

CHAPTER : III

THE ASCETIC IN THE THREE MAJOR NOVELS, VIZ., HE WHO RIDES  
A TIGER (1954), THE GUIDE (1958) AND SEASONS OF JUPITER (1958)

## CHAPTER - III

In this chapter, I propose to undertake a detailed assessment of the three major novels viz., He Who Rides a Tiger (1954) of Bhabani Bhattacharya, The Guide (1958) by R.K. Narayan and Seasons of Jupiter (1958) by Anand Lall with reference to the theme of asceticism. The assessment will roughly comprise a brief summary of the story, a detailed explication of the portrayal of the ascetic and the incidents and characters that go to contribute to the development of the character of the ascetic and the aesthetical presentment of the theme by the writer with his attitude reflected therein.

(1) He Who Rides a Tiger (1954)

He Who Rides a Tiger (1954), a novel of social protest, is Bhabani Bhattacharya's projection of the social, cultural and religious world in a Bengal village called Jharana. Kalo, a blacksmith, is the protagonist of the novel, who is insulted at various stages of his life by the caste - Hindus and is all out to take revenge upon them. His imprisonment for a petty theft gives a necessary turn to his life and the advice of a fellow prisoner, Biten (B.10), hastens the process of revenge. He disguises as a saint, makes the image of a fake god emerge out of the ground and is pleased to see the caste-Hindus bend before him. The first half of the novel describes how Kalo is exploited by the society and the second half how he exploits it as a revenge. The spiritual element is treated on the social level where the saffron robe becomes a symbol of power.

I

Kalo, the blacksmith, sufficiently black to be fit for his profession, names his daughter as Chandra Lekha, a name

not befitting his status and out of place in his community. It is quite interesting to note that the low-born people have a mute desire to rise above their social level. The same aspiration of rising in the society is shown by the untouchable Laxmi and Bakha in The Road (1961) by Mulk Raj Anand.

Kalo makes up his mind to bring up the child as a girl of gentle birth as far as his means would permit, because his wife had often said : "Our golden one, boy or girl, shall go to the mission school and get all the learning they have there. We must find the money for expenses even if we have to go without food." (p.9)

Lekha's schooling begins smoothly. It is a joy and pride for Kalo that Lekha makes quick progress at school, stands first at the annual test and is given double promotion. However, Lekha's schoolmates and the caste people in her locality grow jealous of her progress at school. They taunt her : "A Kamar girl puts on the feathers of learning! A sparrow preens as a parrot! " (p.15) Lekha wins a gold medal in the essay competition, but there is nobody to admire her success, except Kalo and the newspaper, Hindustan. Kalo's joy knows no bounds.

## II

Soon begins the "dark year" of a plague of hunger in the wake of the war and famine of 1943. Barns and markets run empty and prices of goods rise like anything. Bengal dies of hunger and so does Jharna, Kalo's village. Resultantly, Kalo does not get customers. People from all over Bengal fly to the capital city of Calcutta in search of job and food. One day, a trader from Calcutta comes to the village and asks

whether Kalo has any jewellery to sell. He retorts at the negative answer of Kalo : "The lowborn people won't bend but they will crack. God has sent this mighty hunger to teach the lowborn people a true lesson." (p.19) What Kalo receives from the society is nothing but insult and injustice which gradually lead him to revenge. The trader invites Kalo to the city and leaves his address with him. Jharna is now the 'ghost of a town'. Kalo too decides to go to Calcutta to seek his fortune, leaving his daughter in the charge of his sister. The scene at the Jharna station crowded with destitutes is a touching one. Scores of men and women are seen clinging to footboards of the train and crying for help.

Kalo too travels in the train, without a ticket. The red-turbaned men remove the foot-boardholders. One of them strikes his bundle of rice and spills it off. Kalo gets red with anger. A bitter fury and a wild thought of revenge germinate in his mind. He gives vent to his anger : 'Sons of swine! Beasts and devils!' (p.29) Further Kalo is arrested for stealing bananas and given the 'Justice' of hard labour. Thus Kalo's exploitation by the high caste moneyed people sows the seeds of revenge in his mind.

### III

Kalo is P-14 in the jail and develops friendship with a fellow-prisoner, B-10, popularly known as Biten. Kalo tells him the whole account of his life and enquires about the possibility of a job in the city. Biten rules out such a possibility. Now Biten is his guru. His counsel changes the direction of Kalo's life philosophy.

One day Biten says :

"There is one road for us-for me, for you, for all of us."

'What road?' .....

'We are the scum of the earth. The boss people scorn us because they fear us. They hit us where it hurts badly in the pit of the belly. We've got to hit back.'" (p.39)

The initial inspiration of taking revenge upon the people in power and making them bow to him, thus, comes out of Kalo's anger against them.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is a reformatory writer and propagandist. His novels are the theses of social protest. His heroes raise their voice for the down-trodden as Kalo and Biten do in this novel. Biten guides Kalo in the matter of fooling the society and taking revenge upon the highbrows. Note for instance, a very vocal passage in which the first germ of asceticism is seen :

"Can you wear a saffron loincloth, smear your body with ashes, mark a red-paste trident of shiva on your forehead?' ... 'if you have luck, someone with money enough to squander will see in you a Yogi with great spiritual power....' 'I can see another way and may be it is better way - if it works. This, again is a trick to make a milch-cow of people ...' 'The Brahmin has sole right in this business. To take it from him you have to be a Brahmin ...' 'That is why you have to make yourself Twice-Born. The white, nine stranded thread shall gleam across your chest.'" (pp.42-43)

In this way, forced by circumstances and goaded by the co-sufferer, Biten, Kalo makes up his mind to attain Brahminhood and the status of an ascetic as a means of his aim of taking revenge upon the exploiting class.

## IV

Kalo is released from the prison on the scheduled day, gets his ticket punched at the station and comes over to Calcutta. He walks up and down the streets of Calcutta and gets nothing but disappointment. Ultimately, he somehow gets the job of a stretcher-bearer<sup>-of</sup> piling dead bodies of the destitutes into the truck and unloading them at the cremation ground. Kalo is now ready to burn himself in the hell for ten thousand years for Lekha's sake. He is forced to change his jobs.

He then enters the firm of Rajani and tells him of his readiness ~~for~~ accepting the job of a harlot-house agent. Rajani appoints him for five harlot-houses.

Here, at home, Lekha and her aunt have to struggle with their lives. Lekha has to sell her gold medal to the same trader who had once affronted her father. One day, a stranger woman from Calcutta comes to her house and tells her the sad news of her father's meeting with an accident. She also produces a letter from Kalo. Lekha at once decides to go to Calcutta. The woman doesn't allow Lekha to take her old aunt with them.

There in Calcutta, Kalo has been working at 'Rupa' a beautifully constructed whore house. One day, he sees a statue-like figure in the balcony. Soon the visitor of the night arrives. The girl inside is heard groaning and Kalo is startled by her voice. He thinks that it is Lekha's voice. The man walks off stiffly. His voice is a bark of fury. Kalo slips to the room of the woman, and to his astonishment, he finds his daughter Lekha sobbing with deep sorrow. He at once brings her downstairs and is off with

her in a rickshaw. Kalo turns a brute now. He thinks that his daughter is fallen even to have breathed the air of the harlot house. He recalls the words of Biten and consoles his daughter : "They beat you?" ... "They shall pay".(p.72) Now he decides to make a living by practicing the magic trick suggested by Biten. And here starts his role as an ascetic who is all out to take revenge upon the society. Then follows the Temple episode in which Kalo, the fake Sadhu, is shown playing with the religious emotions of the high class people as part of his revenge strategy. The whole episode is a bitter exposition of the hypocrisy and gullibility of the people.

V

The news of the emerging of shiva's image spreads all over the locality. A continuous chant of 'Namo Shivaya!' goes on under a banyan tree beside a street. Kalo is in charge of the whole scene. Now he is a tall, dark, big-built Brahmin in a holy man's yellow cloak. He sits crosslegged on a tiger skin. A passerby passes on the news of Shiva's coming, from place to place. The news draws swarms of people to the spot. Kalo and Lekha are tired of the chanting but they don't give it up. Kalo performs many tricks to make himself appear like a twice-born. Putting on the sacred thread, he has made himself rootless and has willingly surrendered to the guise of a Yogi. On his part it is a kind of rebel to seek justice. Kalo is now past caring anything. He says to himself;

"I am a rock. I have killed all my past lives for this bold new life. Why could I not kill a man who comes out of the darkness of my past?" (p.82)

At dusk, Shiva manifests himself. Only a few can see the miracle. People start jostling each other in an attempt of having a 'darshan' of Shiva. Kalo doesn't miss a chance of outshining others and showing his generosity : "All must see. Do not push. Shiva having come, is not going to vanish. Bide your time. Take one look and move off. One glimpse is enough." (p.83)

Offerings are heaped. Coins and silver bits are poured upon the deity. Women take out gold bangles from their arms to offer to Shiva. Kalo is sensible enough not to show ~~very~~any greed. He hates the sight of the crowds. "The fools! How he had tricked them! He could have laughed. He had created a god. He had created a legend. The legend would pass from generation to generation." (p.83)

Now the life of a smith is beyond Kalo's thought because he has chosen a different path of life and there is no middle way : "He rode a lie as if it were a tiger which he could not dismount lest the tiger pounce upon him and eat him up." (p.84)

This is one of the comments on the significance of the title.

