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Experiment Of Social Consciousness Through Irony And Subtle Humour: An Analysis Of R. K. Narayan's The Guide

Dr. Trailokya Nath Parida

*Faculty, Department of English
KISS (Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar*

email: trailokyanath.mitu@gmail.com

Abstract

Literature influences society by charging with newer ideas, opinions and values throughout the ages. It mirrors and reflects multifarious nature and the reality of social beings. In fact, it is the “quality of literature is intimately connected with the quality of life that it reflects”. (Goodman.p.09) R.K.Narayan’s idea of social consciousness using irony and subtle humor has gone unchallenged. Irony and humor feature constantly exposing concrete realities of rural India. Narayan’s use of the above techniques enables him to achieve his narrative purpose delineating the prevailing conditions effectively. The protagonist’s attitude of exploiting the innocence and simplicity of villagers is discernible and includes diverse social intakes. This paper aims to explore Narayan’s portrayal of the societal issues of hypocrisy and dissimulation, gender and feminism, tradition and modernity, greed and materialism through irony and subtle humor.

Key Words: *Society, Humor, Irony, Literature, Satire, Consciousness*

As a leading author of early Indian literature, Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanswami acclaims a renowned position for being so closer to the everyday life and situations through the most of the characters with might and majesty, greatness and grandeur in his works. The Sahitya Academy Award winner, *The Guide* catches the attention for its intimacy with Indian social context and establishes peculiar relations with the readers bringing irony and satire. The novel revolves round the protagonist Raju and his transformation from a tour guide to a spiritual guru. The falsity in transformation evokes an element of irony and humor reflecting the prevailing illusory life of Indian communities in the late fifties

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of twentieth century. Narayan an adroit creator of fictional narrative brings the cosmic importance out of lowly comic life. The lives of the commoners were historically bound up with different social occupations. Karl Marx rightly concludes that social consciousness is built upon human being's productive and economic relations leading to their basic desire to live together.

Published in the year 1958 *The Guide* is indeed the depiction of the realistic aspect of traditions, rituals, blind belief of the innocent Indian villagers. Religious impact, deteriorating family bond, greed of money, marital fidelity, sex and love affairs are exposed with apt intention dealing with social change. Humor and irony are the heart of literature. The novel typically characterizes Indian atmosphere to portray bringing true social picture leading to lots of contextual references.

Humour may be defined as the amused perception of the incongruities of life and intends to provoke laughter and provide entertainment. The artistic expression of humorous situation is keenly alive in Narayan's novels. A humorist attempts to dive at exposing the discrepancy or contrast between what is and what should be on the basis of social norms. In the process, he ridicules human follies and mistakes so as to make these lively and instructional. The satirist other hand, intends to expose human wickedness and evils with a view to rectify or reform the established norms. Irony aims at bringing together opposites and contrasting them which comes from the use of the language delivering meaning opposite to one intended.

The characters are placed during post-independence India and analyze the economic theories of the country. The conflict between traditional India and its values with modern western values is amply visible. Narayan's heroes are "unheroic who may stoop to any degree to achieve their goals", (Sen. P.46) *The Guide* is the spiritual Odyssey in the history of the human world. Among all other characters the protagonist Raju along with Marco and Rosie are typical by nature and stand to ... They were concerned with the underlying faith in God and integrity. Rosie epitomizes an Indian woman captivated by tradition and modernity. As a tour guide, Raju is an impulsive, unprincipled and self-indulgent who acts on the basis of prevailing social problems. Rosie's journey from a middleclass aspiring lady to a self-reliant woman proves the emergence of the in dominant will among the women in Indian context.

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The central theme of *The Guide* is matured with the aspirations of spiritual maturity through comic resources which he achieves through meticulous accuracy and minute observation. “Narayan; theme are pertaining to human relationships, disturbance of order and restoration towards spiritual maturity through the sources of the comic. All these themes are pertaining to deep idea, concepts and ideologies of life”. (Sen.p.51)

Among the Indo-Anglian writers Narayan, at the very outset is a greatest humorist in Indian literary history. He is best at blending satire with humour in an actual life situation which is the main technique of reaching at the readers in no small measure. His humor is immensely varied and all pervasive in which we find the use of farcial humor, irony wit and satire. Perfect mixture of pathos and tragedy is observed in a number of occasions that causes laughter and light moments in the play. A perfect example of the situation of Raju in the *pyol* school where the boys pry into the house of the master and find him cooking in the kitchen. The wife stands close and watches the amazed boys at the door of the kitchen. His discomfiture creates comic situation for the readers. Narayan ideally draw his sources from absurdities and contradictions from daily lives. He satirizes the ill mentality of religious gurus through irony when in *The Guide* when Raju transforms him to be conceived as sainthood and thinks to compose his feature, smoothes out his beard and hair, and sits down in the seat with a book in his hand.

Narayan basically deals with the social issues and gives message that those who deviates from these human relationships get destroyed. Indian marriage tradition usually doesn't allow marrying others wife. Religious belief also supports to this notion, but finds contrary what happened in the novel. Raju comes in contact with Rosie, wife of Marco. Being attracted towards a married lady is honestly a confusing position. She becomes 'mohini' and gets a personality like Raju diverted towards her. Coming from a lower middle-class family, known as 'Railway Raju' is intuitive to the needs of tourists needs and turns indispensable for them. But he doesn't stand to the social and moral expectation regarding his marriage to Rosie, the wife of client Marco. Raju becomes obsessively in love with her and neglects his family duty. He thinks of her as a property and also dedicates for furthering her dancing career but becomes greedy which leads to spoil the relationship and finds him in jail.

