, but it becomes a turning point in his life and the turning segment of Raju’s life is the point of study in this paper. The jailbird Raju, after his release from the prison cell, is mistaken for a spiritual guide and later made to sacrifice his life to save the lives of the whole nation. Raju’s life—his transformation into a sage from a rogue—seems to match the lives of many Indian mythical sages. This study attempts to show how consciousness raising voices transform Raju from a traitor to a holy man.

Saul Bellow is the first writer introducing to us the American Jewish voice, a gentle voice. Henderson - The Rain King (1958) is an unsuccessful experiment, noble in purpose but dismal in result. It is a perfect example of why Saul Bellow is perhaps the most serious of comedic writers. This novel contains three major elements. Grotesque comedy, fantasy and adventures in central Africa, an indistinct Africa where one meets Tarzan and his faithful Waziri, and a solemn quest for “the great principles of life” for spiritual happiness and communion with Truth and Deity. The novel portrays Eugene Henderson, the hero as an aristocrat who is dissatisfied with forever chasing a voice inside of him screaming *I want [I want[I want]*’ His trip to Africa on a spiritual safari, a quest for truth makes him Henderson The Rain King. His strength, his passion for life and his prime success in bringing rain have made him a god like figure among the Tribes.

In R. K. Narayan’s ‘The Guide’ (1958), Raju, the protagonist, by profession a guide is a captivating character. The central theme of this novel is his transformation from a rogue, a villain into a sage and sadhu or a saint. ‘The Guide’ is set in Malgudi, a fictional town. It opens with the protagonist Raju recently released from jail, sitting on a granite slab beside an ancient shrine on a bank of the river, Sarayu. On the other bank is situated the village Mangala, where people are simple and made to accept even the most unbelievable things. Raju, though simple and ideal, always seizes chances either short cuts or wrong cuts to win money or women. He is later imprisoned especially for forgery. This imprisonment puts an end to his career as a tourist guide. After release, he is mistaken for a spiritual guide. To make up this idiosyncrasy, he becomes a true saint hero and in the end he sacrifices his life to save people.

This review is an attempt to make a parallel study of consciousness raising voices in these two novels based on symbols and theme. Henderson, a multi millionaire by trade and a pathetic, overconfident clown at fifty five, wants to go to Africa. His never-ending follies, his alcoholism, his discontent life, restlessness, rough tyrannical mood bore him to tears. Henderson feels that raising Pigs, hard physical labour and playing on Violin cannot quench his *tedium vitae* and the agony of spirit ever whispering , ‘I Want; I Want’. He flies to Africa.

Henderson, though big and brutish, sometimes contemplates on complexities but manages to be melodic. When he decides to start living his own life, he leaves his wife Lily, employs a guide called Romilayu, who takes him to a village Amewi. There he meets the Leader of the village, **Itelo**. It is their custom to invite him for a wrestling match either as greeting or as a test of strength. Henderson beats the leader Itelo. Henderson's hideous drive finds a temporary channel. He learns about a plague of Frogs which the village people consider as a curse to the river. When he is unable to alleviate it, both Henderson and Romilayu visit a neighboring village, Wariri. There Henderson has to challenge strange games that can aggravate and fan the



flames of social humiliation. The villagers lay a dead body next to where they stay the night. When Henderson removes it, the body comes back to where it was laid. Again Henderson is challenged by the King of the village to remove a statue Mummah. He succeeds in lifting it. "How much better I can interpret now why you succeeded with Mummah. Solely on the basis of that imprisoned want" (HRK 207). Thence forth he is called 'Sungu' meaning Rain Warrior. Henderson's transformation takes place through the king Dahfu who has often exposed Henderson to the lioness. In *The Guide*; Raju the hero explores the complexities of a 'Reluctant Guru'. His versatile career is controlled by destiny, and this destiny makes him a true hermit. A railway vendor turned tourist guide, Raju comes very close to Rosie. He persuades her to leave her husband Marco. She obtains fame as a dancer. Raju becomes her impresario establishing himself as an influential member of the Malgudi high society. He is sent to Jail for forgery. As soon as he is released from the Jail, he becomes a fake hermit in Mangala. The circumstances allow him to discover his amazing spiritual strength he turns into a true ascetic. Raju has a kaleidoscopic personality. His taste for higher things of life stands him in good stead when he pretexts as the holy man. As a railway vendor, and as a servant in the jailor's house, he has learnt a lot from 'scraps' Narayan wants to spotlight the mystery of human motivation. Hence instead of depicting Raju a mere saint or pseudo-saint, he has created Raju with even more care than his other would-be hermit, Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*.