Now begin Kalo's troubles. The owner of the land where Lord Shiva has emerged is a rich merchant in Clive street and is now a ruthless man. But equally cunning as he is, Kalo handles the man skillfully :

"This is my land. What witchcraft is happening here? ..."

"Son, grandson and great grandson of low-caste folk, '... He does not know how to stand before a Brahmin and a Pujari of Shiva' ... 'Bow low!' ...

'Why, Sir, I meant no disrespect'... 'A temple is to be built on this site'... 'The people need a place of worship'... 'There is a law higher than the man made one you speak of'...



Spare your breath. Keep your calculations for your hardware stuff... Can you deny a roof to Shiva? Can you stop, me? Then try! That is all I shall say'... " (pp.86-87)

The voice of the miserly merchant lowers down to the sermons of Kalo. He opens his mouth again to ask for the price of the land. But Kalo quietens him by saying : 'Have you no fear? Do you not shake at the thought of Shiva's thunderous wrath?' (p.87) He gets rid of the affair with the merchant, by saying, "In the temple - yard a marble slab will be set at our expense, with your name as the donor of the land." (p.88) An aged Brahmin 'Pujari' who knows the whole religious rituals along with mantras is appointed for the purpose. Kalo gets his name changed as 'Mangal Adhikari' which sounds Brahminic. Soon the construction of the temple begins.

One day, a rich stock-broker, Motichand by name, asks for the advice concerning the share bazaar. 'My business is buying and selling shares. Today I am at my wits'end' ... Tell me should I buy or sell?' (p.89) Lekha doesn't get his question clearly and answers in a heedless way ... 'Buy ... Sell ... Buy ... Sell.' (p.90). Motichand makes for the market, takes the message of the 'Devi' as buy first and then sell. He asks his manager to buy and gets a six figure profit. He promises to complete the structure of the temple. Even Lekha is taken for a Devi by Motichand. And like her father she is labelled with Divinity.

For the whole of his past, Kalo has been a low-caste human being. He has enough of it. He has turned the tables on time, and has hidden himself behind the saffron robe in order to take a revenge upon the oppressors for all the

injustice he has had to suffer. He speaks to Lekha in a vehement tone :

"The turn of the wheel favours us beyond all reckoning!'"... 'They touch our low-caste feet. They pray to god who is no god... Yesterday a man came and touched my feet humbly. Lekha, he was no other than the magistrate who sent me to prison, the magistrate who asked, "Why do you have to live?" Why does your daughter have to live?'" (pp.91-92)

This is the pleasure of revenge that Kalo derives out of the situation. The Pujari's wife grows jealous of Chandra Lekha because she thinks that the girl will some day overpower her husband. Lekha herself is sick of the whole affair. She says : 'In these few weeks, I have grown twenty years older than my age.' (p.94)

Kalo wants to give his daughter's hand in marriage to a Brahmin to reach the climax of his undertaking. He says to himself : "We've got to hit back." Through what better means than the temple? Let them pray to a false god. Let them seek benediction from a Kamar. And let their proud women, limbs draped in jewels and chastity, bow down to a girl who had almost fallen." (p.95)

Now the temple is ready and is made open for people after a small ritual. It is Kalo's day. He is requested to deliver a speech. And like a sermonizer he speaks : "I am Shiva's tool, I am a tool of the great god's will, no more and no less ... It is my firm will to make myself worthy of the image set before me." (p.99)

At this moment, Motichand introduces Jogesh Mitra, a very big man in the Jute business, who wants to give a cheque for the temple. Kalo is red with anger because it is this

Jogesh who had once attempted to seduce Chandra Lekha. But somehow he consoles himself, saying, "When you ride a tiger, you must not slip off its back lest the tiger stop, and eat you. You ride on, ride on ..." (p.102) This is another comment on the title of the novel.

A remarkable change has taken place in Kalo since he has been bearing the name Mangal Adhikari. One day an old destitute man touches his hand, asking for food. Kalo retorts : "Rogue!" - 'How dare you touch me? I shall have to take a bath at this late hour to cleanse myself'. (p.109) Thus his Brahminic sainthood sometimes overpowers him but in the inner corner of his self he is himself. He calls the man again and enquires about his profession. Ironically, that man happens to be a blacksmith. Kalo comforts him with the words : "All men are born equal! ... A craftsman honest with his iron and fire is as good as the best of the folks. He can hold his head high because of the skill of his hands, his special knowledge..." (p.110)

Kalo appoints the destitute Vishwanth as a gardener yet he warns Lekha to keep away from him as he is afraid of the hundreds of eyes of the people. He keeps brooding over the cause of his own as well as Chandra Lekha's sufferings but doesn't find any answer as he is not a seer. He is only a 'rootless hypocrite.' The milk of the milkbath is stolen by Vishwanath and hence he is dismissed from the temple by the Pujari. Vishwanath admits his offence and further tells that he used to take that milk to the destitute children. Then there begins a war of words between Kalo and the pujari. During the Shivratri, scores of men come to the temple. Kalo decides not to waste a single drop of milk. He tries to argue:

"Milk is not being wasted ..."

'Is the bath milk given to Mother Ganga or not?'

'It is given to the children of the Mother ...'

'We make gods in the image of mortals, we think of them as mortals, else why do we offer them milk? And so - we must see in Ganga a true, living mother' ". (pp.129-130)

The people raise their voices against him. Kalo says that he would pay the price of the wasted milk and would make a fresh list of those who are ready to give the bath milk to the destitutes. All keep quiet and Kalo wins the victory. He is the master of the situation.

Motichand keeps coming to the temple to have a chat with Kalo. He shows sympathy to Kalo and Lekha. He is the only man in All Bengal to have four wives and is thinking of the fifth one. His desire is to ask for the hand of Chandra Lekha as his fifth wife.

Kalo has his own plan of bringing Biten to the temple. Chandra Lekha is sick of the temple life which has no longer remained a real life. Kalo doesn't want to allow his daughter to go back to the world of futility as Lekha too is sitting with him on the "tiger's back and they must ride on." (p.143) This again, is another comment on the significance of the title. The sainthood that Kalo has adopted is symbolised as the wild tiger. They have adopted it rather willingly though it is very difficult to keep it long and lifelong.

Kalo and Lekha travel to the prison on the day of Biten's release. Biten comes with them. He makes Chandra Lekha laugh and forget her sorrow. Biten resumes his work at the Bengal Automobiles. He can never forget his past, his

orthodox parents, and his sister Purnima who had to commit suicide at the altar of the caste system. Like Kalo, the protagonist, Bikas Mukherjee is also a victim of the caste system. His sister Purnima is not allowed to marry Basav, a youth belonging to a lower caste. Even Vishwanath has to suffer on account of his low birth.

Lekha gets a brother in a destitute boy on a heap of rubbish. She brings him home cleans him and names him Obhijit. She devotes herself more and more to the temple. Biten walks out of their lives, all of a sudden, without even bidding them farewell.

Lekha achieves fame and popularity. She receives three strange devotees prostrating before her and addressing her as the Mother of Sevenfold Bliss. The temple affair leaves her restless. She starts repenting for having discarded Biten. People come to take her photographs. She gets irritated. 'Am I an actress?' (p.200) she complains.

Obhijit comes in her life only to invite new troubles. Pieces of bread are found under his cot. The pujari's wife gets very angry with the boy. Soon the clouds of Obhijit's future are cleared away and he behaves properly.

Motichand wants Lekha as his proud possession. One day, he asks Kalo to send the dirty boy away. But Kalo quells him by saying : "All children are jewel-pure, whatever their birth." (p.208) It is for the first time that Kalo speaks like a sensible and compassionate man. The matchmaker brings the news that Motichand wants Lekha as his fifth wife. Kalo gets furious but somehow controls himself.

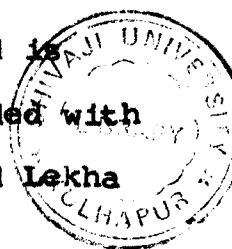
Chandra Lekha is amused at the swarms of people who come everyday to have her 'darshan'. They come in long queues,

asking for advice, begging for blessing and confessing their guilts and sins. The small boy causes a big obstruction in Lekha's marriage proposal. Kalo is uneasy : "... he was about to be tested. The mock battle which had excited him for so long was turning into a real battle : The end of the temple story was to be told through the fate of the homeless boy." (p.211)

Lekha too finds herself in a critical situation. A woman comes to her with her sick baby. The Mother of Sevenfold Bliss lifts her arm in the gesture of bestowing a boon. The child dies and next afternoon the mother comes wailing and addressing Lekha : 'Eater of my child,'... 'witch-woman in holy clothes', ... I curse thee, eater of my child.' (p.213) Lekha feels very sorry and wants to put a fullstop to the whole playacting. She broods over the marriage proposal from Motichand. She thinks of accepting it as a sacrificial oblation. She thinks that Motichand is a good rope to hang oneself with. At night, she tells her decision to Kalo who is left aghast. Thus, Lekha who, in the beginning, participates in her father's game of revenge and deception comes back to her senses after the tragic death of the child whom she could not cure with her divine touch. She grows repentant and intensely feels to cast off the holy clothes.

