



Voice of Existentialism in the R.K.Narayan's *The Guide*

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Abstract

Existentialism had a great influence on literature. Many people consider existentialist literature a devaluation of traditional moral values. Nonetheless, existentialists considered their approach creative and thought that this innovative practice of ethics was a new ray of hope for humanity. In the Indian English fiction, Existentialism in the form of realism is discernible in the works of many novelists like Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandeya, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, R K Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and a few others who portray Indian life in its economic, socio-cultural, political milieu and who put forth the cause of the underprivileged and the have-nots. Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanswami was an Indian writer known for his works set in the fictional town of Malgudi in South India. The most striking feature of his work is his ability to highlight the social context and everyday life of his characters, and instil a sense of importance in the seemingly mundane, by exploring the nuances of ordinary life with energy and compassion. In Narayan's works, one notices that the 'individual' has his own identity and is a public entity. This concept is an innovation that can be called one of its kind. His works provides his western readers the first works in English to be infused with an eastern and Hindu existential perspective. As he explores the psychological implications of human behaviour, we are able to grasp his philosophical stance.

Key words: Political Milieu, Innovation, English Fiction.

Introduction

The founders of Existentialism in literature are Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jean-Paul Sartre. In the modern world contemporary literature is somehow in accordance with the philosophy of Existentialism. The characteristics of existentialism emphasize the authenticity of single individuals as to how the world can change; rather than relying on a God, existentialists urge the individual to take responsibility for their place in the world. For instance, the existentialist singular thought or dilemma finds the human experience seemingly pointless, at least at the beginning of one's assessment of the world, resulting from being in an uncaring world. Studies on existential thinking introduce the concept as a meaningful process that explores fundamental human existence concerns, correlating with meaning in life and



existential wellbeing. Narayan's human experience and compassion constitute a mature existential vision which is vitalised by his humorous narration and given depth by his acceptance of traditional and religious values, which at various points in his narratives place his characters in moral relief. Narayan's view is that wisdom is not gained through meditation, or by spiritual contemplation, but by going through the experiences that life has to offer. R.K. Narayan writes only for aesthetic satisfaction and not for didactic purpose. He has moral vision. The problems he sets himself in his novels are largely ethical. There is 'poetic justice' in his novels that virtue is rewarded and vice is punished. The aberrations caused by non-adherence of moralities leads surely to adverse result in his fictions.

Major Thrust

Existentialism analyses the existence of human beings and impels light on the way they find themselves existing in the world. Soren Kierkegaard, the 19th century philosopher is regarded as The Father of existentialism. He maintained that the individual has the sole responsibility for giving one's own life meaning and with living life passionately and sincerely despite many obstacles and distractions including despair, angst, absurdity, choice, boredom and death. Existentialism is a philosophy of reaffirming and regaining the lost status of man in the advanced scientific and technological society. In this modern society, the creator of science himself becomes a victim of his own creation and feels like a mere cog in a highly mechanized system. Various existentialists differ on the fundamental problems but agree on perceiving certain objective realities like the crisis in human values, the significance of human anxiety, deprivation of human freedom and importance of human emotions. No emotional problem is more threatening than the existential problem. R.K.Narayan masterfully explores the intricacies of human existence in his timeless novel- *The Guide*. His unique storytelling artistry illuminates the dichotomies of life offering readers a profound glimpse into the human experience. The novel *The Guide*, the fifth novel is one of the finest and the best of Narayan's novels. The novel was written in the USA when the author was thinking of a subject for a novel: a novel about someone suffering enforced sainthood. A situation in Mysore offered a setting for such a story and the idea crystallized in his mind centering in and around Narayan's fictional town of Malgudi located in South India. One can easily notice the change in his writings over different periods. His modest initial experiences bloomed in to maturity and achieved perfection in his novels after independence. His novels of 1950's and 1960's threw light on the characters' fascination for money, power and sex. His novels depicted the existential dilemmas of the characters in this hostile world. The three major characters Raju,



Rosie and Marco form relationships that are characterized by the domination of one over the other. The dominated characters use various ways to overcome their handicap. The struggle to be free from dominance also results in a search for individual identity. We also find a sense of loneliness and alienation in the relationship between Marco and Rosie as well as Raju and Rosie, the main characters in this novel. R.K.Narayan projects such existential predicaments as natural agents whose role is devastating the formation of the human relationship. He has encapsulated the postmodern condition in an existential perspective in a very subtle but powerful way.

