

Write an essay on the elements of humour
wit, irony and satire in The Guide.

Dated 2.7.2020
Part - III
Answer (H)

Ashok Kumar Trivedi
Assistant Professor
Department of English
BMA College Baheri, Darbhanga

Narayan's vision is comic. He is the greatest humorist among the Indo-Anglican writers of fiction. His humour is varied and all pervasive. We get in his words words the humour of character, humour of situation, of farcical humour, irony, wit and satire. His humour mingling with pathos and tragedy. There is a Shakespearean fusion of the comic and the tragic. Every shade and variety of humour is to be met with in the Guide also.

There is farcical humour in the novel that arouses loud laughter. For example, there is a situation in the Pyal school where the boys pry into the house of the master and find him cooking 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.

Besides the above example of the humour of situations, we have the humour of character in the Guide. There is humour in the development of Raju the stall keeper into Raju the Mahatama. Marco is the eternal explorer and is also presented as a humorous figure several times. "He wouldn't yield an Anna without a vowel, 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 spade traveller. He is an odd, cut-off-the-way character, like a knot in the 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 of verbal irony. To quote a few examples: (1) His interest was one-rupee a month and anything else in hand was cared to carry! (2) "The essence of Southard seemed to lie in one's ability to utter mystifying ~~utterables~~ statements." (3) when Nalan prostrates himself before Raju he says, "God alone is entitled to such a prostration. He will destroy us, if we attempt to usurp his rights." (4) Nalan says to Raju "your present is similar to that of Mahatama Gandhi. He has a left or disciple in you to save us," and the examples can be multiplied ad infinitum.

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 the ridiculous, 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. Of the lawyers he says, "A case in his hands was like dough, he could knead and draw it up and down." He presents Raju's case as a comedy in three Acts in which Marco is presented 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 case: "Raju soon realised that his spiritual status would be enhanced if he grew a beard and long hair to fall on his neck. 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."

Full interview

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.

In brief, Narayan is a great humorist. His characteristic humor does not result from distortion, exaggeration or caricature. It results from an observation of the common human weaknesses, follies and foibles, and irony is the weapon he uses to express and ridicule such weaknesses and absurdities. His eyes take on a merry twinkle as he surveys the panorama of common humanity on the march.