## VI

The 'Yagna' episode that follows throws light on the Indian ritualism. It is in this scene that Kalo feels like revealing his identity. One day all preparations for the 'Yagna' are over, and invitations are sent. Motichand is there, wearing his false modesty and is seen open-handed with his cash and his time. The hour approaches. Kalo and Lekha



climb up the steps. Motichand steps forward and offers Lekha a necklace of pearls. Mangal Adhikari begins his speech right from the beginning. He confesses the authentic details about himself : "I am no fit person to speak to you', ... 'Of knowledge I have little', ... I who made this Shiva's abode', ...' I who made, this temple was not born a Brahmin." (p.225)

He confesses the very reality because he knows it well that it is high time he blurted out the fact and stopped the fiction. He has been riding a tiger and could not dismount it. He has sat astraddle, half-resigned but helpless, while the beast races at will. Yet even as he rides, he has been "aware" all the time that there has been no way but to kill the tiger. He has accepted the robe in an attempt to get comfort, peace and happiness but ironically enough he has received adverse results. He continues : "I have installed a false god, for there was no dream at all ... A down-trodden kamar has been in charge of your inmost souls, souls corrupt with caste and cash! " (p.227)

Truth is not easy to digest so quickly and easily. When Kalo starts telling it, people show their reluctance to accept it as truth is bitter and what fool will try to taste it? Kalo continues his confession : "... I am a Kamar from afar. Hunger drove me from my native earth ... Nothing is true as falseness !" (p.227)

He also frankly tells the people that it is a legend which he has invented and spread. He accuses the people to have created their own legend :

"They created the Mother of Sevenfold Bliss." (p.228)  
out of an average girl like the ten million others in Bengal.

The people rise against him in anger. They start cursing him and his daughter. A stone strikes his chest. They shout at him : "We'll tear them limb from limb ... The shaitan and the harlot woman. They have doomed us for all our lives to come. Hang them from the banyan tree!" (p.230)

Though Kalo cannot save himself from the attack of the Brahmins, he feels more relieved than ever as there is a class of admirers from the poor people at the far end. They are pleased with him. They admire him, saying :

"The mighty ones with noses in the sky. They tread upon us as if we were earthworms, less than earthworms' ... 'As if God were Brahmin by caste ! ... 'As if chamars must not earn merit lest they go to heaven and jostle shoulders with the caste folks!" (p.230)

The oppressed low-caste people support Kalo because they feel that he has avenged the injustice done to them by the caste Hindus and the moneyed people. Kalo is now ~~at~~ amidst Biten, Viswanath and the hundreds of destitutes who have come to him to drive his steel deep into the tiger. They are cheering : 'Victory to our brother!' The battle is won. Biten says: "You have chosen, my friend... "Your story will be a legend to inspire and awaken." (p.232) Finally Kalo and his daughter leave the temple and take the road to their village.

## VII

From the foregoing discussion, it can be said that He Who Rides a Tiger is a 'novel of social protest,' the protest being against social, religious, economic and communal systems. The agent of protest against the tyranny of caste is not Kalo the blacksmith, alone, but also Biten, the Brahmin. Biten's sister, Purnima, is hastily given in marriage to an elderly widower when the parents discover that a young man,



Basav, of a lower caste is in love with her. This leads her to commit suicide. Basav taunts Biten with reference to this incident and Biten renounces his Brahminhood, breaks and throws away the sacred thread and takes a vow ~~never~~ to name his caste. Caste is a habit of thinking and living and hence is very difficult to eradicate. Chandra Lekha's attending the school incurs harsh criticism even from the people of her own caste. Kalo (now Mangal Adhikari) is so flattered by his acquired Brahminhood that he rebukes Viswanath, a Kamar, for polluting him with his touch. This momentary state of his intoxication is vocal of the inherent arrogance of the higher class people. The treatment given to Obhijit by the Pujari's wife is another example of the tyranny of caste. Kalo's protest is against exploitation of the low-born by the upper class people and that of Biten is against the caste system itself. The author sums it up as : "A small rebel was born when he sold his tools and set off for the big city. The rebel grew eyes and ears in court, and prison, with the help of B-10, gave it a mouth and a protest." (p.117)

A few asides in the novel reveal the author's attitude to certain aspects of the Hindu religion. Kalo's trick and the eager expectation with which the miracle of Shiva's emerging is awaited by the masses show that faith and credulity in miracles do not belong exclusively to the past or to the villages. Bhattacharya brings out the contrast in the fact that while destitutes die like flies on the streets, without being noticed, money and material are promptly offered for the construction of a bogus temple :

"... While men died of hunger, wealth grew; and while kindness dried up, religion was more in

demand. It was only the outward form of religion, the shell of ritual, empty within." (p.113)

A remarkable change is seen in Chandra Lekha after her undertaking the tiger-ride of sainthood. She seems to have undergone a spiritual transformation. People come to her, prostrate at her feet and address her as the Mother of seven-fold Bliss. This change in her is partly on account of her compassion and affection she has begun to feel for the destitute boy, Obhijit.

Lekha is a girl of a steady and peaceful nature. Her attitudes and actions show a large amount of consistency. She rides the tiger with her father but does not feel at home in the temple. She is seldom flattered by the honour shown to her. She stops her father from going astray, especially in the Viswanath episode. She feels hurt whenever she finds her father out of path.

Kalo's case is altogether different. He initiates his drama of the temple purely with the motive of revenge, playing the role of the Brahmin, Mangal Adhikari. In the course of time, this easily acquired role starts swallowing his original self and is on the verge of making him 'rootless', but the integrity and strength of his character, save him. He experiences a moral and spiritual conflict between love and ease, power and prestige on one side, and the desire to be true to himself on the other. He is able to kill the tiger of deceit when he acquires the moral strength to be himself. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, Kalo's dissociation with his own self becomes so complete that what he does at the end of the novel is unnatural. To quote Mrs. Mukherjee:

"The end simplifies the complex issues involved in the novel. Kalo is made to escape the consequences of his confession and the doubts raised earlier about Kalo's capacity to go back and be satisfied in his caste, as the naming episode in the earlier part of the novel indicates ... Therefore when circumstances raise him to the status of a Brahmin it was the fulfilment of his submerged wishes. How is one to reconcile Kalo's sudden renunciation of his power, his money and his status with his background?" <sup>1</sup>

What seems unnatural to Meenakshi Mukherjee is not really unnatural; because in the inner sanctum of his self, Kalo is himself, a Kamar and a low-born blacksmith. The opulence which his false sainthood brings him doesn't help him forget his yesterdays completely. When he is watching the scores of workmen building the temple, restlessness seizes him and his hands itch and long to work. The urge to be himself is so strong that he sets up a secret smithy in the attic of his house. He feels ashamed of himself to have admonished Viswanath for having touched his forearm when he learns that Viswanath too is a blacksmith. A close examination of these facts goes to prove that Kalo has not made himself rootless by putting on the sacred thread : it is a kind of playacting and he is merely playing the role of a Brahmin.

In the final scene, Lekha shocks her father by announcing to him her decision to marry Motichand a week after her installation as Mother of Sevenfold Bliss in order to liberate herself from a living death in the temple. It is now that Kalo understands the nature and magnitude of the sacrifice that Lekha is about to make in order to liberate herself. He exposes himself and is ready to face the consequences.

As regards the disguise, transformation and fraud in the case of Kalo and Raju, Meenakshi Mukherjee has the following comments to make :

"The Guide and He Who Rides a Tiger both deal with men whose holiness is only a convenient disguise, but in both these novels the men undergo such transformation that the fraud ceases to be a fraud. "<sup>2</sup>

Prof. Chandrasekharan seems to be more convincing when he refutes Mrs. Mukherjee's arguments. He writes :

"Mrs. Mukherjee is right when she says that both The Guide and He Who Rides a Tiger deal with men whose holiness is only a convenient disguise, but one cannot agree with the further statement that 'in both these novels the men undergo such a transformation that the fraud ceases to be a fraud.' The identification of the face with the mask is never perfect in either case. In the case of Raju the identification occurs through self-hypnotism, but lasts only for a brief spell. In Kalo's case, it is never complete and the mask is thrown away in the end. The perpetrator of the fraud stands self-exposed and he has the strength of character to face all the consequences of his confession."<sup>3</sup>

Bhattacharya seems to have the intention of making conscious experimentation with language. He has a keen eye on the evocative power of the language. He exerts this evocative power through the repetition of certain words and sentences. For example, the recurrent sentence 'I know a man by the look in his face', is addressed to Kalo by three different persons in three different situations. The policeman is the first man to say so in the theft episode, Rajani, the procurer is the second and Motichand is the third man

to repeat the same sentence though with different connotations. The first two men use the sentences to point out something unusual, guilty and offensive in Kalo's face, and the third man Motichand speaks it in admiration. 'We've got to hit back,' is another example of the same type.

Mr. Bhattacharya has a wonderful power of narration. For instance, the <sup>condition</sup> ~~depiction~~ of the drought-stricken Bengalis, the destitutes, Kalo as an ascetic in the Temple episode, the hypocrites in the high society, Chandra Lekha as a female ascetic and the Yagna scene are very graphically described. Bhattacharya waxes eloquent when he portrays Kalo burning with revenge. The prophetic jargon in Kalo's mouth is very effectively employed.

