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REALISM IN R. K. NARAYAN'S NOVEL 'THE GUIDE'

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Abstract:

Renowned novelist R.K. Narayan wrote many novels and short stories. In this novel, through the characters of Raju, Rosie and Marco, he depicts various aspects such as religious rituals and socio-economic status of the India to show the blindness of the Indian people. He told the problems that plagued the Indians, the problems of the family and how he died of greed, sexual love and passion.

Keywords: Socio-cultural, realism, valuable tradition, realization, ethics and human values.

Introduction:

In the guide, the author points out that the issue of illusion and reality is used in portraits of his main characters. The novel focuses on the life story of the protagonist Raju, who is presented as a tourist guide. The present and past life of the hero is the story line of the novel. The main part of the story is that Raju recalled his previous life up to Velan. This major part of the novel is covered in many Chapters.

Raju is very much with Rosie in her dancing performances. He poses himself as the connoisseur of art of dancing but actually he tries to shield any possibility of her return to Marco. Rosie tries to convince her husband of ingenuity of her ambition and finally reveals her affair with Raju in order to save her married. But she fails in her mission because Marco prefers the life of a self-interested cultural researcher to the infidel wife and practitioner monkey tricks of street. When Marco leaves Rosie, she on her own way tries to save her marriage. The separation from Rosie becomes unbearable to Raju and he tries to revert to his past existence. But Rosie return to him proves fatal.

To the end of chapter six we see Rosie returning to Raju who shows an increasing potential of a passionate lover. During the time of separation Raju thinks Rosie the only reality of life. It is not so and what he thinks is his illusion. His reunion with Rosie renews his strength of mind to do anything for her interest. Cultural reality shows that an act of pure individualism is doomed to pay the person. Rosie at first comes to Raju's house only for a shelter but after hearing her personal trauma, he assures her to make her an artist:

You are in the right place. Forget all your past...I'll make the world recognize you as the greatest artist of the time.

Proving himself as the promoter of the art Raju sets for himself an assignment that is pregnant with possibility of self-deception and self-agony.

Rosie's artistic self blooms as Raju boosts to her tormented person. She starts dance practice in Raju's orthodox household inviting reaction from Raju's mother. Though Raju's mother is sympathetic to Rosie, she can no longer tolerate her son's callousness to family tradition and his laxity in moral character. She opposes Raju's move:

You can't have a dancing girl in our house. Every morning with that dancing and everything going on! What is the home coming to? I was hoping you would have the sense to do something about it. It can't go on like this for ever. What will people say?

But Raju protests and does not mind the public opinion. His mother's reaction becomes the articulation of the older generation's allegiance to community tradition.

Raju's mother wants to restore the traditional values as they are seemed lost in Raju's affair. We clearly discern in Raju's mother her growing antipathy to living with a tainted woman under the same roof and she whisper from time to time into Raju's ears that "She is a real snake-woman, I tell you, I never liked her from the first day you mentioned her". There is something in Raju to blame him for; the stall boy's father points it out when he says Raju that "It's not he who has ruined you, but the *Saithan* inside, which makes you talk like this". The reference to the evil has to do with the illusions that Raju has been engulfed in. Raju financial condition faces another setback when the *Sait*-a regular creditor to Raju- demands repayment of a huge loan but goes back without having it.

Raju is at a stage where his existence is threatened but still he is not disillusioned. On the contrary the attachment seems to tighten its grip on Raju who moves away from the concerns of social contact and, what Mukhopadhyay calls, "lives in an illusory world of fatuous self-content". Later he confesses to Velan that "Living with Rosie under the same roof was enough for me. I wanted nothing more in life. I was sleeping into a fool's paradise". Once again Gaffur advises Raju to come back from this world of illusion to the real:

Send her away and try to get back to ordinary, real life. Don't talk all this art-business. It's not for us.

Gaffur's advocacy of the ordinary, real life underscores the importance of traditionally lived existence that has a surviving vitality of its own without modernity.

