

## Surreal and Absurd Ironical Humour in R.K.Narayan's *The Guide*

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### Abstract

*This paper made an attempt to study of humour and irony in K.R.Narayan's novel The Guide. His interest in Indian sensibility results in his exposing the peculiarity of life and his characters. Through exaggeration, force, juxtaposition of appearance and reality, he paints his total vision of life in his The Guide. In this novel, there is humour of character, humour of situation, irony, wit and satire. Irony can be tragic also, but in Narayan my concern is mainly the irony that works as the base for Narayan's humour the instance for which are found at every step in his novels. R.k.Narayan is one of my favorite authors. One thing I would stress here is that Narayan novels are complex. The writing is unimaginably simple but novels are quite complex. And also this paper focuses on the protagonist Raju's behaviours especially in the end of the novel. The unexpected conclusion portrayed in different perspective.*

**Key words:** R.K.Narayan, Indian writing, humour, irony, wit, Malgudi.

The most popular novels of R.K.Narayan is *The Guide*. This novel is also a flash of Indo - Anglian fiction. It has been translated into many languages like French, Dutch, German, Polish, Swedish, Russian and Hebrew and in several Indian languages. The novel fetched for its writer Sahitya Akademi Award in 1961. Furthermore, it has been filmed successfully and has been a hit.

The protagonist, Raju is born in Malgudi and his father is a small shop-keeper. He sees the Malgudi station taking shape and enjoys himself moving with the railway workers and picks up their foul language. So his father sends him to the Pyol School then he is admitted in the Board high School. When Raju's father died, he is made to look after the shop. He starts helping the pilgrims by guiding them and so people approached him for guidance and he comes to be called as 'railway Raju'.

One day Marco a scholar, comes to Malgudi with his wife Rosie. He is interested in studying the carvings in the temple but Rosie is interested to become a dancer but her husband opposes her wishes. Slowly Raju falls in love with Rosie. Rosie's character in the novel is not only very lively but also very fascinating and charming. The novelist describes her sometimes very minutely:

She was not very glamorous, if that is what we expect, but she did have a figure, a slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a

complexion, not white but dusky, which made her only half visible as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice. ( 52 )

Raju takes Rosie, abandoned by her husband, to his house. Rosie stays there and gets training in dancing and becomes a well known public dancer. Rosie, now comes to be called as Nalini becomes very busy with dancing. Her behaviour changes and she starts neglecting Raju because he involved in drinking and gambling. When Marco's book is published, Rosie reads the review and reveals her admiration and love for him. This shocks Raju.

Marco sends a few documents on which his solicitor wanted Rosie signature. Raju, Who receives the documents, feels that this act of Marco's kindness will make of Rosie to run back to her husband, forges her signature on the document. But it is found out and he is arrested for forgery and is sentenced to two years imprisonment. Social morality has its value and as such it must be maintained; tampering with its equilibrium is dangerous. Raju is the living example of the same. The personal failure of the character of the hero symbolises the social maladjustment of a person in society. The sanctity of marriage must remain intact because when infringed it creates the problems of social immorality and maladjustment. Rosie's folly in surrendering to the desire of hero is treated as an act of passion which is not rewarded.

It disturbs the social order as well as disturbs the mind of the hero. But the social, moral and psychological interests are relegated to the background; on the forefront the novel remains a very delightful piece of art. Nevertheless, the Indian tradition and thought of 'karma' is maintained.

Rosie tries in vain to save Raju from going to jail. She goes back to Madras and Raju spends his time in jail. For his good behaviour, he is given remission by six months. After he is released, he feels so ashamed of himself that he does not want to go back to his mother. So he finds shelter in an ancient shrine on the banks of the river Sarayu. In Sarayu, Velan meets him here and takes him to be a sage. A change comes over Raju and he begins to read the 'Gita' to the village, and starts preaching to them, who have much belief in him.