According to Bhattacharya, a novel should deal with 'social reality' and the theme and its treatment must be true to life. To quote Prof. K.R. Chandrasekharan : "Realism means for Bhattacharya the perception of the essential truth of a situation or a period; it does not mean wallowing in detail for the sake of detail."<sup>4</sup>

He doesn't support the view that 'Art is for art's sake' as he is the ~~sp~~ spokesman of the view that 'Art is for life's sake.' He believes that art is the vehicle of truth and must teach but unobtrusively. He is true to his theory of art in his He Who Rides a Tiger and hence his characters are down to earth realistic. Kalo, the ascetic, is the spokesman of his social reformism.

(2) The Guide (1958)

The second novel with the ascetic as the central character is R.K. Narayan's The Guide which is his magnum opus and the best of his Malgudi novels in which the spiritual element is treated on the social level where the saffron robe becomes a symbol of both benevolence and deception. Raju, an average human being, ex-shopkeeper, ex-lover of Rosie, the married dancer, ex-jailbird, ex-tourist guide who turns or is rather turned by circumstances to sainthood and is compelled to undertake a fifteen-day-fast to bring rains to the drought-stricken village of Mangal and in doing so becomes a martyr. It is an artistic attempt at presenting a portrayal of an imposter mistaken for a saint. The first person narration in flashbacks has a ring of authenticity about it.

## I

The novel opens with Raju sitting crosslegged on the granite slab as if it were a throne beside an ancient temple. The pose of his sitting and the holy atmosphere are enough to make a peasant like Velan take him for a Sadhu and stand gazing reverentially on the latter's face.

The peasant's devout gazing reminds Raju of the barber outside the jail and his remark when he had finished shaving Raju: ...'You look like a 'Maharaja'...' (p.8). This remark speaks of Raju's transformation from one life to the other—from the life of a guide, a lover, a jailbird to that of the holy man.

Velan addresses Raju as 'Swamiji' and is the first villager to thrust upon him the holy sainthood. Things go on happening as if they were preplanned. A time comes in Raju's

life when he strongly feels to expose the truth by telling the authentic details of his life in order to get rid of the false guise of sainthood which he finds difficult to put on. The more he tries to get rid of it, the more he finds himself enmeshed in sainthood. He initiates his role as an ascetic by extending a helping hand to the peasant in one of his domestic affairs. It is in his very nature to get involved in others' problems, which later on proves to be the root cause of his troubles that precede his sainthood.

## II

Raju's pre-jail life is the life of an average man with all kinds of ups and downs in it. Raju is the son of a shopkeeper, born and brought up in the small town of Malgudi. His early life is simple, happy and smooth-running. Then there comes the railway which brings about a tremendous change in the life of the people of Malgudi. Raju's father is given the privilege of running a shop at the railway station and young Raju is in charge of it. Soon after the death of his father, Raju acquires the name 'Railway Raju.' People from all directions come to him for his guidance. He takes them all around the Malgudi town showing them the temples, caves, carvings, groves and other beauty spots. He masters the tricks of the trade and soon becomes a 'Seasoned guide.'!

One day, a girl, Rosie by name, comes to Malgudi from Madras, asking for a king cobra. The girl is very beautiful and her husband, Marco, an ill-matched old man, does not pay attention to her demands and desires. Marco is an archeologist and is busy with his research on the caves of Mempi. Raju succeeds in bringing about reconciliation between the fallen out husband and the wife, but at the same time, a flame of

love is kindled in his own heart at the first sight of Rosie. Rosie is fond of dancing, is attracted towards Raju and thus becomes an object of hatred for her husband. She seeks Raju's help and begins the dance practice in a hotel room. Learning this, Marco abandons her and moves away to Madras. Raju gives her shelter. And in the meanwhile, Raju is served with a notice from the railway authorities and has to quit the shop which makes him run into debts. He has to mortgage his house to clear off the debts. Raju's uncle comes and asks Raju to drive the snake-girl out of the house. Raju is reluctant to do so and hence his uncle takes his mother away to his village. Calamities mount up, yet Raju is hopeful. He names Rosie as 'Nalini' and brings her on the stage.

Nalini becomes the talk of the town and receives engagements from all corners of India. Money and fame come to her like anything. Raju takes to drinking and gambling and is mad after money. Nalini is changed and yearns to visit Marco.

Raju's unstable mind leads him from one fall to another. He receives a letter from Marco addressed to Rosie. It is an application for the signature of Rosie for the release of a box of jewellery left in a safe custody at some bank. Raju's madness for money aggravates. He makes Rosie's signature, is arrested and accused of forgery and is imprisoned for two years. He completes the term of his imprisonment as an ideal prisoner, and on his release, steps out of the jail, not knowing where to go and what to do next. Checkmated by a series of difficulties and frustrated in his life, now Raju puts on the ochre robe as his last resort.

### III

Raju is endowed with an engaging personality. He is



neither a born saint nor is he made so. The thing is that he is mistaken for a saint by ~~the~~ the peasant, Velan. In addition to his saintlike personality, Raju has a grand style of speaking out simple, commonplace matters in a dignified language. Note for instance,

"I have a problem, Sir,' (p.14) says the man. Raju nods his head and adds 'So has everyone,' (p.14) and then he begins an anecdote - 'If you show me a person without a problem then I'll show you the perfect world. Do you know what the great Buddha said? ... A woman once went wailing to the great Buddha ... to all the problems.'" (pp.14-15)

Though all this is beyond the grasp of Velan, the ignorant, he is enchanted by his prophetic words and finds enough ground to take him for a 'Swami.' As Velan narrates his domestic trouble bit by bit, Raju goes on completing the incomplete sentences of the peasant, as if he knew it all beforehand. This ensures the impression in the peasant's mind that Raju must be an incarnation of The Almighty having countless eyes observing all the activities of the humanity. Raju promises to solve the domestic problem of Velan. When Velan is about to touch his feet, Raju recoils, saying : "I'll not permit anyone to do this. God alone is entitled to such a prostration. He will destroy us if we attempt to usurp His rights." (p.16)

Thus, gradually Velan develops an unshakable faith in Raju's sanctity and ability. In fact, Raju has used only his common sense in tackling the problem! The news of the Swami's prophetic powers spreads among the villagers and they start coming over to the temple, with all kinds of edibles and offerings. But Raju doesn't show any greed for these things.

He takes the offerings to the inner sanctum and offers them to the stone image of god, saying : "It is His first. Let the offering go to Him first and we will eat the remnant. By giving to God do you know how it multiplies, rather than divides." (p.18)

As Raju is all out to solve the domestic problem of Velan, he draws his fingers across his brow and putting on the airs of a prophet, says :

"Whatever is written here will happen. How can we ever help it?' We may not change it, but we may understand it' ... And to arrive at a proper understanding, time is needed' ... 'What must happen, must happen, no power on earth or in heaven can change its course, just as no one can change the course of the river.' " (pp.21-22)

This grand eloquence with a prophetic ring about it reaches the root of Velan's domestic problem and uproots it successfully. Naturally, Velan's faith in Raju is confirmed beyond doubt. The gullible villagers, in general, and Velan in particular, serve as instruments of Raju's future accomplishments as an ascetic. It is their devotion, blind faith and gullibility that he exploits to the greatest extent. Actually, he hangs upon them but they take him as their hangeron.

Velan is now in a hurry to offer his sister's hand in marriage as early as possible. Raju at once guesses the cause : 'For fear that she may change her mind once again?' (p.29) Velan is wonderstruck and asks <sup>him</sup> how he could read his mind. Raju is cunning enough to conceal the secret of his guesswork. He simply says : 'There is nothing extraordinary in my guess.' Velan reacts to this as; "Not for you to say

sir. Things may look easy enough for a giant, but ordinary poor mortals like us can never know what goes on in other people's minds." (pp.29-30)

This is the receipt of Velan's deep faith in Raju as a spark of the Divine.

Velan invites Raju for his sister's wedding but Raju is shrewd enough to avoid it. He doesn't want to drown himself in the ocean of humanity and be cheap. This aloofness of his makes him an object of curiosity on the part of the villagers. Velan and the villagers are now fully convinced that Raju is an extraordinary person. Their conversation which Raju overhears is an evidence of it.

"Where could he have gone?"

'He is a big man, he may go anywhere, he may have a thousand things to do.'

'Oh you don't know. He has renounced the world; he does nothing but meditates. What a pity he is not here today!'

'Just sitting there for a few minutes with him - ah, what a change it has brought about in our household!'

'We won't have to fear anything more; it is our good fortune that this great soul should have come to life in our midst.'

...

'It would be our misfortune if he went away'.

...

'He has no fears.'

...

'Do you know sometimes these yogis can travel to the Himalayas just by thought?'

'I don't think he is that kind of Yogi.'" (pp.31-32)

Raju is amused at all this. Now he too takes lively interest in his role as an ascetic because it promises him regular food as well as honour. Circumstances compel him to accept the role, because he can't go back to the town of his birth and show his guilty face to and bear the giggles and stares of the people of Malgudi. He has only two sources of getting regular food viz., the prison and the temple and has to choose either of the two. He has <sup>had</sup> enough of the prison and hence he decides to try his hand at the temple.