Raju's increasing attachment and subsequent possessiveness over Rosie bring his self alienation from the traditional pattern of life. Raju's mother cannot live with Rosie under the same roof because of her allegiance with the traditional values. She calls in her brother to intervene without her son's knowledge. Raju's conflict with his maternal uncle and his mother is indicative of his displacement from morality and tradition. It is obvious that Raju is drawn into the Western individualism and the escape from it seems impossible to him. His mother and his maternal uncle stand for those very values and mores of traditional society which Raju decisively rejects. Raju alone at one side and his mother and maternal uncle on the other side form two patterns of cultural response- first favors Western individualism and the second favors the traditional values:

My mother appealed to me, 'Have some sense, Raju. She is another man's wife. She must go back to him.' There was such calm logic in what she said, I had nothing more to do but repeat blindly, 'She can't go anywhere, Mother. She has got to stay here.' And then my mother brought out her trump card. 'If she is not going, I have to leave the house,' she said.

Though Rosie is rejected by Raju's mother and his maternal uncle, Raju validates his support for her and justifies his faith in her talent.

The character of Raju is understood by his attachment to Rosie rather than his faith in her talent. This is clearly seen in his behavior to her. Raju watches her at dance practice and the time is just before the climax that ensues with his uncle's arrival. He tells, "I watched her critically, but what I watched were the curves that tempted me to hug her on the spot". This infatuation accounts for his moral deprivation which in turn gives way to illusion. Raju call his affair with Rosie as relationship between husband and wife. He says that "We were a married couple to all appearances...All day long she danced and sang. I made love to her constantly and was steeped in an all-absorbing romanticism.

Rosie becomes popular dancer and for this she gives credit to Raju. He is given credit for having discovered a genius like Rosie. But very soon he finds that he is an intruder into the aesthetic world of Rosie. He admits that "She became known because she had the genius in her, and the public had to take notice of it". Such self pity as this breeds in him a sort of jealousy and possessiveness regarding his attitude to Rosie. He tells to Velan, "I did not like to see her enjoy other people's company, I liked to keep her in a citadel" . Rosie moves more and more into the joy of creativity with a growing dislike for her hectic routine of performances as a glamorous celebrity. Raju, on the other side, slips more and more into snares of immorality.

It has happened to Raju because of "his preference of appearance to reality". Raju prefers illusion to

reality but his perverted craze for material felicity is doomed to face disillusionment sooner. He speaks his philosophy in this regards, “My philosophy was that while it lasted the maximum money had to be squeezed out. We needed all the money in the world”. But the reality is altogether different. In spite of his speculation, Raju admits that reality poses contrary to his soaring plans. He tells, “As it was, the style of living and entertaining which I had evolved was eating up all our resources”. Raju’s craze for money and affluence naturally has degrading influence upon his character:

I gathered a big circle of friends and we played cards...We had surreptitious drinks too...well, the prohibition law was not for a man of my influence.

The novel also focuses on the immediate social reality of the ‘permit raj’ and the ‘license raj’ in the Nehru-Indira era of post-Independence India. The following passage from the text of the novel describes Raju’s activities to acquire the status of influential man while he deviates from the behavioral norms of culture, religion and morality including his forgery:

‘Permit-holder’ became a social title in our land and attracted men of interest around me, because the permit was a difficult thing to acquire. I showed respect for law by keeping the street-window shut when serving drink to non-permit folk...We played Three-Cards sometimes...I changed a two-thousand-rupee cheque for the purpose, and expected those who came there to meet me on equal terms. Through my intimacy with all sorts of people, I knew what was going on behind the scenes in the government, at the market, at Delhi, on the race-course, and who was going to be who in the coming week. I could get a train-reservation at a moment’s notice, relieve a man summoned to jury work, reinstate a dismissed official, get a vote for a co-operative election, nominate a committee man, get a man employed, get a boy admitted to a school, and get an unpopular official shifted elsewhere, all of which seemed to me important social services, an influence worth buying at the current market price.