'*Henderson the Rain King*' is packed with symbolism especially of Africans. The Africans have a specific mythology concerning Lion. To them, Lion is a symbol of courage, a power beyond men. Whether Lions are the incarnations of the souls of the dead warriors / the secret heirs to the wariri throne, Saul Bellow is determined to create a context in which he shows Lion, Lions and Loyalty and Lions again. The author presents a character in 'Henderson', a character who cares much about the tragedy of his failures while maintaining a positive outlook though the circumstances seem to be gloomier. Love and sex have a significant role in 'The Guide'. The design of love is fashioned between another man's wife and a railway guide. This love crumbles when Raju's commercialization is exposed. Rosie, the daughter of a Devadasi and an adept in the westernized culture is neither a pure artist nor a pure wife. Just like Raju she too is highly commercialized. Love in the novel is portrayed from the point of view of the Indian Society. The treatment of sex in the novel is different from what is seen in Somerset Maugham and D.H. Lawrence. R.K. Narayan doesn't describe sex, he suggests it. The novelist unfolds a truth that illicit love and sex will destroy man - woman relationship. The novelist while exploring love and sex, presents in Raju, the spirit of the contemporary young man of India.

Coming back to 'Henderson-The Rain King'. Henderson is not attracted by sex or money. He reveals that there is an unknown voice in him that always says 'I Want, I Want'. This voice is extremely agonizing and distressing to him. He says- "Now I have already mentioned that there was a disturbance in my heart, a voice that spoke there said, "I Want, I Want, I Want". It happened every afternoon and when I tried to suppress it, it got even stronger. It only said one thing, I Want, I Want" The voice occurs nearly eighteen times in the novel. Along with the voice 'I Want I Want' there is an oft repeated phrase, 'spirit's sleep'. Both together transform him entirely. But the talk with the queen of Arnewi gives him solace and serves him as a remedy to his agonizing voice. He tells Prince Itelo, "Now please tell the Queen for me, friend, that it tells wonderful for me simply to see her. I don't know whether it's her general appearance or the lion skin or what I feel emanating from her-anyway; it puts my soul at rest." (PP 72-73). The readers have to sympathize with Henderson for his constant suffering. Soon he learns from the Queen a lesson 'Grun-tu-molani' meaning 'you want to live'. The novelist uses the term 'Grun -tu-molani' fourteen times to express Henderson's gratitude for having learnt it and regret for not completing the lesson. For blowing up the cistern of Arnewi. He has to leave the Arnewi for the Wariri. There he is confident of learning the unfinished lesson from Dahfu, the king, "However under the light of the king Dahfu's eyes I comprehended that in bombing the cistern I had not lost my last chance. No Sir. By no means", (P. 149).

Just like Henderson, Raju in the novel "The Guide" develops a strong passion for Rosie, Marco's wife"- I was obsessed with thoughts of Rosie", (The Guide 105). Again he says, "This woman who had been in my arms forty-eight hours ago showing off." (135-36). He never understands Rosie's introspective nature. Raju's desire for the wealth of Rosie involves him in a case of forgery. His two years imprisonment changes him partially. But a complete transformation is through a simple man Velan a humble villager. Raju declares "fast unto death". Raju has to continue this contrived sainthood till he falls a victim to his own arduousness Raju realizes that Raju, the self-absorbed man is moving to self-renunciation.