#### IV

Men, women and children cross the river and reach the temple with the only hope of watching the radiance on his face, and draw solace out of it. At this stage, Raju's benevolent role begins. He doesn't miss a single opportunity of impressing the audience :

"Boys must read, first. They must, of course, help their parents, but they must also find the time to study' ...

'If they cannot find the time to read during the day, why should they not gather in the evenings and learn?'

'Where?' asked someone.

'Maybe here' ... May be you could ask one of your masters. Is there no schoolmaster in your midst?' ...

'Ask him to see me." (pp.44-45)

Now, Raju belongs to the temple, to the people of the village and to the schoolboys. He is not his ~~self~~ now. He enquires about their problems and worries and suggests solutions to them. He poses that he has been sent by The Almighty for bettering the lot of the suffering villagers of Mangal.

Though Raju says that he is an instrument of God and has to perform the duty assigned to him by God, he has nothing to do with the schooling of the village boys. He does it only because he has to do it and he has to do it because he wants to survive, and he can survive only if he gets regular food from the parents of the boys. This is the logic behind the whole thing. The teacher is a man who cannot easily be brushed off. He goes on to argue that the boys are afraid of crossing the river in the dark because they have heard of a crocodile in the river. Raju poses himself to be the embodiment of the principle of 'Fear No More' and says : 'What can a crocodile do to you if your mind is clear and your conscience is untroubled?' (p.47)

Thus, Raju gets a chance of establishing his contact with the village boys. He begins his sermons on godliness, cleanliness and speaks to them on the Ramayana and the characters in the epic, by exhibiting the scriptural knowledge and speaking in a pedantic style—which is an essential characteristic of a Sadhu. He himself is hypnotised by his own voice. But in the inner corner of his self, he knows that what he has been doing is nothing but playacting. 'Raju felt like an actor who had come on the stage, and, while the audience waited, had no lines to utter or gesture to make'."(p.50)

One day, Velan ventures to ask for a discourse from Raju. Raju feels cornered :

"I have to play the part, expected of me; there is no escape." He racks his head secretly wondering where to start and after a long brooding silence he says :

'All things have to wait their hour' ... I will

‘speak to you when another day comes’ ...

‘Why another day, Sir?’

‘Because it is so’ ... ‘I’d advise you to pass the hour brooding over all your speech and actions from morning till now’ ... ‘When you don’t remember your own words properly how are you going to remember other people’s words?’ ... ‘I want you all to think independently, of your own accord, and not allow yourselves to be led about by the nose as if you were cattle.’” (pp.51-52)

Everything he utters is quite commonplace : the advice he gives can be given by any man of average common sense. But the real art lies in the organisation of the whole thing and the grand hypnotising tone in which he utters his words. Now he has his fingers right on the pulse of the villagers.

Now Raju decides to acquire the requisite paraphernalia essential for an ascetic. He realizes that his spiritual status would enhance if he grows a beard and long hair to fall on his nape. His beard caresses his chest and his hair covers his back. He wears a necklace of prayer-beads around his neck. With his eyes shining with softness and compassion, he chants holy verse, gives lessons in philosophy and prescribes medicine. Children who could not sleep at night are brought to him. He presses their bellies and prescribes a herb, for them. He lacks nothing now to qualify himself for the status of a Sadhu.

## V

A Sadhu is regarded as a saviour in the time of calamities and is invoked by the people for help and succour. This happens in the case of Raju also. One year, the scorching summer continues longer and the rains are not within sight.

The symptoms of drought are discernible. One day, Velan ventures to express to the Swamiji the threat of the impending drought : "A thousand banana seedlings are dead,' ... 'If it continues, who knows?' ... Raju, ever a soothsayer, says consolingly, 'Such things are common; don't worry too much about them. Let us hope for the best.' " (pp.91-92)

The helpless villagers pester him by asking countless questions. The news of the severity of the drought comes from all the directions of the locality. A buffalo is found dead on the forest path beyond the village. Raju is prayed to go over there and have a sight of it. He consoles the villagers, by saying : "Can't be as bad as that, Velan. It must have died of some other disease,' ... 'It must have been bitten by a poisonous insect." (pp.94-95)

Raju very well knows that it is a magnificent lie he has ever spoken, but what else can he do? He has to go on posing himself as a Sadhu. The condition of the drought-stricken village worsens. The village shopkeeper holds out for bigger prices and makes profit. A customer slaps him in the face. The shopkeeper attacks the customer with a chopper. A big ~~great~~ quarrel starts and many are wounded. Velan too gets hurt and doesn't want to go to the Swami. Velan's brother, almost a block-head, rushes to the temple and breaks the news of the fight at night and also of the would-be fight the next night. Raju sends a peace message to Velan. Here comes his role as a peace-maker. In his saintly voice he says :

"Tell your, brother to apply turmeric to his wounds' ... 'Tell Velan to rest in bed completely' ... 'It is no good; nobody should fight' ... 'Go and tell Velan and the rest that I don't want them to

fight like this.' 'I'll tell them what to do later' ... 'Tell your brother immediately, wherever he may be, that unless they are good I'll never eat'." (pp.97-99-100)

Velan's brother conveys to the villagers of Mangal the message which is misinterpreted by them. "'The Swami, the Swami, doesn't want food any more. Don't take any food to him.'

'Why? Why?'

'Because, because - it doesn't rain' ... No fight, he says' ...

'What did he say? Tell us exactly.' ... 'Tell your brother not to bring me any more food. I won't eat. If I don't eat, it'll be all right; and then everything will be all right.'" (pp.101-102)

The blurt of the blockhead is backed by a similar story told by Raju, one evening, when he is addressing the villagers. The villagers rush towards the temple to see the holy personality, saying: 'Let us all go and pay our respects to Swami, our Saviour.' (p.104)

Ultimately, Raju is compelled to undertake a fifteen-day-fast to propitiate the rain god in order to bring life to the drought-stricken village. It leaves him aghast. Velan speaks out the reverent faith in Raju, the Swami, on behalf of the villagers: "Your prayers will surely be answered and save our village. Every one of us in the village prays night and day that you come through it safely." (p.106)

The village people have his 'darshan' and pray to him. They touch his feet. Raju doesn't allow them to do so. He shouts : "Have I not told you that I'll never permit this? No human being should ever prostrate before another human being." (p.106)



The villagers don't pay heed to what Raju says as they have an irrevocable faith in him. Their reaction is : "You are not another human being. You are a Mahatma. We should consider ourselves blessed indeed to be able to touch the dust of your feet". (P. 106) Raju's humility assures the villagers of his holiness. The crowd keeps on lingering. Velan explains : "You are undertaking a great sacrifice, sir, and the least we can do is to be at your side. We desire merit from watching your face, sir". (P. 108)

Raju finds himself entangled in the net set by himself. He becomes the prey to his own imagination. He has been in the dreamland, thinking that he is growing in the status of sainthood, but he has the least idea that the same dreamland will some day be converted into a dark dungeon that will surround him and make him a bird in the cage.

The whole thing appears to be absurd for Raju. At first, he takes a practical stand and thinks of running away from the whole scene. But now things are not so easy as they seem to be. How can he get away unobtrusively ? He is fed up with the whole playacting and resultantly decides to tear away the mask of his sainthood by confessing the bitter reality. When Velan arrives at night, Raju takes him into confidence and tells him of the stark reality. After narrating his life-story, Raju anticipates a furious reaction from Velan. He thinks that Velan would say :

"And we took you for such a noble soul all along ! If one like you does penance, it'll drive off even the little rain that we may hope for. Begone, you, before we feel tempted to throw you out. You have fooled us". (P. 232)

Velan is still unmoved; his faith in Raju is unshaken.



He still addresses Raju as 'Swamiji'. For Raju, even the last possible hope of escaping is lost. The news of his penance spreads all over the locality. There is a constant flow of people coming to the place and soon the holy place of penance turns into the scene of a fair. Now, Raju has no privacy even to think for himself. At times, a thought strikes ~~to~~ his mind;

"Get out all of you and leave me alone, I am not the man to save you. No power on earth can save you if you are doomed. Why do you bother me with all this fasting and austerity ?"  
(P. 235)

Raju strongly feels to bleat out the truth and confess that he is not the man they think him to be. But unfortunately for him, the fiction is changed into fact, the mask is converted into his face and nobody bothers to listen to what he has to say. He does not know what to do next and repentantly murmurs :

'What a wise plan it would have been if the crocodile had got him while he crossed the river ! But the poor old thing, which had remained a myth, had become dehydrated'. (PP. 236-237)

When Raju finds all possible ways of escape closed, a sudden change occurs in his mind and in his being. He feels it better to yield to the circumstances :

'Why not give the poor devil a chance ? ... I'll chase away all thoughts of food. For the next ten days I shall eradicate all thoughts of tongue and stomach from my mind, ... 'If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly ?' (PP. 237-238)

Thus it is for the first time that his mind is filled with selfless thoughts and he thinks of something, earnestly. He decides to condition his body and mind in undertaking the ordeal. He earnestly tries to dismount the tiger that he has

been riding so far.

The news of his fast spreads in all the directions and attracts swarms of people to the holy place. Velan is in charge of the whole affair. People choke all around the Swamiji to have his 'darshan'.