The entire passage displays influence of commodification and power-politics. More than that, it displays Raju’s moral degradation to the least level.

In this condition, Raju is shocked at the fact that Rosie still loves her husband Marco. She is mentally attached to Marco and this baffles Raju:

I could not understand her. I had an appalling thought for months and months I had eaten, slept and lived with her without in the least understanding her mind...I did not understand her sudden affection for her husband...I did my best for her. Her career was at its height. What was it that still troubled her?

Till this moment Raju believes that he is the only person in Rosie’s life now and she loves

only him.

The above passage shows how Raju's illusion about Rosie is shattered when she shows her love to her husband. In an attempt to keep Rosie away from Marco, he forges Rosie's signature. His act is motivated by a couple of reasons: one is his attachment to her and other is avarice for money.

It is notable that the arrest-warrant against Raju is issued while he busy monitoring one of the most gorgeous stage-shows of Nalini, Rosie. It makes a thing clear that Rosie is successful in making a true artistic identity out of the ruins and, on the other hand, Raju steeped more and more into lures of self-deception. Rosie does her best to relieve Raju from the jail but disillusioned of her relationship with him. She suffers from an acute sense of drudgery in celebrity life. She says, "Even if you are free, I'll not dance in public any more. I am tired of all this circus existence". Raju is shocked at her decision and her categorical affirmation of playing no longer a trick of appearances. She tells Raju, "If I have to pawn my last possession, I'll do it to save you from jail. But once it's over, leave me once and for all; that's all I ask. Forget me. Leave me to live or die, as I choose; that's all".

Rosie has taken this stand because she does not want the life of appearance and illusion. Actually, Raju's preference to illusion results into his moral degradation and frustrates the artist in Rosie. Rosie's stand compels Raju to come out of his illusion. Mukhopadhyay's opinion in this connection is worth to quote; he says that:

Actually, it is Raju's moral degradation and puerile approach to identity and role-playing that frustrate unknowingly the artistic self in Rosie and prompt her to retire from the world of Raju and this change in her, however baffling to Raju, brings to him a chastening effect of disillusionment.

Raju comes to realize Rosie's greatness and his relative non-entity in her rise. In the prison Raju comes to reality around him. The prison experience brings him the illumination to detect a measure of authenticity in his new life:

"For the first time in life," Mukhopadhyay writes, "Raju gets the taste of a primeval reality and sheer joy of living in connection with his gardening experience". Raju's new experience is more authentic than his past ones:

I dug the earth and drew water from the well and tended it carefully...I grew huge *brinjals* and beans and cabbages. When they appeared on their stalks as tiny buds, I was filled with excitement. I watched them develop, acquire shape, change colour, shed the early parts.

The prison life shatters Raju's illusions of life and now he is able to enjoy the reality of life. Here he is regenerated in his soul and mind. Gradually he comes to reality which seems far away in his life. He has changed a lot from his earlier life. Raju that meets Velan is totally another Raju. The novel's locale changes from Malgudi-imaginary place- to the village called Mangal-real place.

Malgudi is a place where Raju fails to cope with reality because of his illusion of things. In his meeting with Velan, Raju acquires philosophic appearance and illumination:

‘I have a problem Sir,’ said the man. Raju nodded his head and added, ‘so has everyone...If you show me a person without a problem, then I will show you the perfect world. Do you know what the great Buddha said’... ‘If you show me a single home without a problem, I shall show you the way to attain a universal solution to all problems’.

These philosophic statements testify the fact that Raju has assumed the role of a saint. Like a seasoned spiritual guide Raju treats Velan’s personal problem regarding his sister’s negotiated marriage. He tells Velan, “We cannot force vital solutions. Every question must bide its time...And to arrive at a proper understanding, time is needed”. In his speech with Velan, Raju accepts the reality of predestination. “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”. Raju’s guiding instinct has led him to a new role of a saint and confers on him community-consciousness. Acceptance of new role is the only choice before Raju and he has to accept it. The third person narrator tells of this, “He realized that he had no alternative: he must play the role that Velan had given him”.

