

## Use of Irony in R . K. Narayan's 'The Guide'

R. K. Narayan's conception of humor is meticulously achieved in *The Guide*. We get a glimpse of the complexity of life in this novel through irony of motives, characters, situations, and ideas. Narayan behaves like Chaucer when the matter of religion arrives. Narayan satirizes the corruption of the sadhus through irony. Sainthood is reduced to a matter merely of external appearance when Raju thinks to compose his feature for his professional role and smoothes out his beard and hair, and sits down in the seat with a book in his hand.

"He was hypnotised by his own voice; he felt himself growing in stature as he saw the upturned faces of the children shinning in the half light when he spoke. No one was more impressed with the grandeur of the whole thing than Raju himself"

Narayan criticizes sharply when Raju relates some principal of living with a particular variety of delicious food and he mentions it with an air of seriousness, so that his listeners take it as a spiritual need. Narayan had all respect for Gandhi and Gandhism but the Gandhi and use of fasting for self-purification is also satirized when a fraud is shown as being compelled to undertake a fast to bring down the rains. Narayan has full command over verbal irony s for example Velan says to Raju, ' Your presence is similar to that of Mahatma Gandhi. He has left a disciple in you to save us'.

Raju, the protagonist, is a victim of the irony of life. His life which moves from birth to death, symbolizes the rise and fall of man in life. Though Raju detests Marco, the scholar ironically, he teaches others all his life. Raju is trusted by Marco, but ironically Raju seduces his wife. He hides Marco's book to keep his control over Rosie, but this act of deception ironically alternates her. He forges Rosie's signature, for greed and to keep her away from Marco, but instead he loses her, instead of a box of jewelry, a warrant for his arrest arrives. His attempt to hide Marco's generosity ironically exposes his deceit, and Rosie loses her respect for him. Ironically Marco, the scholar who studies "dead things" and is unaware of his surroundings, ends in out-witting Raju, the clever guide. Raju's pride over his role in Rosie's success ironically replaces by the realization that she is capable of even great success without him. Thus, he is a victim of irony at every step.

After his release from prison he wants a life of solitude but ironically he becomes a fake swami, he is surrounded by people and greatness is thrust upon him. They believe that a superior soul has come to live near their village.

In order to appear wise, he tells the story of a man who fasted for twelve days to appease the gods. Ironically, he too has to have to fast to propitiate the rain-god. His own story rebounds on him and the fake swami has to fast to keep up the faith of the people. Once again, he is the victim of the irony when he tells Velan's half brother that he will not eat till they stop fighting. His aim is to get food, but ironically the message is distorted and the villagers come without food. It is ironical that his desire for food results in him fasting for life. In a desperate bid to save his life, he confesses to Velan in the hope that he will condemn him and give him food, but ironically Velan pardons him as the frank confession confirms Velan's belief in his goodness. Thus, the man who becomes a fake swami because of food becomes a true swami, once he renounces food. Thus Raju faces the unexpectations at every stage. At every stage, he gets what he rejects; he is denied what he wants.

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Narayan satirizes the thing through irony. In this novel he refers to lawyers-five year plan, red-tapism, postal services, efforts to eradicate mosquitoes etc, all expose the irony of life. The reaction of the government to Raju's fast is ironical, while special arrangement are made for the fasting swami and the pilgrims who throng to see Raju but nothing is done to help the drought effected villagers. The ignorant villagers, the government and the elite are also satirized as they affirm their belief in fake sadhus. Equally ironical is the interview of the American journalist. The final lines of the book, as Raju steps into the water for the last time, are both ambiguous and hopeful, and the complexity is once again achieved through the use of irony:

Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said, "Velan, it's raining in the hill. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs,....He sagged down. It may simply be an illusion because of his physical weakness.

Narayan very aptly exposes and ridicules human follies and weakness through irony. His irony arises from the bringing together the opposites and contrasting them.