Westerners have a special interest in Indian Sadhus, snakes and miracles. Here too an American reaches the spot to take photographs of the scene and to seek an interview with Raju. The answers that Raju gives are double-edged. They bear a bare reality on one hand and at the same time they are the holy pearls dropping down from the holy man's mouth. To quote a few questions and answers :

"Tell me how do you like it here ?"

"I am only doing what I have to do, that's all. My likes and dislikes do not count".

...

...

'Do you expect to have the rains by then ?'

'Why not ?'

'Can fasting abolish all wars and bring world peace ?'

'Yes'.

...

...

"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'. (PP. 243-244)

Thus an Indian Sadhu is seen through the eyes of a foreigner. All start taking care of his health and offering their

services to him. The doctor reports that his health is in danger and he must break his fast. But now Raju can't come back. He is taken to the river-water for offering prayers. When he reaches the river, he opens his eyes, looks about and tells Velan that it is raining in the hills. Then he sags down. Thus comes to an end the sainthood of the saint.

## VI

After a close analysis of The Guide in the foregoing pages, one cannot lose sight of the remarkable transformation that Raju undergoes while practising the ascetic penance. He is out to cheat others but is cheated by himself. The disguise which he is circumstanced to take becomes his skin, an inseparable and integral part of his being. The more he tries to discard it, the more it sticks to him and assimilates into his being. He compels out sympathy. In <sup>the</sup> words of Prof. Mehta ; "Narayan has nothing but compassion for this misguided guide".<sup>5</sup>

One is tempted here to compare Raju with Anand's priests. Anand's priests are simply hypocrites, whereas R. K. Narayan's Raju is a lovable rogue who exerts some benevolent influence on the drought-stricken villagers of Mangal. He gives them a kind of emotional support, solves their domestic problems, makes the village boys learn the scriptures and ultimately undertakes the penance of fifteen-day-fast to propitiate the rain God and thus becomes a martyr. What one finds in Anand's priests is lechery and exploitation and not a single deed of benevolence.

The story of Raju's life is told in alternate chapters by the author to the reader and by Raju to Velan, his worshipper, and in either case it is Raju's story. This way of telling it combines naturally the vividness of the first-person narrative

with the advantage of the omniscient novelist.<sup>5</sup> Raju's life can be divided into two parts : his pre jail life and post jail life. The story of Raju's life begins not at the beginning but in the middle.

The Guide does not have even a slight touch of melodrama. The first incident leads to the second, the second to the third and gradually and logically we arrive at the end of the narrative. Narayan has no comments to make. An objective writer as he is, he keeps a proper aesthetic distance and skilfully closes the narrative leaving the question a question. As William Walsh aptly puts it :

"And the hint in the last words of The Guide that rain is on its way is Mr. Narayan's method of suggesting that there is some measure of objectivity, of endorsement by reality, in Raju's transformation".<sup>6</sup>

What strikes more to the reader in The Guide is its story-element. According to E. M. Forster, what one should look for in a novel is its story element and Narayan fulfils this first and foremost basic condition of the novel to make it a novel. Narayan's novels in general, give us a clear, fluent and unobstructed reading,

R. K. Narayan is seen to use a limited vocabulary. He seldom does any conscious experimentation with language; everything is natural, simple and straight. His use of the limited vocabulary never becomes an obstruction in his narration.

Thus after explicating the two novels with an ascetic as a central character, I would like to sum up the discussion in the words of Meenakshi Mukherjee :

"Both are stories of a man who deceives society by

passing for a spiritual man, in both the man is carried away by his deception until a point comes when it is difficult to undo the enormous lie. But the superficial similarity hides a very fundamental difference. If both these novels deal with the theme of a man wearing a mask, in one the man at the end throws away the mask and goes back where he began. In the other the man finds it more and more difficult to tear off the mask until he finds that the mask has become his face. In Bhattacharya's book Kalo's deception is a deliberate act of revenge against society. Raju in The Guide on the other hand, drifts into the role of a sadhu willy-nilly, and once he finds himself cast in the role of an ascetic he attempts to perform the act with gusto, partly for the sake of self-preservation, partly because it suits his personality wonderfully".<sup>7</sup>

### (3) Seasons of Jupiter (1958).

The third and the last novel dealing with the theme of asceticism is Anand Lall's Seasons of Jupiter (1958) written in an autobiographical method. It tells a series of unsuccessful experiments in spiritualism undertaken by a seeker of knowledge and peace, in whom elements of spiritualism are fused with sensualism.

It is a full-length portrait of Rai Gyan Chand, scion of a rich landowning family in Amritsar. Except at the beginning and at the end, Rai Gyan Chand himself tells the story and the result is an uncommon autobiographical view of Indian manners and ideas from inside. The novel deals with Gyan Chand's quest for personal happiness. This story takes the Western reader to the inner private sphere of Indian spiritual life and ascetic practice of an Indian.

The very title of the novel is curiously suggestive. It suggests the unshakable faith in the influence of stars (especially, Jupiter) that Gyan and Narinjan have. The opening chapter of the novel is, as it were, a prologue narrated through the consciousness of the author in which he describes his first acquaintance with Rai Gyan Chand. Rai Gyan Chand has an impressive personality which is a common feature of all the ascetics and holy men. The author states :

"I caught a glimpse of a very pleasant-faced elderly man with a twinkle in his eye and ruddy friendly looking cheeks. Almost all the rest of his face was covered with a grey beard, and the long locks of hair on his bare head were thinning. The next moment, he was walking towards the house". (P. 9)

The author gets fascinated by Gyan Chand's personality and soon establishes friendship with him. He is invited warmly in the household of Gyan Chand. Gyan Chand tells that he has been attempting at becoming a philosopher by copying Samkara's Crest Jewel of Wisdom. Gyan Chand has a peculiar habit of saying simple things in a grand style, which is a common characteristic of all ascetics. One day, he talks to the author : "You know how they say that pleasant conversation stimulates one's healthful glandular secretions !" (P. 14) The author cannot resist the temptation of listening to the friendly talk of Gyan. In this way flourishes their friendship.

One day, Gyan Chand also tells the author of his study of erotics. He has his own views about sex, romance and a successful married life. Note for instance :

"I don't want you to be plunged into a frustrated, unhappy marriage ... After pondering deeply, what I have done for you is to sketch twenty-eight of the most pleasurable postures of union. In them, and remembering

that you must not give way to impatience, you will not fail your life". (P. 17)

Saying so, Gyan Chand hands over to the author an envelope containing twenty eight pictures of union. The writer is convinced that Gyan Chand is an artist, a talent and a philosopher - all rolled into one - and plans to write a novel on his life as narrated by Gyan Chand himself.

## II

Rai Gyan Chand begins the story of his life with an anecdote of his early childhood. His superhuman powers are seen in his early boyhood when he rescues the keeper Janak and other panicky people from the elephant run amuck. Since this incident he is looked upon as a boy of 'superhuman abilities' and the rest of <sup>the</sup> household regards the incident as a sign of his being endowed with 'unusual powers'. Thus, generally an Indian Sadhu's career begins with some miraculous deed in his early boyhood. This brings to our mind a similar beginning of the ascetic careers of Raju and Kalo in The Guide and He Who Rides a Tiger, respectively.

A special treatment is given to Gyan. He has the privilege of studying at home. When he reaches the age of eighteen, his parents look for a match for him. But he tells them of his ambition of going abroad in order to escape the marriage affair. His father tries to dissuade him from this idea for some time but soon melts away at the gentle and mystic argument of Gyan :

"Respected father, young men are setting out for England from Bengal and Delhi. Why should Amritsar be left behind the other cities of our country ? I feel it would do us all some good if I were to go". (P. 23)

This prophetic style indicates his future confirmation



as an ascetic. His parents permit him to go abroad only because his words have cast a spell upon them. Two months later, he sails for England, prolongs his stay there in spite of the cable asking him to return home. But his brother's death brings him back. His father too is on the death-bed. He wants to save his father but fails and has to take the charge of the household. Gyan takes interest in his father's library, reads books on philosophy, develops friendship with Karamjit Singh, the son of his father's friend. Karamjit takes him to his Uncle Daljit's house. His uncle is fond of hunting.

At Daljit's, he is introduced to Jennifer, the daughter of Lady Trip. She takes interest in Gyan and expresses her desire for going with him to Amritsar, the Lake of Immortality. Gyan is tossed between the two ends of the situation - her beauty which binds him to her and the impossibility of leading a life with her. When she comes to Amritsar for the second time, Gyan takes her to his medieval-castle-like house. He takes her to the secret room where they embrace each other. Jennifer likes the house, the dinner and everything. She is sent off and Gyan is left alone. Here begins his life of love and enjoyment. And it is his initiation in<sup>to</sup> practical erotics.

### III

A philosopher or an ascetic need not necessarily be a bachelor. Gyan visits his sister, Shakuntala, at Jullundhar and tells her that he wants a gentle, quiet and beautiful girl as his wife. His sister discovers one, the matters are settled, the horoscopes are consulted, a date is fixed and in due course the marriage is over.

Gyan takes his wife Basanti to the secret room, but she

is startled. She is cold and innocent and withdraws herself like a tortoise into its shell. Gradually, she allows him to enjoy the bridal pleasures but she is never close to him. She grows more and more self-absorbed when she is pregnant.