Narayan portrays a traditional woman, Raju's mother who is sociable to a significant extent. The artistic expression of the character touches the heart of the readers when we find womanly qualities in her,

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permitting Raju to live with Rosie even after she realizes that Rosie belongs to a low-caste dancer. Although Raju realizes his mother's affinity, he smelt the changes in her leading to her reluctance in accepting such kind of intimacy with Raju. The innocence of the village woman is perfectly exemplified by the narrative technique of R.K.Narayan. "But unfortunately, my mother, for all her show of tenderness, was beginning to stiffen inside. She had been listening to gossip, and she could not accommodate the idea of living with a tainted woman. I was afraid to be cornered by her and took care not to face alone. But whenever she could get at me, she hissed a whisper into my ear. 'She is a real snake woman, I tell you, I never liked her from the first day you mentioned her.' (Narayan p.154)

Rosie is characterized as a hybrid of tradition and modern who challenges the Hindu orthodox social system. Significantly she tries to free her from the bondage of so-called confinement and gets closer to Raju. Narayan is aware of the social needs to get in the track of norms disallowing what happens in the character. Indian patriarchal dominance, suppressing freedom of woman in the society is epitomized through Rosie when she tries to escape the constraints of her caste and gets united with a wealthy man. Her creativity and passion to be a dancer is suppressed by her cruelest husband. Eventually turns towards to fulfil her aspirations through adaptive Raju, who also exploits her in a number of cases leading to lose from both of them. On one hand Macro denounces her art and she "gets back neither Macro nor Raju. Ultimately, she comes back where she had left, that is Madras, and settles down there, far away from her husband and her lover." (Bala p. 47)

Narayan's writing is enriched with a number of situational ironies in which he makes the burdened heart light and evokes laughter among the readers. At the very outset the title indicates to the guidance of the protagonist Raju as a railway guide and then as a spiritual guide. But ironically, he fails in his duties rather Velan guides him to a secure position in his life. In case of fasting, he adopts the ways which he was not convinced. Raju undergoes a number of transformations throughout of the novel which indicate change of Raju as even a person and a character in a practical life. His transformation depicts the cycle of his life from a tour guide to spiritual guru is in fact comic. Raju's life shows how beautiful and intriguing simplicity that one can be.

Regarding the simplicity of Narayan's work *The Guide* approaches to even non-specialist readers. The language can appeal the readers with simplicity and common insights of thoughts which are from day to

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life situation. The autobiographical dimension of Narayan is mingled with facticity of facts to reach at the common readers. But his fictional narrative grows from personal to universal and shows the easiness of acceptability.

Raju, the protagonist is the center of irony and is ridiculed with gentle mockery. As a character, he is aimed for his pretentious role as an individual to compels the readers to think whether he is a good man at all. Becoming a tour guide and being a spiritual guide, both come to him by chance. His dramatic and unprecedented rise and fall raise readers sympathy from the common readers. Raju's conservative uncle's visit to his home creates a comic situation when Raju narrates, "My uncle watched my antics from the kitchen." Another instance of comic situation is when Raju intends to please the school authorities.

Narayan is adept in using gentle humor which performs important function in the novel and significantly the amount of empathy he draws towards the protagonist is marked by realism. Narayan compares the characterization of Raju and Marco when he is represented as a victim of modern wife who cheats him on the basis of modern materialistic attitude and futuristic intention. Marco bears the burnt of most caustic comedy in the novel. Narayan's humor is intimately linked to a sense of irony. Raju is drawn with two opposite positions with sainthood and imprisonment as well. Hence Anita Desai views it as "dubious skeptical tone". It is this element which makes Graham Greene to compare Narayan with Chekhov. On many occasions, this gentle irony broadens out into overt satire. The description of the pandemonium surrounding the site of Raju's self-punishment abruptly ridicules the propensity of the Indians (or people in general, perhaps) to turn every condition to a quasi-religious fair. The irony in *The Guide* is multifaceted.

Again, another situational irony prevails in the village of Mngala when people have no water and food all the facilities are available in the draught affected village immediately surrounding Raju's fasting place. Simple villagers start pouring in the facilities like tea stalls to postal system. In fact, these facilities remain unavailable for the common villagers in their ordinary life. They talk themselves 'appearances are sometimes misleading'. Narayan's writing is marked by gentle and sweet humor and attract low social criticism. At the end of the novel, as Raju steps into the water for the last time, there is both ambiguity and hope, achieved by subtle use of irony. The novelist tries the comic mode to bring to our notice the highest kind of reality in an attractive and ordinary sense. The characters inhibit the appearance and the

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reality, tradition, and modernity, spirituality and materialism. 'Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said, Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel coming under my feet, up my legs- 'He sagged down''. (Narayan. 247)

The Guide as the most representative novel, is unique in the sense that the protagonist moves from the ordinary position to an exalted one and subsequent reversion to the previous condition magically. Raju moves from a railway guide to a better one attracting Rosie but goes down forging the signature and gets imprisonment leading to again elevated being a spiritual guru. As a simple narrative *The Guide* is replete with high and serious techniques of presenting past and present without big explosions and finally the end of the novel keeps the suspense undamaged. Narayan is an acute observer of life and records it as it appears to him. In fact, the mask of a false sadhu is exposed and truly the novelist intends to bring social consciousness through gentle humour and irony.

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