The Guide is the most popular novel of R.K. Narayan. It was published in 1958, and won the Sahitya Academy Award for 1960. *The Guide* is set at the background of Malgudi, R. K. Narayan's make-believe place in southern India. The novel is told through a series of flashbacks. Raju is the hero of the story who grows up near a railway station and eventually becomes a shopkeeper. Later he becomes a resourceful tourist guide. He meets Rosie and her husband. Rosie is a beautiful dancer. Her husband Marco is a scholar and anthropologist and is more interested in his research than in his young wife Rosie. As the story progresses the guide falls in love with Rosie and starts to live with her. He loses all his money and inspires Rosie to start dancing and he becomes her manager. But he cannot forget his habit and is one day caught red handed while forging Rosie's signature to sell one of her necklaces. He stays in jail for two years. After returning from imprisonment, he decides not to go to Malgudi. He arrives at a village wherein a local villager, Velan notices his simply draped garments and immediately creates an impression that Raju is a saint. Raju, however, decides to continue residing in the village as going back to his native village would shower him with renewed disgrace. Therefore, he accepts the food offered affectionately by the villagers and enjoys the whole process. The irony of the story is a drought that occurs in the village. Raju takes a 12-day fast on people request. After many days of his fasting in one fine morning when he goes to the riverside for his daily rituals his legs sag down and he feels it is raining in the hillside. The ending of the novel is a bit confusing as it leaves an unfinished end of Raju's death or end of drought.

Although Raju is portrayed as an ordinary human being his self-awareness and the sense of social and spiritual fulfilment at the end is something astonishing and results in appreciation. Human existence organises the world. Sartre says that without the world other is no self-hood, no person; without self-hood, without the person, there is no world. So world, person and selfhood is like the sides of a triangle they form the way of existence. Like Narayan's other



novels, *The Guide* too begins with the realistic things and everyday happenings in the lives of cross section of Indian society with characters existing in all sections. Gradually fate or chance, fault or blunder transforms mundane events to fantastic or fatal happening. Sometimes unexpected disasters befall on heroes like Raju sent to jail and Margayya's financial collapse Raju like a falling leaf in the autumn wind of the circumstances reaches to the nadir. *The Guide* has existential views elaborately. Raju as a railway guide, then guides Rosie in the sensual way, then to promote her dance and art as a guide, then as a manager, as a prisoner which enlightened him to show the way for the This is one way of existence. The villagers of Mangalam adores him as a man of divine power and finally he becomes a spiritual guide for the whole world.

The consequences of every decision or action and an ability to shoulder this responsibility remain the cornerstone of existential awareness in the Postmodern era. In *The Guide*, Narayan's protagonist faces different predicaments in all four phases of his life. The narrative strategies employed by Narayan in the novel are commendable. The hero Raju in the story plays the role of a guide but they are four different roles of a guide. The story portrays gradual shaping in to a tourist-guide. He knows the secrets of his profession. His story moves through a cycle. His role is narrated in two series. One by the author and the other by the Swami. The 'flash on' and 'flash back technique' describes alternately the incidents of Raju's life.

Conclusion

The Guide stands as a timeless work of literature, inviting readers to ponder the complexities of the human psyche and the intricacies of our moral compass. *The Guide* should be read as an affirmation of human possibilities for self-discovery and self-transcendence rather than a story of enforced sainthood. Each character faces existential crisis and overcomes them in their own way. The last sentence in the novel epitomizes the non-closure and shift of perspective—two devices employed in an Indian English novel in the 1950's. His novels depict the existential dilemma of its characters in a hostile world, which is a conglomerate of individuals and can be said to represent the whole humanity. Narayan stresses that all his protagonists confront all types of existential anxieties and thus grow psychologically and spiritually. The philosophical and psychological dimensions of Narayan's fictional exploration provide depth to his narratives.



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