Gyan Chand is an experimentalist ~~not~~ only in sex and spiritualism but also in several other matters. He buys a timber concern and makes a lot of profit out of it. He happens to read in a Calcutta newspaper the news of Jennifer's accidental death and feels depressed. He comes to know Narinjan Das, a general clerk in the timber concern who has the habit of attributing the cause of every bitter and sweet experience to the position of Jupiter. When Gyan asks him the cause of the lowering of his payment by his earlier master, he says :

"Honoured Sir, it was entirely due to the unkindness of stars. For me Jupiter is a very evil star, and at that time he was so fiercely in the ascendant that nothing else was possible". (P. 81) The Indians' belief in the role of stars in human life is exemplified here. Thus the title of the novel is significant.

Basanti's arrival with the son brings life and light in the old house. Basanti forgets herself, accepts life as it is and not as an adventure to be shared with Gyan. She names her first son as Man-Mohan. As the second son, Romesh is born, Basanti as a mother is more engrossed in her life. Gyan pays a visit to Narinjan's house and is moved by his happy family life. . But Basanti's sudden death in her third delivery leaves Gyan gazing into an endless waste of darkness. Months later, he has a trip to the hills where the whole natural beauty consoles him and enables him to regain mental balance and peace. Gyan's life is thus full of trials and tribulations in his domestic and

spiritual experiments. After <sup>his</sup> fruitless attempts to establish happy relationship with other persons, he leaves his house and belongings and becomes the disciple of a mature ascetic. For the first several months he learns nothing beyond a certain self-discipline through physical hardships.

#### IV

At Karamjit's, Gyan meets Ranjit, the son of Daljit, who is a sportsman fond of hunting. Ranjit, Karamjit and Gyan Chand together arrange dinners and music parties at Gyan's house. Gyan takes an early ride which is a kind of outer expression of his inner senses, of a journey into the unknown. Gyan forgets his woes and worries at least for the time being. Both Ranjit and Gyan are enamoured ~~of~~ the beauty of Pus<sup>h</sup>pa, the daughter of Narinjan. Young Ranjit sets his eye on Pushpa who is exceedingly beautiful. Pushpa pays frequent visits to Gyan's mansion and expresses her desire to study music, drama, Indian classical literature and to travel and meet people. She grows romantic, preserves a lot of aspirations in her bosom, lingers in Gyan's library longer than ever. Thus Gyan Chand is a man of multiple interests and experiments in his life.

Once Ranjit takes Gyan Chand to Askari, the maid of Amritsar. Every sentence she speaks is meaningful and philosophical. She speaks like a seer and casts an unfailing spell on Gyan Chand's mind. When Ranjit tells her about the urgency of his visits to Tibet and Sikkim she tries to dissuade him from so doing. She addresses Gyan in a philosophical manner : "Must you go too, wise man of Amritsar ? I am in the mood to talk of the complex knots of life and I feel you would help me loosen them".  
(P. 134)

She tells all the details of her past life and concludes by saying : 'Anyway it's almost time for my morning yoga ...' (P. 139). Thus, even the other characters who come in contact with Gyan have a spark of spirituality in them. All have a combined effect on Gyan who has recurrent fits of philosophic moods.

Narinjan's devotion to Gyan Chand continues. Gyan has his usual philosophical and impressive style to calm him whenever he is upset by some unfortunate happening : "Come, come, Narinjan ! Things have gone fairly well for so many years. Good and bad things happen. We must face them and go on" ... (P. 140)

These are the words almost of a seer who has the capacity to forecast the future and face the present successfully. They have the necessary soothing effect on Narinjan.

Gyan Chand arranges a party before Pushpa is to leave for her examination. The party is cancelled at the eleventh hour as Narinjan gets ill. Gyan loses his mental balance. He has been thinking of living by reading, ridding and helping others, but that doesn't seem to be possible. Then he turns to Askari. After her singing, Askari tells him that she wants to liberate herself from the whole affair. Thus, in spite of his attempts to get the 'closeness' in life, Gyan remains lonely at every stage.

Pushpa presents Gyan a picture before she leaves for Delhi. The picture consists of two heads facing each other, and at the centre, there is a bright multicoloured spectrum. She remarks : "They must both move to the centre". (P. 149). By this perhaps she wants to suggest her inarticulate love for Gyan. Gyan leads her to the secret room where she presses herself against him, drops her hands around his neck and says, "Gyan, this is the

centre". (P. 149) As Pushpa moves away to Delhi, Gyan is left panic-stricken<sup>C</sup>. Gyan's is thus also a life of extra-marital relations turning him a hedonist.

On the day of Pushpa's arrival from Delhi, a telegram about her marriage with Ranjit reaches Gyan. It is an unexpected shock for him. Her father, Narinjan, breaks down. Gyan tells Narinjan to be generous enough to welcome Pushpa and Ranjit. In this upset-minded condition, Gyan drives to Askari and tells her the shocking news of Ranjit's marriage. She welcomes him warmly and they spend a night in love-making. She thanks him, saying : 'Like quite warm rain on the newly formed fruit on the trees you make life glisten in me, Gyan'. (P. 170) In her company, Gyan finds a new experience. He has yearned for this long-cherished closeness but it is she who finds the words to express it.

Gyan Chand liberates her from the so-called hell and brings her home. But like Basanti, she too shows more interest in other things like the Rajput paintings than in him. She tells him of her further plan of taking education as she wants to become 'somebody' of importance: "I know I must do something urgently to fill the vast deep chasm of ignorance within me to do this. I know you will understand and forgive me, Gyan". (P. 178) Thus, the free bird flies away from him. She takes a degree and becomes a teacher. Again Gyan is left alone.

Gyan's continuous failure with Jennifer, Basanti, Pushpa and Askari makes him realise the futility of his efforts in establishing a 'satisfactory relationship'. He is totally baffled by the situation. At this stage, he realizes the significance of hermitage of the ancient sages and decides to move away from the whole scene. The puzzlement of Gyan's mind

is best revealed in all these scenes and incidents. And thus goes on the series of experiments in spiritualism and sensualism in Gyan's life. All these years, he is seen hankering after love and making experimentation in his yogic pursuit. Consequently, this part of the narrative has become a patchwork of a series of incidents rather than a gripping story. In short, the story appears like a picaresque life-history of a philanderer. It lacks the dramatisation of He Who Rides a Tiger and the artistic finesse of The Guide.

# V

Gyan's experiments in spiritualism continue further. One day, Gyan drops letters to his relatives, gives the charge of the house to Narinjan and sets out towards the grove in quest of 'sainthood' and meets a Sadhu. He presents the whole account of his life to the sadhu. After an hour's meditation, the sadhu talks to him in a mystically abstruse style :

"He has come here, but he has not fled. No one flies. Each moment, the world is destroyed and is reborn. Each moment is in balance. Comings and goings have their significance for us, but they alter nothing". (P. 184)

Gyan's lessons in ascetic practice begin. He soon wonders whether he would succeed in attaining the stage of effortless movement and frequent spells of meditation. On the eighth day Gyan asks a fundamental question to the sadhu. "Sadhuji, why do you live ?" (P. 189) and the enigmatic answer of the Sadhu is 'Of what special significance is my life or your question ? - I am part of the pleasure of the Creator ... Do you think I fail to give Him pleasure ?'. (P. 189)

The sadhu accepts Gyan as his 'spiritual disciple' and gives him a suggestion : "Two things I would bid you do. One,

simplify your own life, and then simplify that of others by setting their minds at rest". (P. 190) Gyan's learning begins with the reading of the basic religious texts and philosophies. The next step is learning the lessons from the Upanishads. The Sadhu doesn't approve of cooking of food. He would say : "What wisdom is there in letting the flames consume half of the strength of our food ?" (P. 193). Gyan is now 'Narayan' - the immortal. By the end of the second year, the sadhu seeks Gyan's opinion concerning different matters. People from all directions come to them - some of them to sit in quietness, others to seek advice, women to ask for progeny. The sadhu would say :

"It is those who come and sit silently who perhaps gain something. The silence helps them, and perhaps I do in some way make manifest the delight of Brahma in his creating. But the ones who talk get nothing". (P. 195)

Gyan Chand is enchanted by the sadhu's gentleness, humour and modesty and above all his amazing dignity. The sadhu is quite philosophic even in simple matters. While telling the cause of his leaving Delhi, he says :

"We live in these quiet places so as not to be in the way of other people. For a year I lived in a room in Delhi ... It was clear to me that if I moved out, at least one person - or perhaps a man and his wife - would have a room in which to live..." (P. 197)

In the fourth year, the sadhu asks him to move away because now he doesn't need the sadhu's help. Before Gyan moves away, the sadhu tells him the gist of his philosophy :

"Knowledge is the light that glimmers on that tank - the light has a thousand facets, and yet releases a thousand facets

of darkness ... only remember one thing Narayan : the pleasure of Lord in his creation". (P. 199)

The philosophical dialogues between the Sadhu and Gyan remind us of the Upanish<sup>d</sup>ic dialogues of yore.