Self-retrospection and analysis make Raju realize the reality of things around him. There is ironic mode in his role-playing: he makes the appearance of a saint but in reality he is not so. Saint is the identity forced upon him by Velan and villagers consequently he faces identity crisis. “I have to play the part expected of me; there is no escape,” he says. In accordance with his role Raju also modifies his appearance with ‘an apostolic beard’ caressing his chest. The novelist describes the preparatory stage of Raju as a man-god of Mangal village:

By the time he arrived at the stage of stroking his beard thoughtfully, his prestige had grown beyond his wildest dreams. His life had lost its personal limitations...He seemed to belong to the world now. His influence was unlimited. He not only chanted holy verses and discoursed on philosophy, he even came to the stage of prescribing medicine; children who would not sleep peacefully at night were brought to him by their mothers; he pressed their bellies and prescribed a herb...It was believed that when he stroked the head of a child, the child improved in various ways.

It is notable here that Raju’s role does not limit to the physical and the spiritual matters only but it also goes to worldly matters like division of ancestral property.

Raju counting time by its elemental way; it proves that he lives by elemental reality that the villagers live by:

Several months (perhaps years) had passed...He kept a rough count of time thus, from the beginning of the year to its end through its seasons of sun, rain and mist. He kept

count of three cycles and then lost count...His beard now caressed his chest, his hair covered his back, and around his neck he wore a necklace of prayer-beads. His eyes shone with softness and compassion, the light of wisdom from them.

The novelist employs no irony here; it is free from ironic implication. That Raju has changed and accepted reality is clearly suggested in his statements. He tells people when they bring gift for him that "I'm a poor man and you are poor men; why do you give me all this?". But there is no use in his telling the people; they won't stop:

All this evolution in Raju's self takes place until the climax comes in his life with the failure of rains in the locality. Raj who has by now developed a feeling for the well-being of the villagers now senses an emerging change in his world with the villagers. A veritable panic of draught has stifled the spirit of the community. We are told that "The talk was always about the rains. People listened to discourses and philosophy with only half-interest. They sat round, expressing their fears and hopes". There is feud over granary and Raju wants peace in the village so that he asks Velan's brother "Tell your brother, immediately whatever he may be, that unless they are good, I'll never eat".

The message is misrepresented and understood that Swami will not take food until rain come. The villagers call him Mahatma; they think that "If he fasts there will be rain". Raju is confused about the villagers calling him Mahatma but Velan makes all things clear. Raju tells Velan his past but there is no use of it, "I don't know why you tell me all this, Swami" Velan says, Velan's unshaken faith in Raju prevents him any possibility of escape for Raju who can do nothing but resign to his lot. His decision to go through an ordeal is suggestive of complete change in him; he accepts reality but this time it is transcendent reality:

Raju does work real thing; he observes fast sincerely which weakens his faith. On the eleventh day of the fast doctors prescribe glucose and medicine but he refuses to break his fast. Instead Raju asks Velan to help him to his feet and manages to totter up to the river-basin with Velan's help. He gives valedictory speech that seemingly ushers in rains. Raju concludes that "Velan, I can hear the rains upon the hills...under my feet". What matters here is not rain fall but the change that Raju has undergone from illusion to reality; the self-oriented man has passed the ordeal of self-renunciation.

The Summing Up:

The Power of the Guide is a realistic story that presents different pieces of life. The mood and attitude of the personality in the novel is captured by the perfect realistic aroma. This is not a 'literal passage of life', but its contents are highly acclaimed as realistic works of fiction. His realism as a whole is selective. Narayan's realism is as accurate in detail as it is psychologically strong.

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