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Dr. Tripti Kumari
+ 2Teacher (English), Shiv
Ganga Balika, + 2 High
School, Madhubani, Bihar,
India

RK Narayan's *The Guide*: A portrait of a spiritual guide

Dr. Tripti Kumari

Abstract

Rashipuram Krishnaswamy Narayan has presented the saga of a man who was an emblem of transition from tradition to modernity in the South Indian socio-cultural background in the novel "The Guide". Through the character Raju, Narayan has presented the changing human scene, entangled in the web of domestic life, question of morality and over commercial leanings in social life around himself. After all the jail life, Raju abandons his previous life and wanders away to a very distant and remote village where he takes shelter in a temple and by chance he is taken to be a saint. Therefore basic aim of this paper is to study the charismatic character of spiritual guide Raju who adhere the spirituality without ignorance and gullibility of the villagers of Mangal.

Keywords: south Indian, socio-cultural, morality, village, temple, spiritual, guide, saint

Introduction

Among the great Indo-Anglican novelists RK Narayan holds a unique position. He has successfully presented the life's scenario with its changing time and spirit very artistically. Social, cultural, moral and philosophical aspects of life attracts Narayan very much. The present novel is a social picture of life and time found in a particular south-region, commonly referred to as Malgudi. This novel is a social tragedy depicting the rise and fall of the hero Raju due to his own misadventure in life.

The Guide was the first novel written in English which won R.K. Narayan not only Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960 but also several other awards. The book was adapted into both a movie (1965) and a play of the same name (1968) (Osborne-Bartucca, 2019) [2]. In "The Guide" R.K. Narayan depicted the protagonist journey from Railway Raju to Saint Raju. While describing this journey we come to know different things facet of Indian life especially south Indian like religious nature of Indian, urban superiority versus pastoral simplicity, mixing of eastern and western culture, human emotions like love greed for money, infidelity. Though his art form is western, his theme, atmosphere, situations and scenes are truly Indian (Ataullah, 2010) [3].

Analysis

The hero of the novel Raju is presented to us in various role that he plays in his entire life. He presented before the readers in different characters according to the changing circumstances. He acts and behaves as per the demand of his circumstances. But one very inconspicuous trait runs from the beginning to the end of his personality is the sense of guiding people in their private or common problems of life. The underlying theme of this novel is that the hero begins and ends his life while guiding others, but failing to guide himself totally. So this novel revolves round the central point of view which is guiding people in this world.

Raju the hero of the novel is a young man, son of an ordinary village shopkeeper, having little education. But as grows up he develops to be an intelligent and romantic young man. He is social, adventurous and can win the hearts of his associated people.

With the introduction of the railways to Malgudi, tourists begin to pour there. The background of Malgudi, tourists begin to pour there. The background of Malgudi is rich in natural sights and sounds. It has very beautiful hills with lush green forests. There is the river Saryu flowing by. Far away is found ruins of a place consigned to oblivion.

Correspondence Author:
Dr. Tripti Kumari
+ 2Teacher (English), Shiv
Ganga Balika, + 2 High
School, Madhubani, Bihar,
India

All these stimulate the interests of the visitors. Now Raju changes from shopkeeper to a successful guide for the people coming to Malgudi. So we find Raju's first appearance as a shopkeeper changing to a career of a tourists. He earns a lot of money and fame. He is extremely popular because of sociable nature.

Further, there is turning point in the life of Raju. In course of his guiding career he comes across a young couple – Marco and Rosie. Raju comes in the life of Rosie and begins to act as her guide on her artistic quest. For this, he also fans her discord against Marco her husband. On this account the romantic turned artistic guide Raju confess,

"I was accepted by Marco as a member of the family. From guiding tourists I seemed to have come to a sort of concentrated guiding of a single family."