# VI

Now the scene shifts from the secluded grove of the Sadhu to the rural locality of Paramanand village where Gyan comes in contact with the villagers. This reminds us of a similar scene in The Guide in which Raju as an ascetic comes in the limelight. The Indian Sadhus and minstrels cannot remain aloof from the village folk on whom is spelt their benevolent influence. Gyan moves away from the sadhu's grove because he realises the meaning of 'motion'. He takes shelter under a big fig tree near the village. The people from the village come to seek his advice. The village is under the grip of an epidemic of high fever. Gyan tries to tell them that he is not endowed with powers to help them. But one of the villagers says : 'But there is something, in his face which gives us strength :' (P. 202) Three days later, he too contracts fever. With his meditation he speeds across the universe and then comes back. When he gets up, he finds himself recovered. He wonders at the festivity in the village in the days of epidemic. The villagers exclaim :

"It is a great day ! ... Since you came to Parmanand, there have been no deaths in the village. Many men and children were ill when you arrived, and others took ill at the time the fever struck you, but today none of them has any temperature".

(P. 203) The scene very graphically evokes the gullibility and superstitious nature inherent in the Indian villagers.

Two days later, the whole village rushes to him and



requests him to prolong his stay there. Gyan Chand doesn't want any involvement<sup>as</sup> he is trying to get detachment and seclusion. He leaves Parmanand and walks towards the mountains, avoiding all possible villages because he knows that meditation demands immense courage and a deep thirst for inner freedom. He inhabits a slate-roofed room near the confluence of the Beas and two mountain tributaries. In the spring, he moves to the last valley of the Beas.

One evening, he finds a shepherd boy named Rumsu injured and sobbing. He helps the boy by washing his wounds. The boy again contracts malaria. The boy wishes to stay with him. He is fascinated by the Sadhu's grace : 'My Sadhu, even my sheep will become your followers when, I sing these songs for them'. (P. 214), says the boy.

Gyan experiences a strange experience of friendship with the boy. He keeps pressing the boy against his bosom. The boy too receives the illumination which he composes in his own words :

"Soon after the Sadhu sat there before his fire, he arose quietly and took me out with him ... Immediately many sounds came from all over the hillside-birds, frogs, stones, grass, drops of water, leaves falling ... He pretends to sit here but he goes away and listens to the sounds of the hills. Then he returns full of happiness". (P. 216)

Rumsu, the shepherd boy, gives Gyan company in his meditational journey. 'That was a wonderful journey' (P. 217), would be the remark of the boy. One day Rumsu fishes out the other shepherds. His joy knows no bounds. One fine morning the shepherd boy too walks out of Gyan Chand's life. Now it is

difficult for him to meditate. He climbs the mountain above the sea-level and descends into the valley of the river Parvati. As he meditates and intones verses from the Upanisads besides a pool, he gets a companion, a thrush bird, to listen to him. He establishes a kind of communication between himself and the bird. The intensity of their friendship is clearly <sup>felt</sup> in the following few lines :

"I brought out a few grains of buckwheat and held them in my open hand. The thrush hopped on my wrist and delicately picked the grain off my palm ... While it spread and gently flapped its shimmering wings. It was time for us to go down to the water, it was saying ..."(P. 223)

Gyan's stay with the villagers as their benefactor is very graphically and realistically described. This brings to our mind a very identical scene from The Guide, published in the same year. Thus the scene of a Sadhu's visit to a village seems to be a popular feature of the Indo-Anglian novel.

Though the narrative is generally dry and prosaic, in passages like this the novelist is seen waxing poetic and emotional. The Indian sadhus are always friendly with 'the flora and the fauna'. This particular scene is a superb poetic piece. The ~~episode~~ of the thrush who comes to bathe with him every day and does not migrate as the weather changes and dies as a result of it is a heart-rending incident exemplifying the bond between man and the fauna.

At this stage, there is a vague realization in Gyan's mind that he is unable to achieve the state of detachment expected of him as a Sadhu. Now meditation is replaced by Contemplation. He discards the saffron robe, walks down the

hills, picks up a bus and comes back to his town. Thus after seven years of ascetic practice, he is back to the pavilion, his own house, suggesting thereby that the ultimate peace is in being at home and not in wandering here and there in search of the mirage of pleasures of senses.

At home, nobody recognises him at first sight. Narinjan comes out and they greet each other. Narinjan still holds a firm faith in Gyan's abilities. And as is usual with him, he speaks under the spell of Jupiter :

"The movements of a wise man are always directed by the benign stars. Only foolish people like me are constantly getting in the way of the evil stars". (P. 233)

After a momentary detachment, habituated as he is, Gyan starts afresh his philandering with Sulochana who by now has completed her medical studies. She too is not less fascinated by him. She says : 'I am intensely happy with you'. (P. 241) Narinjan dies in sleep and soon Gyan and Sulochana get married. It is a happy marriage apparently, and yet something goes wrong after the birth of a baby, the "common rhythm" (to quote Prof. Iyengar's term) is broken, he grows moody, exposes himself and breathes his last. Gyan's life is a grand failure. His introspective words at the fag end of the novel are quite vocal of his unsuccessful career as a spiritualist :

"In a sense I had left Amritsar with Jennifer. My marriage had never succeeded in bringing me back to the family mansion; and my seven years at the grove and in the mountains were not an escape but merely an expression of the greater unreality". (P. 243)

The last chapter is narrated through the consciousness of the author and so serves as an epilogue. It tells, in brief,

the account of Gyan Chand's marriage with Sulochana and his death. Gyan confesses to the author that things happened to him prior to the ascetic practice had left a kind of imbalance in his life which he wanted to set right by undertaking Sanyasashrama which also proves to be an illusion. For instance, when he is on the verge of getting detachment he develops attachment towards the shepherd boy, Rumsu, and the thrush bird. Gyan's analysis of the cause of his failure in his life speaks volumes of his defeatist temperament :

"... Whenever I looked at my life, it was empty. So I went from one experience to another always losing out, and pitying myself, it was lack of courage that afflicted me ... and yet I realized then that my early instinctive bravery with Moti the elephant had been only a childish victory..." (P. 248)

## VII

From the foregoing analysis of the story it can be said that the plot of the novel is mostly a patchwork of sequential incidents - and yet the interest of the reader is somehow managed to be sustained. Too much is stated and too little presented through action of the protagonist or the cognate characters. This is <sup>also</sup> because of the very philosophical tone of the narrative. The elaborate dialogues in the novel sound like Upanisadic discourses of the ancient sages. The introspective monologues of Gyan are loaded with wisdom and experience. Philosophy overbears artistic finesse in the novel.

As far as the central character is concerned, like several other Sadhus, Swamis and Saints, Gyan Chand too is tailored to suit the tastes of the Western readers and touched up with the usual colours and equipped with the necessary

paraphernalia. The pages which describe his long career as a Sadhu are replete with Hindu philosophy and wisdom and put his worldly life in a proper perspective.

Rai Gyan Chand of Seasons of Jupiter comes closer to Tom of Tom Jones by Henry Fielding. For both, life is a journey. Rai Gyan Chand makes a mention of it quite often. The characters in this picaresque novel are like rolling stones tossed by the various incidents. They have no firm ground of their own to stand upon. In the course of the narrative, all characters are drawn to and then away from Gyan, suggesting thereby the see-saw movement of his life. Interestingly enough, all men and women who come in contact with him have a streak of mysticism in their behaviour. Mysteriously they enter his life and mysteriously they walk out of it. All characters are garrulous and for most of the time they talk of philosophy, arts, music, nature, beauty, sex - and what not ! They seem to be so devised by the novelist that they appear like tools in the spiritual experiments of Gyan Chand. <sup>Though</sup> they are several milestones in the long journey of the hero's life, they remain shadowy throughout.

As for the narrative technique, it is as though Rai Gyan Chand, now sixty, is telling his life-story, but there is another narrator (the author) at the beginning and the end, who has 'an enveloping function', to quote Prof. Iyengar's term, in the narrative. The first person narration by the hero lends a tinge of authenticity to the whole account of his life.

To sum up the discussion of the novel in the words of Prof. Iyengar :

"Seasons of Jupiter is a strange assortment of a tale,

the elements hardly fusing into a whole. Gyan's journey through life is in the picaresque tradition, and while there are interesting situations, the man himself is hardly convincing".<sup>8</sup>

#### VIII

Thus the explication of the portrayals of the three ascetics in the foregoing pages reveals certain features common to them in spite of their own distinctive individuality. None of them is a born sadhu; circumstances and the <sup>people</sup> society among whom they live make them so. Generally, some accident or miracle turns them into 'men in the saffron robes'. Their charismatic features, knowledge of the scriptures and the acquired philosophical jargon prove to be great assets to them. All the three ascetics undergo a certain amount of spiritual transformation and keep riding the horse which later on they find difficult to dismount. Kalo's revenge - oriented asceticism and Gyan's experimental spiritualism make them artistically flat characters. Raju, on the other hand, is a gradually developed character and the objectivity of Narayan has lent him an artistic dimension. Raju has neither the emotional gusto of Kalo nor the ever-changing fickleness of Gyan. His is a slow and steadily growing character. The purposiveness and reformatory zeal of Bhattacharya have made Kalo a spokesman of his social philosophy and the brooding monologues in the novel have made Gyan an introverted man. Comparatively, therefore, Raju has emerged as an artistically superior ascetic character.

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