The transformation of Henderson is through the lion Therapy as initiated by the King Dahfu. The King advises, "Closer- little by little" (P. 196). Henderson is made to appreciate, absorb, contemplate and dramatize the lions, soon a transformation crops up. He becomes a roaring lion, a Beast. "And so I was the beast. I gave myself to it. And all my sorrow came out in the roaring. My lungs supplied the air. But the note came from my soul. This roaring scalded my throat and hurt the corners of my mouth and presently filled the den like a bass organ pipe. This was where my heart had sent me, with its clamour. This is where I ended up. Oh Nebuchadnezzar; How well I understand that prophecy of Daniel. For I had claws, and hair, and some teeth, and I



was bursting with hot noise, but when all this had come forth, there was still a reminder. That last thing of all was my human longing” (P.236-37). This Lion-Therapy seems to be a must for his transformation. The King Dhafu feels, “First she is unavoidable. Test it, you will find she is unavoidable. And this is what you need as you are an avoider. Oh, you have accomplished momentous avoidances. But she will change that. She will make consciousness to shine. She will burnish you. She will force the present moment upon you” (P.230).

The brunt of Lion -Therapy is felt when he rejects his original name. E.H. Henderson is now Leo. E .Henderson,(P.252). His human hunger is fulfilled when he is able to adopt a Lion Cub and an orphan child. This complete transformation is well said by Philip Toynbee - Henderson-“returns to America with a symbolical Lion-cub and the sense that he has been spiritually renewed” (Philip.69). Henderson realizes that a man can with effort have a spiritual rebirth when he understands that spirit, body and the outside world are not enemies but can live in harmony. Raju’s transformation launches on the moment he avoids food. “This enjoyment is something that Velan cannot take away”. (238). He dies on the eleventh day of fasting. This death is his transformation. To quote Narasimhaiah, “Raju’s death, viewed symbolically, means that the individual by losing his life in water brings rain (and life) to his fellowmen, and his death, a ‘death by water’ is really not death but a means of self-purification and self-realization” (P 198).

Raju’s transformation is through Velan, he instigates the saintly living- a spiritual therapy. To avoid walking on the Razor's Edge, Raju discloses to Velan his past sinful life. But Velan fervently calls Raju ‘Swami’ to let Raju listen to his inner voice. Fakrul Alam says, “it may be in the nature of things for villagers like Velan apotheosize Raju Types” (P 19). ‘drought’ occupies a main place in both the novels. The cows die due to Drought ‘both in *The Guide* and *Henderson The Rain King*. But in *Henderson*, the death of a cow is poignant, moving and touching. To the Aenewi Frog is banned and prohibited. Hence they prevent their cattle from drinking water from the frog invested cistern. In *The Guide* also due to Drought more cattle die. R.K. Narayan presents a genuine and an authentic picture of Drought while describing the death of cattle. In *Henderson*, The King Dahfu while initiating Lion-Therapy to Henderson explains that Wairiri Witches have congress with bad lions and that the results children are dangerous. To Henderson, the message is very peculiar. In *The Guide* and *The Rain King* the depiction of ‘Rain bringing ceremony’ is *creme de la creme* meaning the very best. The ordeal the heroes endure and experience bears mythical presumption that flowers bloom in the desert once in forty or fifty years- “These seeds need a heavy rainfall. It has to be the rain coming through the soil”(HRK 207). This mythological truth is felt when Henderson conducts the rigorous and occult ‘Rain bringing ceremony’. In the same way, Raju’s penance brings rain in *The Guide*. Saul Bellow besides cattle describes a wild Warririan ritual filled with dancing, animals and warriors. In *The Guide*, cobra (Rosie’s presentation of cobra dance) is connected with the relationship of Raju and Rosie K. Chellappan: comments *The Cobra* is a symbol of primordial energy” (P 28).

To conclude, Henderson wandering around Africa lamenting his sins and weeping copiously performing feats of strength and being hailed as the Rain King of Primitive Tribe sees himself not only as a comic figure but also as a heroic one. By learning to adopt a more complete and consistent view of life from the Wariri and King Dahfu, Henderson ultimately sheds his personal excesses and becomes a balanced person. Thus, by the end of the novel, he is no longer a prisoner to the consciousness raising voices but is free to live a calm, dignified and self controlled life. Raju in *The Guide* by taking up the challenge of the villagers to bring rain and by- answering the Consciousness awakening voices becomes a Mahatma and a martyr.

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