Raju then successfully acts an artistic guide of Rosie. Soon Rosie gets a towering success. And she is the success of Raju. From artistic guidance Raju turns to a commercial enterprise. He transforms Rosie into a commercial dancer. He begins to earn money. His art of guiding brings him affluence and fame. At this stage the guide in Raju is known as Mr. Raj.

Unfortunately, Mr. Raj, the guide tries to forge the signature of Rosie for the release of her jewelry from the bank. This is discovered and he gets imprisonment for two years. In jail, Raju's fine sense of humor and social sense win him good friends. He acts also a guide for them in the jail. The jail life marks the end of the romantic and commercial in Raju's life.

After all the jail life, he abandons his previous life and wanders away to a very distant and remote village called Mangal. Here, the artistic-guide turned 'gaol-guide' Mr. Raj. Or Mr. Raju takes shelter in a temple. By chance he is taken to be a saint by the local people. He receives a lot of presentations and edibles which gives him a comfortable life in the temple. Soon he capitalizes on the benightedness and credulity of the villagers. Soon he begins to act as a wise man for the villagers by settling disputes and arranging education for children. Here the traits of artistic turned gaol-guide seems to be 'Spiritual-Guide' obtaining reverence from all but definitely not from God. The cosy life of Raju is caught in his own net of deception. Raju is forced to go on fast to propitiate the 'Rain-God'. But before he dies, the guiding tone is still present in Raju's words, when he says,

"Velan its raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet up my legs"

After his two year period in jail Raju bids good bye to the romantic life of woman, wine and wealth. He wandered away to a remote village called – Mangal, where he sought shelter in a temple from the probing eyes of society. By chance, the villagers look him to be a great and lived on their charity. But after a long time, he was caught in the net of his own misdoings. The villagers forced him to go on fast in order to propitiate the rain god to help the people struck by a long famine. Raju reluctantly went on fast and slowly kissed the inevitable end on the 14th day of his fast.

The character of Raju strikes us very much even though he does not possess the great tragic heights. Raju being an intelligent man, could read anyone in a short time. He tells us about Marco and Rosie – "Perhaps he (Marco) married out of a desire to have someone care for his practical life, but unfortunately his choice was wrong – this girl herself

was a dreamer if ever there was one." However Raju does not exhibit the great inner storm that we find in the tragic heroes of Shakespeare or Graham Greene. More or less Raju proves himself an impresario from beginning to the end. He has no care for tradition, culture and morality. He does not hesitate in luring a married lady and also earns money through her.

Raju has also certain good qualities which keep us bound to him. He receives punishments for his misdeeds. The fast he was forced to take leads to his end without any salvation. He could have run away from the village, but he did not want to demolish high hopes of villagers in him. He preferred to die than to betray those who held him in such a reverential esteem. Raju's all voices are redeemed when he dies for the villagers. His laying down his life evokes in us pity and sympathy which are the corner stones of a great man.

Conclusion

So R.K. Narayan's "The Guide" is a fine example of realistic portrays of Indian scenario as this technique was used by in tragedy King Lear Shakespeare skillfully exposes the chaos, illness and turmoil of Lear's dominion with unadulterated realism of his art (Ramanan, 2014) ^[1]. With the same skill R.K. Narayan portrays the journey of different phases of Raju's life like Station food vendor, a tourist guide, a sentimental adultery, a manager of Rosie, a jailbird, martyred swami while portraying transformation of Raju from Railway Raju to spiritual awaken Raju. Narayan put forward different religious, cultural, social, economic aspects of Indian society. He also focuses on deteriorating family relation, religious nature of Indian society, and different problems of Indian society like drought, blind faith on sadhu, superstitious nature of Indian people. "The Guide" is a magnum opus by R K Narayan which was published in 1958. It's greatness is recognized by bestowing Sahitya Akademi Award on it. The movie "The Guide" is the blend of philosophy, fiction and elements of supernatural blended with the faith of morals in it. Bollywood stars of bygone era Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman acted as leading stars in the film "Guide".

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