

The Guide -
R.K. Narayan

Social values
Social criticism and Social Problems in the Guide.

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R.K. Narayan is not a social critic like Charles Dickens or Mulkaji Premchand. His main purpose is not to criticise the society but to present a true and faithful picture of it with whatever sense of irony and humour he has. It is while presenting a realistic picture of the background of the novel that society and its problems get attention focussed.

In the Guide the social values go on changing at the individual as well as group level. Individually Raju and Gopfer change on account of urbanization and modernization of Malgudi, and the life of Malgudi in general changes with arrival of Railway on the town. Thus both the individuals and the society change due to urbanization, westernization and modernization. This change however is gradual. But the villagers seem to be unaffected. The villagers go on passing their lives in the old rut of superstition and ignorance. There is little change, although the government is aware of increasing facilities of transport and communication to the villagers. Their main problems are poverty and ignorance. Superstitions cannot be removed until and unless there is a widespread education and training. Until education spreads, the scholars like Marco will get the same cold and unjust treatment by society, and pretenders like Raju will get on going accepted as Swamis.

The novelist has taken up the problem of the gullible masses steeped in superstitions, the problem of hypocrite saints who go on cheating a vast populace of India, the problem of ignorance, of maladjustment in marriage, of guilt and sin. The problem of the small shopkeepers, of urbanization and modernization are also touched upon. The problem of dropouts and of corporal punishment to the school children is also

The changing traditional life of India is seen in the case of Raju's mother; she does not like her son's ways and the rift is caused between them after Rosie's entry into their house as a mistress of Raju. The problem of love, marriage and sex is also a vital social problem, and has been elaborately incorporated in the novel. But the purpose of the novelist is not to offer solutions but to show the weaknesses of society. The evils of litigation have been pointed out by the novelist. To an extent the novel is a socio-moral novel. The novelist has tried to indicate that the wages of sin have got to be reaped sooner or later. Immorality among the young men is not reined ^{ed}

The problem of not understanding and not accepting the new culture is also incorporated. It is not art or culture which is bad but commercialization of art that is bad. Furthermore, the life of Malgudi would have been quieter, nobler and heavenly had it not been disturbed by the inevitable railways which ushered in a new era in the town. It was a boon to Gabbar but a curse to Raju. Even the career of heroes' fall lies in the wrong social valuation of things. It is not his adultery that brings his fall but his real commercialism and greed and avarice. The novelist perhaps wants to tell us that a simple life free from greed is better than a life of glamour and money with excessive greed.

~~The problem of not understanding~~

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The novelist shows the superficial values of the bureaucrats. They are invited to take part in the railway ceremony at Malgudi. When Raju becomes an impressionable he takes pride in cultivating friendship with the bureaucrats. By doing this he feels that he is something different from others. He plays cards with them. When the Superintendent of Police comes to him with his arrest warrants, he greets him and takes him for calling on him for some social

reason. R.K. Narayan exposes the mechanical nature of the bureaucrats.

The Guide is a social tragedy, and the tragedy is caused through the wrong understanding of the values. Had Raju married Lalitha as recommended by his mother, there would have been no tragedy. The wayward life of Raju and Rosie evinces the fact that the unrestricted life for the young is not desirable. In the novel, however, the social problems have been presented with a certain boldness and candour. Yet the novel possesses its strength and force not due to the social problems touched upon by the novelist but to the personal life of the hero and the heroine. The novelist could have done better had he concentrated more on the psychological and personal side of characters instead of conglomerating so many social issues.