Raju spends his days in the village of Mangala. One summer, there is a total failure of rains, and the drought increased in severity. So, Raju has to go on a fast, unwillingly, for rains for the villagers. The news of his fast spreads far and wide and people from all over the country come to see him. The government sends doctors to persuade the swami to end his fast, but in vain. Shops spring up in the drought affected area and it becomes the centre of hectic activity.

Narayan's irony is like shot silk showing different colours as it catches the light at different angles. His satire is mild and gentle. He exposes and ridicules, but his primary aim is entertainment, and not social reform. In *The Guide*, he satirises lawyers, government officers, and fake Sadhus and their credulous disciples. He presents as the villain and Raju as the selfless hero. The career of Raju provides the novelist an excellent opportunity to satirise the government officers of post-independence India. Just mark the mild satire against the fake sadhus in Raju's wish:

Raju soon realised that his spiritual status would be enhanced if he grew a beard and long hair to fall on his nape. A clean-shaven, close-haired saint was an anomaly. He bore the various stages of his make-up with fortitude, not minding the prickly phase he had to pass through before a well authenticated beard could cover his face and come down his chest. (125)

The interview between the American reporter and Raju at the close of the novel is also a piece of sustained irony. It is not a Yogi but a bhogi who is being interviewed, a fraud and a cheat is being asked to express his views on

a number of questions. On the twelfth day, Raju's condition becomes critical and he sags down leaning on Velan's shoulders and he tells him that it is raining in the hills and that he could feel it under his feet.

The plot has been split into three episodes or phases: First Phase Raju as a Railway man or tourist guide; and Second phase Raju as an impresario; and Third one Raju as a pseudo saint. Narayan's vision is comic. He is the greatest humorist among the Indo-Anglian writers of fiction. His humour is varied and all pervasive. His novels are the humour of character, humour of situation, of farcical humour, irony, wit and satire. His humour mingles with pathos and tragedy: there is a Shakespearean fusion of the comic and the tragic.

There is farcical humour in the novel that arouses loud laughter. For example, there is a situation in the school where the boys pry into the house of the master and find him cooking in the kitchen. The wife stands close by and she giggles as she sees the amazed boys standing at the door of the kitchen. There is also the farcical scene in which Raju is abused and thrown out of the station, and Rosie looks at the whole scene from the doorway. Another farcical situation is when the Swami goes in to have some food, finds the pot empty and throws it away in anger.

Novels of Narayan is very few usually given to elaborate technical experiments or overt display of his artistic skills, *The Guide* is one of his few works that draw attention to itself because of its somewhat unusual narrative method.

In telling Raju's story, Narayan sways third-person and first-person narration and uses such cinematic techniques as flashbacks and jump cuts. When the first encounter Raju, he is about to meet Velan, and he is seen at this point from the perspective of an omniscient narrator. Then Raju takes over the narrative slogs and relates his progress from sweetmeat seller to jailbird to Velan. In between, the omniscient narrator stops Raju's narrative by showing him dealing with the villagers as a holy man. At the end, Raju ceases to be a narrator as he loses his hold on his consciousness.

There is humour in the development of Raju the stall-keeper into Raju the Mahatma. Raju is the eternal explorer and is also presented as a humorous figure several times. "He would not yield an anna without a voucher, whereas if you give him a slip of paper you could

probably get him to undertake an expedition with his thick coloured glasses, thick jacket and a thick helmet over which was perpetually stretched a green, shiny, water-proof cover, giving him the appearance of a space-traveller" (124). He is an odd, cut-off-the-way character, like a knot in wood.

Irony and wit are woven into the very texture of Narayan's prose. At every step we get fine, sparkling things which startle and delight. Narayan has full command over verbal irony. In brief, Narayan is a great humorist. His characteristic humour does not result from distortion, exaggeration or caricature. It results from an observation of the common human weaknesses, follies and foibles, and

absurdities. His eyes take on a merry twinkle as he surveys the panorama of common humanity on the march.

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